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The Origins and Development of John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson's Perceptions of American Foreign Policy toward East Asia

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THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF JOHN F. KENNEDY AND LYNDON B.
JOHNSON'S PERCEPTIONS OF AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY
TOWARD EAST ASIA

A Thesis

by

JUAN C. RAZO, JR.

Submitted to the Graduate College of
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
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THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF JOHN F. KENNEDY AND LYNDON B.
JOHNSON'S PERCEPTIONS OF AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY
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December 2017

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ABSTRACT

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The administrations of John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson focused extensively on foreign affairs in East Asia related to China, Laos, and Vietnam. Examining the development of their respective perceptions proved instrumental in comprehending their approaches to the geopolitics of the region. The overall structure of this thesis includes an analysis of their tenure in Congress, a breakdown of the first-half of Kennedy's presidency, an emphasis on the transition period between Kennedy and Johnson, an examination of Johnson's presidency, and concluding with a detailed comparison of their foreign policy toward East Asia. Their differing perceptions to the regional geopolitics proved essential in shaping the respective legacies of their administrations.

DEDICATION

The completion of my master's studies stemmed from the love and support of my family that motivated me to persevere in reaching this feat. My parents, Juan Razo and Patricia Razo, and grandparents, Heriberto Rodriguez and Maria De Luz Razo, guided me in never losing hope to attain this degree. More importantly, this thesis is dedicated to the memory of my grandparents, Juanita Rodriguez (1934-2015) and Victoriano Razo (1933-2013). Thank you for all your love and inspiration.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The presidencies of John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson involved the usage of strong leadership to resolve the domestic and foreign issues of the nation. The execution of Kennedy and Johnson's leadership proved instrumental in asserting their credibility as effective leaders. In these two administrations, the foreign policies of these presidents represented a vital portion of their respective presidencies. While these two Democratic presidents possessed similar ambitions on American foreign policy, their differing mindsets in fulfilling their foreign policy agenda distinguished them from each other. In the context of the Cold War, the Far East became the focal point of American engagement against communism. The strained relationship between the Soviet Union and China acted as a dominant factor considered by both administrations in dealing with the region. The escalated tension in Laos and Vietnam transpired into immense conflict requiring immediate American response to subdue any chance for communist influence.¹ For both Democratic leaders, the growth of Chinese authority played a considerable part in their approach to the region like their involvement in the Vietnam War. The foreign policies of Kennedy and Johnson toward East Asia relied on their respective perceptions in approaching the varying developments within Laos, China, and Vietnam.

Various historians have evaluated their effectiveness as leaders based on their foreign policies toward East Asia like their usage of broad executive power. Some historians like Robert

¹ Throughout this thesis, any mention of Vietnam will be written as such instead of Viet Nam to maintain continuity in this work. If the country is expressed as Viet Nam, it will be noted only if directly quoted from a source.

Dallek viewed Kennedy and Johnson individually with their responses toward East Asian issues like the Vietnam War.² Other historians like Paul Henggeler and Larry J. Sabato tended to view them in comparison instead of an individual assessment, which resulted in their outlook on the Johnson administration being less favorable than on the Kennedy administration.³ In the pages that follow, the success of Kennedy and Johnson as leaders will be examined through their foreign policies toward East Asia. Their differing perceptions of the American presence in the region and their usage of executive power will be an essential focus within this work.

The foreign policies of Kennedy and Johnson toward East Asia reflected their perceptions to determine the American stance in their relations within the region. They would be heavily active in foreign relations as it represented a vital component of their respective administrations. Due to their active involvement in foreign relations, they would have to be strategic in their decisions, especially in their presidencies being in the midst of the Cold War. As a result, they would have to rationalize their policies with some accordance to the policies established by the immediate predecessors.

The foundation of foreign affairs in both the Truman and Eisenhower administrations stemmed from the aftermath of World War II and the beginning of the Cold War. Due to Roosevelt not seeing the end of the war, Truman would devise his own foreign policies that responded to the aftermath of the war. It became apparent that Truman needed to respond effectively like Roosevelt with the American people viewing the president leading the

² Robert Dallek, *An Unfinished Life: John F. Kennedy, 1917-1963* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2013); *Camelot's Court: Inside the Kennedy White House* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2014); *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1961-1973* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

³ Paul R. Henggeler, *In His Steps: Lyndon Johnson and the Kennedy Mystique* (Chicago: I.R. Dee, 1991); Larry J. Sabato, *The Kennedy Half-Century: The Presidency, Assassination, and Lasting Legacy of John F. Kennedy* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013).

government in protecting the domestic and international interests of the nation.⁴ Despite him having limited experience with foreign relations, revisionist historians viewed Truman's ability to continue the agenda of Roosevelt with approval in responding to the nation's issues at a moment's notice. In comparing Roosevelt and Truman, it became known that most radical revisionists such as Gabriel Kolko believed Truman continued Roosevelt's agenda.⁵ Historian Jerald A. Combs asserted that these revisionists perceived that "Roosevelt too had sought a world open to capitalist expansion and had done his share to initiate the Cold War."⁶ In relation to the Cold War, there were various foreign policies that Truman initiated that reflected his stance on foreign affairs. It involved his Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan which were instrumental in serving his policy of containment.⁷ Most importantly, his Truman Doctrine served as the foundation for his foreign policy, eventually leading to the 1949 formation of NATO. As he focused on the standing of Europe, the conditions in East Asia became equally significant to contain communism. Combs further asserted Truman's attitude toward foreign affairs with the importance of NSC-68, which fueled the necessity in the dramatic increase in government spending. However, the initiation of this policy derived from "the North Korean invasion of South Korea to drive the United States to the fully militarized containment visualized in NSC-68."⁸ The impact of the Korean War in the Truman administration resulted in the president having to make difficult decisions in the execution of his foreign policy. It led to the administration needing to determine how to approach East Asia.

⁴ Sidney M. Milkis and Michael Nelson, *The American Presidency: Origins and Development, 1776-1993*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1994), 294.

⁵ Jerald A. Combs, *The History of American Foreign Policy From 1895*, 4th ed. (London: Routledge, 2012), 191.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 210.

⁸ Ibid.

The perception of the Truman administration on the Korean War involved containing the Communist influence in the region, which resulted in American involvement in this Asian war. This foreign policy would be possible with the usage of presidential power possessed by Truman allowing him to execute it. It stemmed from the creation of the National Security Act of 1947 which “strengthened the chief executive’s authority in dealing with the armed forces, intelligence activities, and overall coordination of national security policy.”⁹ Due to this expansion of presidential power, Truman possessed massive influence in dictating military operations in foreign countries aimed in protecting the security of the nation.

In terms of the Korean War, Truman viewed China as a threat to American interests with its Communist influence possibly contributing to the war. As a result, historians Edward Drachman and Alan Shank asserted that “Truman was concerned about the domestic and international political consequences of extending diplomatic recognition to the PRC.”¹⁰ The impact of the Korean War contributed to his reputation being diminished among the American people based on his lack of success within the war. Also, his ineffective foreign policy resulted in the failure to prohibit Chinese involvement in the war as well as tense relations between the United States and the PRC during the upcoming decades.¹¹ Despite the various difficulties endured by the Truman administration in its foreign policies toward East Asia, his leadership served as an indicator that the president was able to make difficult decisions despite lack of public support. In furthering this notion, historians like Sidney Milkis and Michael Nelson asserted that Truman showed “a president without extraordinary political gifts or popularity could achieve important objectives, define the terms of national debate, and control at least the

⁹ Edward R. Drachman and Alan Shank, *Presidents and Foreign Policy: Countdown to Ten Controversial Decisions* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 5.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 47.

main lines of domestic and foreign policy.”¹² The actions executed by Truman in his foreign policy toward East Asia would influence in the mindsets of Kennedy and Johnson as they confronted issues in this region. More importantly, it became apparent that these two presidents would be heavily influenced by their other predecessor, Dwight D. Eisenhower.

While Truman set the foundation for American foreign policy in the aftermath of World War II and the beginning of the Cold War, the foreign policies of Eisenhower greatly conveyed the American stance on world affairs in the midst of this international tension. In relation to his execution of his foreign policies, historian Elmo Richardson expressed that Eisenhower differed from his Democratic predecessors with his preference “to restrain and even conceal his personality, while displaying his strength of character.”¹³ In terms of his executive power, Eisenhower responded to the new standards of executing it derived from the Roosevelt administration with agreement in fulfilling the vision established by his progressive predecessors.¹⁴ Due to the primary attribute in his policies being to prohibit the spreading of communism in the grand scheme between the United States and the Soviet Union, Eisenhower’s perception toward East Asia proved vital in making the necessary decisions in confronting this region. Unlike his predecessor’s inability to resolve the conflict in Korea, this resilient military leader turned commander-in-chief effectively overcame it with the 1953 Korean Armistice Agreement which ceased fighting in the region.

Besides this crucial victory in the Eisenhower administration, other issues in East Asia would emerge stemming from the conflict in Indochina as well as the communistic influence of China within it. The war in Indochina represented the administration’s primary concern within the region with the negative impact of a communist victory in the conflict. Historian Jerald A.

¹² Milkis and Nelson, 301.

¹³ Elmo Richardson, *The Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower* (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1979), 195.

¹⁴ Milkis and Nelson, 279.

Combs asserted that Eisenhower viewed that this possibility would result in “the fall of Indochina’s neighbor’s like a row of dominoes – Burma, Thailand, Indonesia, and perhaps even Japan, Taiwan, and the Philippines.”¹⁵ This perception exhibited by Eisenhower would become his well-known “Domino Theory” which served as one of the vital factors contributed in his execution of foreign policy.

In relation to the threat of China’s communist influence, the assertive president would repeatedly clash with the communist nation, especially asserting his authority extensively. He would use this power in warning China not to interfere in the Indochina War with the repercussions being the possible usage of nuclear weapons. However, the usage of nuclear weaponry became more plausible with the American defense of the Quemoy and Matsu islands from China. Eisenhower asserted that the nation would defend these islands from Chinese intervention if it served as an indicator of an invasion of Taiwan with defending these islands not being limited to conventional means.¹⁶ The assertiveness of Eisenhower in his foreign policies toward East Asia represented his resilience and ambition in serving American interests and maintaining the security of the nation.

The effectiveness of the Eisenhower administration in its foreign policy assisted in presenting the shift in American foreign policy in being viewed as more effective with the strategic and assertive nature of Dwight Eisenhower. However, some historians viewed this image of the former president differently and saw discrepancies within it. For example, Milkis and Nelson stated that Eisenhower would “lead actively without seeming to lead, to remain quietly and persistently involved in political affairs while maintaining the public face of the

¹⁵ Combs, 253.

¹⁶ Ibid., 254.

congenial national hero.”¹⁷ Contrary to this perception, Combs reinforced the effectiveness of Eisenhower with him controlling “his own foreign policy and that his restraint in foreign affairs contrasted favorably with the sort of activism that later led Kennedy and Johnson to escalate the Vietnam War.”¹⁸ These differing perceptions on Eisenhower conveyed the complexity of this influential president, especially his impact toward the foreign policies of his successors. In furthering his contribution to the presidency and American foreign policy, he preserved the usage of executive power related to executing foreign policy. He would actively campaign against the passage of the Bricker Amendment, which would have greatly diminished the presidential authority to conduct American foreign policy.¹⁹

In his administration, Eisenhower contributed in executing efficient leadership in his foreign policies especially advocating the necessity for the president to possess the ability to conduct foreign affairs. As a result, his two successors viewed him as a vital figure to assist them with their policies. More explicitly, historian Richard M. Filipink Jr. asserted that both liberal leaders constantly consulted with Eisenhower for his input on their policies and remained concerned of his vocal opposition.²⁰ In relation to their foreign policies, the impact of Dwight Eisenhower toward the Kennedy and Johnson administrations proved instrumental in their respective execution to maintain the American stance of foreign affairs established by their assertive predecessor.

The administration of John F. Kennedy endured various obstacles with his responses toward them defining his effectiveness as the leader of the nation. One of his pressing concerns on American foreign policy was its stance on the communist threat to Cuba. It would lead to the

¹⁷ Milkis and Nelson, 307-308.

¹⁸ Combs, 256.

¹⁹ Milkis and Nelson, 311.

²⁰ Richard M. Filipink Jr., *Dwight Eisenhower and American Foreign Policy During the 1960s: An American Lion in Winter* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015), ix.

1961 Bay of Pigs invasion, which failed to achieve its objective in overthrowing Cuban dictator Fidel Castro. Due to this immense failure, it greatly affected the credibility of Kennedy as an effective leader. In furthering this notion, historian Richard E. Neustadt asserted that the issues of this failed invasion stemmed from two flaws of Kennedy's leadership, which were his ignorance and his arrogance.²¹ Also, historians Edward Drachman and Alan Shank stated that this incident reflected the necessity of Kennedy needing "to make a systematic review of all pending crisis matters before rushing to accept risky plans of the preceding presidency."²²

While his initial outlook as president on foreign policy reflected his inexperience, his reevaluation of these early failures assisted in him becoming more rational and strategic in his future foreign policy decisions. It would contribute to his success in defusing the 1963 Cuban missile crisis which reflected his resilient leadership. As expressed by Combs, it resulted in the president emerging from this crisis "with the reputation of a hero whose firm but flexible and rational policy had applied the minimum of force, kept open a series of rational operations, and provided the Soviets with a graceful means of backing down."²³ Kennedy's confrontation with Cuba represented a vital aspect of his foreign policy in the continued tension between the United States and the Soviet Union. However, his foreign policies exhibited toward East Asia would be more essential with its impact in the Cold War.

In terms of Kennedy's outlook on foreign policy compared to his domestic policy, prominent historian Robert Dallek asserted that the president emphasized more on "formulating and executing foreign policies to protect the nation from external threats and find ways to

²¹ Richard E. Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan* (New York: Free Press, 1990), 247-249. As cited in Drachman and Shank, 105.

²² Drachman and Shank, 110.

²³ Combs, 269.

assume immediate and long-term peace.”²⁴ Kennedy would heavily focus his administration in achieving this ambition for the security of the nation from the communist threat within the world. As he endured other blunders in his foreign policy, such as the Bay of Pigs fiasco, it assisted in strengthening his fortitude and resilience as he confronted other foreign issues like East Asia. More explicitly, Dallek argued that Kennedy taking full responsibility for this debacle reflected his conviction as well as his assertion in being the center of his administration with its successes and failures.²⁵ In furthering the importance of foreign policy toward the success of his presidency, he needed to devise a suitable cabinet of men in determining the appropriate decisions related to his policies. As expressed by Dallek, it proved essential in Kennedy choosing intellectual men like Robert McNamara and Ted Sorensen, which would open his presidency “to new ideas and inclined to break with conventional wisdom in search of more effective actions at home and abroad.”²⁶ The significance of his cabinet conveyed insightful perceptions on the decision-making of Kennedy as he confronted the communist threat abroad such as East Asia.

While the popular president endured various issues with his record on foreign affairs, his confrontation with communist nations like Laos, China, and Vietnam would consume the bulk of his presidency. The various aspects of his foreign policy toward East Asia stemmed from prohibiting the spread of communism in East Asia. These three nations proved essential in his foreign policy with his attitude toward the region. The initial problem to which Kennedy had to respond in his region involved the internal discord of Laos in the early 1960s. According to Dallek, the president was possibly pressured by Eisenhower to intervene in the nation with his predecessor believing that the loss of Laos would jeopardize other Asian nations like South

²⁴ Dallek, *Camelot's Court*, 28.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 188.

²⁶ Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, 321.

Vietnam and Thailand.²⁷ However, the July 1962 Neutrality Agreement, which respected Laotian neutrality and barred interference, temporarily relieve tension in Laos. The initial attitude of Kennedy toward Laos was not favorable to increase the American presence in the nation. According to Richard Reeves, he would not have honored his obligations in Laos because he believed that if “the United States had to make a stand in Southeast Asia, he said, it would be across the border, in Vietnam.”²⁸ Despite the desire of his predecessor to focus on resolving the Laotian conflict, the agenda of the president tended to emphasize the significance of Vietnam in the early stages of his presidency.

In furthering the outlook of historians toward Kennedy’s perception on Laos, the importance of this country in the grand scheme of his administration would be overshadowed with the tension surrounding Berlin, Cuba, and Vietnam. Historian Lawrence Freedman asserted that it subsided into the larger Vietnam conflict, thus resulting in it being forgotten, but it would be more prominent toward the end of his presidency with it serving “as a test bed for the development of relevant military doctrines, local political deals, and superpower diplomacy.”²⁹ Also, the internal debates within his administration over possible military options in Laos resulted in him believing that the risks for direct involvement would be too severe in attaining any potential benefits.³⁰ The rational and strategic mindset of Kennedy in responding to the situation in Laos served as a vital indicator of his leadership within foreign affairs.

Another prominent historian who perceived the importance of the Laotian conflict in his administration was James N. Giglio, who provided a thorough biography on this popular president. He asserted that Kennedy did not view this conflict as a “war of national liberation,

²⁷ Ibid., 523.

²⁸ Richard Reeves, *President Kennedy: Profile of Power* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 75.

²⁹ Lawrence Freedman, *Kennedy’s Wars: Berlin, Cuba, Laos, and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 293.

³⁰ Ibid., 304.

because Laos lived under its own government. He opposed colonialism, but he also abhorred Communist violations of self-distinction, which threatened third-world nations such as Laos.”³¹ This outlook on Kennedy’s attitude toward Laos proved intriguing in comprehending his reluctance in direct involvement, but the communist influence within it would be the deciding factor in his foreign policy. However, historian Larry J. Sabato expressed the significance of Laos in the early stages of Kennedy’s administration with it being one of his primary challenges needing to be confronted. He argued that it served as the larger challenge of his presidency in this period rather than Vietnam because “Eisenhower had told Kennedy that he might need to send troops to the country to prevent a Communist takeover and chain reaction in Asia.”³² Sabato expressed similar perceptions like Dallek on the influence of Eisenhower toward Kennedy with the execution of his foreign policy on confronting the conflict in Laos. The impact of Laos in his administration proved vital in executing his foreign policy toward East Asia.

While Laos served as a crucial aspect of Kennedy’s foreign policy, the presence of China in the affairs of other Asian nations like Vietnam would result in him becoming more concerned in dealing with the communist nation. In relation to the Chinese aspect of the Laotian conflict, Dallek argued that Kennedy became aware that any form of involvement within it would result in the possibility of Chinese intervention.³³ Besides this concern of the president toward Chinese influence in East Asia, it would become more prominent with the development of the Vietnam War. While he acted strategically and rationally in his decisions toward American involvement in this conflict, Kennedy maintained his stance that China’s presence in the region proved critical in his future foreign policy decisions. Dallek asserted that the president’s mindset on the issue on the concern that leaving “Vietnam would open the way to Chinese expansion in Southeast Asia

³¹ James N. Giglio, *The Presidency of John F. Kennedy*, 2nd ed. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 88.

³² Sabato, 85.

³³ Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, 353.

and trigger greater threats to other Asian nations.”³⁴ The impact of the Chinese within the region greatly affected the attitude of Kennedy in executing his foreign policy in East Asia.

Besides the possible involvement of the Chinese in the Laotian and Vietnamese conflict, the administration’s outlook on the communist nation would persistently focus on its desire to develop its nuclear capability. According to Richard Reeves, Kennedy believed that the expansion of nuclear weaponry served as “the greatest single problem of the world in the 1960s, and that the single most compelling reason for a test ban was to prevent Communist China from developing a bomb.”³⁵ This vital concern contributed to the passage of the 1963 Limited Test Ban Treaty which prohibited the testing of nuclear weapons as well as slowing down the arms race. In furthering Kennedy’s outlook on China, historian Lawrence Freedman asserted that the president maintained his anxiety on the possible impact of a militant China within foreign affairs but its nuclear capability being limited lessened these concerns.³⁶ While the resilient president remained cautious toward China throughout his presidency, the development of Sino-American relations seemed unlikely given the international circumstances of this tensed period. Freedman stated that any form of rapprochement would “have had to be on Beijing’s terms, as it saw no reason to modify its behavior or its demands to make itself more acceptable to any foreigners.”³⁷ In contrast to Freedman’s perception on reasserting relations with China, historian Larry J. Sabato asserted that Kennedy never expressed his desire for “constructive engagement with China, nor would it have been politically possible for a Democrat in the 1960s to have reached ‘Red China’ in the way Nixon did in 1972.”³⁸ Kennedy’s perception toward China on its nuclear

³⁴ Dallek, *Camelot’s Court*, 405.

³⁵ Reeves, 311.

³⁶ Freedman, 273-274.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 251.

³⁸ Sabato, 311.

capability and improving Sino-American relations reflected pressing aspects of his foreign policy in confronting this communist nation.

While his attitude toward China served as a crucial part of his foreign policy, the significance of the Vietnam War proved more essential in his execution of foreign affairs. Due to the implications of this conflict, Kennedy perceived its severity resulting in devising a suitable approach to confront it. As his presidency progressed, his approach toward Vietnam would gradually change from limited involvement to the possibility of military usage. Robert Dallek argued that Kennedy wanted to avoid public exposure of the number of American personnel within Vietnam.³⁹ Most importantly, he asserted that the president had a “sense of urgency about removing the threat to South Vietnam’s autonomy and ending the national discussion about a wider U.S. role in an Asian War.”⁴⁰ Towards the end of his presidency, his perception on Vietnam shifted with the limited success of American involvement ending the conflict. Dallek asserted that Kennedy’s failure to bring Cuba toward American sphere of influence resulted in him having his doubts on determining the outcome of the Vietnam War.⁴¹ In terms of the possible decisions related to the war if Kennedy had lived for a second term, Dallek expressed that he would have desired to seize “upon battlefield gains to announce reduced U.S. commitments or to declare an American withdrawal in response to Saigon’s political instability and failure to fight effectively.”⁴² This notion exhibited by Dallek proved vital in presenting a viable conclusion on the possible foreign policy decisions that Kennedy would have executed in his second term.

³⁹ Dallek, *Camelot’s Court*, 260.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 268.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 418.

⁴² Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, 672.

Besides the major aspects of Kennedy's foreign policy toward Vietnam, the overall process of his foreign policy proved vital in fully comprehending the factors that contributed to his decisions. Reeves argued that, in the middle of 1963, the president would become actively involved in determining the American position in Southeast Asia with his emphasis on not having total military involvement.⁴³ Also, the importance of the 1963 McNamara-Taylor report represented a crucial indicator of the internal situation within Vietnam. In terms of his outlook toward the war at the end of 1963, Reeves asserted that the president wanted to devise his various options in resolving the conflict which included possible commitment for economic and military assistance as well as the withdrawal of some American troops.⁴⁴ Reeves expressed perceptions similar to those like Dallek on Kennedy's conduct of foreign policy toward Vietnam, especially the ambitions of the popular president at the end of 1963.

Other prominent historians like Freedman, Giglio, and Sabato provided intriguing perspectives on the president's execution of his foreign policy in resolving the Vietnamese conflict. According to Freedman, Kennedy's attitude toward Vietnam involved him viewing it as soluble with counterinsurgency being a viable option because this conflict stemmed from the political incompetence within Saigon.⁴⁵ This outlook on the president's mindset on overcoming this war conveyed a more optimistic approach toward his execution of foreign policy. In furthering the importance of the McNamara-Taylor report, Giglio stated that it presented "the serious political tensions in Saigon and the increasing unpopularity of the oppressive Diem, and it recommended the suspension of various forms of assistance."⁴⁶ This report assisted in enlightening the president of the internal conditions of Vietnam under Diem which would

⁴³ Reeves, 485.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 660.

⁴⁵ Freedman, 356.

⁴⁶ Giglio, 267.

influence his appropriate course of action toward it. In relation to his internal debate on active involvement in the region, Sabato argued that Kennedy remained consistent in his public stance on the war while he privately doubted American intervention within it.⁴⁷ Also, prominent Vietnam historian George C. Herring conveyed that Kennedy's cautious approach possibly enlarged American involvement in light of the successful coup of Diem.⁴⁸ However, Kennedy's attitude toward Vietnam at the end of his presidency would be influential with his successor in his approach to resolve it. While historians made reasonable conclusions on how Kennedy would have resolved the war, his sudden death resulted in the burden of this conflict being given to his successor Lyndon Baines Johnson, who tragically endured its impact in his presidency.

The administration of Lyndon B. Johnson endured various successes and failures in his execution of domestic and foreign policies, especially the high expectations stemming from his assertive and respected predecessor. In terms of the overall perception of his administration, it derived from his implementation of the Great Society programs and his escalation of the Vietnam War. In terms of the success of his domestic programs, prominent historian Robert A. Caro stated that the legislation initiated within his administration made the "Johnson presidency one which saw the legislative realization of many of the noblest aspirations of the liberal spirit in America."⁴⁹ While his domestic policies seemed to be more optimistic in the eyes of the American people, the consensus among historians generally focused on his execution of foreign policy toward Vietnam with it consuming the majority of his presidency. In furthering this notion, historians Drachman and Shank stated that his leadership exhibited in the war differed from his successful domestic policy because Johnson "failed to lead, persuade, or develop a

⁴⁷ Sabato, 125.

⁴⁸ George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1986), 106-107.

⁴⁹ Robert A. Caro, *The Passage of Power: The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, Vol. IV (New York: Vintage, 2013), xix.

consensus in support of his war policy.”⁵⁰ Besides this outlook on Johnson’s leadership toward his foreign policy, historians like Paul Henggeler examined the impact of the Kennedy mystique within his administration. For example, he asserted that Johnson would emulate attributes of his predecessor as well as frame his domestic and foreign policies in relation to the Kennedy legacy.⁵¹ These overall perceptions of the execution of Johnson’s domestic and foreign policies assisted in conveying his leadership within his administration.

However, the analysis of his foreign policies toward East Asia would be essential in fully comprehending the impact of his presidency. While the Vietnam War dominated his foreign policy, his outlook on the role of communist China proved vital with its active presence in the grand scheme of affairs within the region. There were various implications with its influence in East Asia, especially the possibility for nuclear capability as well as involvement in the Vietnam War. Historian Jonathan Colman provided a revisionist account of Johnson’s foreign policies like his stance toward China with the president having to be cautious in dealing with the communist nation. Colman asserted that the best suitable option perceived by Johnson involved “coexistence, with the future possibility of engaging Beijing, should a more receptive regime ever emerge, in arms control agreements.”⁵² In relation to the Vietnam War, the relations between the United States and China would be more prominent with the involvement of the communist nation within it. While the Chinese participation in the war hindered Sino-American relations, Colman conveyed that the progression of the war resulted in both nations not wanting it to expand, especially their respective engagement with the Soviet Union.⁵³ Most importantly, it

⁵⁰ Drachman and Shank, 132.

⁵¹ Henggeler, 5.

⁵² Jonathan Colman, *The Foreign Policy of Lyndon B. Johnson: The United States and the World, 1963-1969* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 126.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 132.

became apparent that the Johnson administration actively contributed to setting the foundation for détente between the three nations.⁵⁴

While Colman provided a revisionist approach on Johnson's execution of foreign policy toward China, prominent historian Robert Dallek conveyed a crucial perspective on the president's outlook of China in the context of the Vietnam War. In terms of the initial outlook of Johnson toward the nation in his execution of Vietnamese foreign policy, Dallek argued that the president believed that aggressive military bombing would increase the possibility of Chinese assistance to North Vietnam.⁵⁵ This stance exhibited by Johnson reflected his strategic decision with the gradual escalation of the war allowing for the possibilities of peace negotiations. Due to these negotiations not being likely, Johnson's attitude on the war changed resulting in the more assertive nature of bombing but he remained cautious to avoid direct Chinese involvement.⁵⁶ Johnson's perception of the communist nation remained a vital factor in his foreign policy as he confronted the turbulent nature of the Vietnam War.

Another prominent historian who presented a crucial outlook on the president's foreign policy is Robert A. Caro, who is one of the most experienced scholars on the administration of Lyndon Johnson. In terms of the Chinese presence in the Vietnam War, Caro argued that the president did not want to accept defeat in the war with it being similar to the loss of China in the late 1940s.⁵⁷ Due to this ambition of the president, it contributed in the increased military effort which would reflect the more forceful nature of the nation in its quest to attain victory. In furthering this notion, Caro asserted that Johnson contemplated his options with the progression of the war depicting limited success with his belief that reducing American involvement would

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, 250.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 454.

⁵⁷ Caro, *The Passage of Power*, 402.

result in the communist influence of China becoming more prominent in Vietnam.⁵⁸ In the context of Johnson's foreign policy, this outlook on the communist nation expressed by Caro was similar to Dallek with the active presence of China in the region being a considerable factor on American relations toward Vietnam.

Other historians like Vaughn Davis Bornet and Randall B. Woods presented crucial perspectives on the importance of China in the grand scheme of Johnson's foreign policy. In terms of the possibility of Sino-American relations being established in the Johnson presidency, Bornet stated that the conflict of interests between China and the Soviet Union in the late 1950s hindered the possibility of relations as did the internal discord within mainland China.⁵⁹ Due to the deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations and internal tension in China, it would not have been prudent to establish relations with China. In relation to the impact of communist China in the Vietnam War, Woods asserted that the nation would imitate the actions of the United States in the war effort. He stated that if the United States committed either aerial or land forces against North Vietnam, China would exhibit assistance to the DRV as well as the active usage of the Chinese communist army if American forces crossed the seventeenth parallel.⁶⁰ This depiction of the various scenarios of Chinese involvement in the war with the possible American military actions signified the mindset of Johnson needing to consider all these factors as he executed his Vietnamese foreign policy. Due to the influence of China within the war, the progression of the conflict resulted Johnson's perception changing as he rationalized the appropriate foreign policy decisions in determining the outcome of the war.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 534.

⁵⁹ Vaughn Davis Bornet, *The Presidency of Lyndon B. Johnson* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1983), 178-179.

⁶⁰ Randall B. Woods, *LBJ: Architect of American Ambition* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 610.

Besides the attitude toward the People's Republic of China as one aspect of Johnson's foreign policy, the various strategic and ambitious decisions in his foreign policy toward Vietnam served as the core of his administration with his immense activism in resolving this conflict. In terms of the significance of the Vietnam War within the Johnson administration, Dallek asserted that the war served as "a chance not only to promote long-term international stability but also to allow Johnson to make a great mark in foreign affairs."⁶¹ This attitude toward the importance of the war in the Johnson presidency reflected the president's desire to be perceived as an effective world leader. In relation to the development of the war, the passage of the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin Resolution proved impactful on the execution of Johnson's foreign policy in the region. Also, the usage of this resolution as well as the bombing raid of North Vietnam contributed in serving two vital purposes of the president's Vietnamese foreign policy. Dallek stated that it "put both Saigon and Hanoi on notice of American resolve to stay the course in preserving an independent South Vietnam, and they deprived Goldwater of the chance to make Vietnam an issue in the campaign."⁶² In the mindset of Johnson, these two developments aimed in expressing the nation's resilience in continuing the war effort to preserve the noncommunist nature of South Vietnam and exhibit effective results of the war to avoid negative criticism in the 1964 presidential campaign.

As the war progressed, the president became fully aware that the conflict dominated his presidency, especially the lessened emphasis on his domestic reforms. Despite the lack of success in the conflict and the administration's discontent with criticism of their actions, Dallek argued that Johnson and the rest of his cabinet who urged greater American involvement

⁶¹ Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, 279.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 154.

believed it necessary in seeing the war through to its conclusion.⁶³ However, it became apparent towards the end of his presidency that the conflict in Vietnam would not be resolved in his administration. Most importantly, the investment of his presidency with the war resulted in Johnson not wanting to admit that his primary foreign policy ended up being a failure.⁶⁴

Besides Dallek's outlook on Johnson's foreign policy toward Vietnam, Caro's perspective reflected another vital perception on the president's foreign policy within it. The overall decision-making process exhibited by Johnson represented a crucial aspect of his Vietnamese foreign policy with it assisting in fully comprehending how the president would determine his actions within the war. Caro asserted that Johnson would conceal them from Congress and the American people as well as the actions stemming largely from his domestic political concerns.⁶⁵ It became apparent that Johnson did not favor public exposure of his decisions to avoid criticism and the implications of his domestic political concerns having influence on the execution of his foreign policy toward Vietnam. In furthering this notion, the mindset of Johnson on the war in the early stages of his presidency revolved on the possibility of withdrawal with his desire to avoid the conflict from being perceived as a major political issue.⁶⁶ While Caro only emphasized the early stages of his presidency, he presented an enlightening outlook on the initial perspective of the president as Johnson confronted domestic and international issues of the nation, especially his outlook in dealing with Vietnam.

In furthering the various aspects of Johnson's foreign policy toward Vietnam, historian Jonathan Colman expressed a revisionist account on the president's execution of this vital foreign policy. One crucial argument conveyed by Colman derived from uncovering the main

⁶³ Ibid., 356.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 461.

⁶⁵ Caro, *The Passage of Power*, 534.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 535.

motivation for Johnson's increase in American involvement in the conflict. He argued that Cold War concerns about the nation's international standing served as the reasoning for this escalation with the desire in protecting South Vietnam in the context of American interests and regional security.⁶⁷ In furthering this notion, the weakening of South Vietnam would greatly affect American interests in the region. Colman asserted it would be reasonable that the weakness of South Vietnam resulted in "a deepening of the US commitment rather than the cutting of losses."⁶⁸ In the progress of the war, Johnson endured adversity as he confronted it with the lack of effective victory in the 1968 Tet Offensive leading to limited approval toward his administration. Due to the unlikelihood of an effective military victory ending the war, Johnson limited military involvement to reassert the desire for peace talks with the intention in not seeking a second term. Most importantly, Colman asserted that Johnson's execution of foreign policy toward Vietnam did not prove effective with his inability in creating a strategy that properly addressed the guerilla aspect of the war.⁶⁹

Other prominent historians like Henggeler, Bornet, and Woods provided intriguing perspectives on Johnson's execution of his foreign policy in resolving the Vietnamese conflict. According to Henggeler, Johnson became concerned with Robert Kennedy's comments on Vietnam resulting in his belief that "he would be vulnerable to criticism if he withdrew American troops in 1965."⁷⁰ This outlook on Johnson's Vietnamese foreign policy reflected the influence of the Kennedy mystique on how the president dealt with the conflict. In terms of the shifting perceptions of Johnson in the progression of the war, Bornet provided an interesting outlook with him expressing that Johnson knew at the onset of his presidency that "*the Southeast*

⁶⁷ Colman, 24.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 40.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 68.

⁷⁰ Henggeler, 172.

Asia adventure was not going well and that for a long period it was not likely to go well."⁷¹ This perception proved essential in comprehending the mindset of Johnson at the beginning of his presidency with his knowledge on the nature of the Vietnamese conflict. Also, Vietnam historian George C. Herring conveyed that Johnson intensified the war through suppression and indirection to gain approval from the American people.⁷² In furthering this notion, political scientist Larry Berman asserted that the president used the 1966 Manila Conference to send various messages to different audiences to express American support within the war. For example, the conference assisted in expressing the nation's ambitions to succeed toward North Vietnam as well as the American public that a unified Vietnam would be fulfilled.⁷³ In relation to Johnson's motivation in resolving the war, Woods argued that Johnson's commitment to the war derived from his Christian idealism with his ambition in using all the necessary power in attaining victory with the outcome being a noncommunist Vietnam.⁷⁴ While various historians perceived Johnson's foreign policy differently, his handling of foreign affairs proved vital in comprehending how this ambitious president aimed in asserting his own ideals in their execution toward preserving the interests of the nation abroad.

In the examination of the various outlooks of Kennedy and Johnson in their respective foreign policies toward East Asia, some historians conveyed distinctive similarities and differences in the implementation of these policies. In terms of the contrasting foreign policy between both presidents, Henggeler asserted that Johnson's willingness to use extensive military strength differed from Kennedy's tendency for low-scale counterinsurgency.⁷⁵ In comparing Kennedy and Johnson, prominent historian Robert A. Caro asserted that Johnson was resilient

⁷¹ Bornet, 74.

⁷² Herring, 133.

⁷³ Larry Berman, *Lyndon Johnson's War: The Road to Stalemate in Vietnam* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989), 19.

⁷⁴ Woods, *LBJ*, 503.

⁷⁵ Henggeler, 169.

and ambitious with him being able to respond to the nation's issues in the aftermath of his predecessor's death. More explicitly, he believed that Johnson's response to this sudden rise to the presidency showed "a glimpse of political genius almost shocking in its acuity and decisiveness."⁷⁶ In relation to public approval, Larry Berman conveyed that both presidents did not allow public opinion to delay them in executing foreign policy according to their morality.⁷⁷ Historian Jerald A. Combs asserted that the impact of the Vietnam War in both administrations "exacerbated the issue of racial justice at home and demonstrated conclusively the bankruptcy of the search for a nationalist alternative by Kennedy and Johnson."⁷⁸ However, the perception of prominent historian Robert Dallek proved instrumental in conveying the importance of their foreign policy in the context of their respective legacy.

While Kennedy did not implement any new policy toward Vietnam with his untimely death, Dallek conveyed that his thousand days "spoke to the country's better angels, inspired visions of a less divisive nation and world, and demonstrated that America was still the last best hope of mankind."⁷⁹ While the outlook of Kennedy's legacy derived from his foreign policies contained a more respected and admired perception, the perspective on Johnson's legacy would be vastly different with his inability to effectively resolve the Vietnam War. Dallek asserted that Johnson would be perceived as a president that "faithfully reflected the country's greatness and limitations – a man notable for his successes and failures, for his triumphs and tragedy."⁸⁰ The various perceptions on the Kennedy and Johnson administrations' execution of foreign policy toward East Asia revealed its impact in the overall success of their respective presidencies.

⁷⁶ Caro, *The Passage of Power*, 603.

⁷⁷ Berman, 100.

⁷⁸ Combs, 285.

⁷⁹ Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, 711.

⁸⁰ Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, 628.

CHAPTER II

SENATORS KENNEDY AND JOHNSON'S PERCEPTIONS OF AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

The presidencies of John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson involved the succession of two liberal leaders who aimed to resolve the domestic and foreign concerns of the nation. Their respective approaches to confront these issues during the 1960s further solidified their importance in the progression of the Cold War. While they differed in their actions as president, their similar liberal political roots that served as their basis for decision-making. Their political experience of serving in Congress gave them the exposure needed to comprehend the scheme of American politics. Both Kennedy and Johnson used their time as congressmen and senators to further their political career and immerse themselves in national politics. As national issues remained a vital aspect of their agenda, their outlook on foreign affairs served as a more engaging outlet for them. Furthermore, foreign issues tended to dominate their time in their respective administrations. Examining their respective tenures in Congress will be instrumental to understand their growth into presidential candidates, particularly their exposure and response to foreign relations.

The Massachusetts senator's privileged upbringing in a politically active and affluent family served as a catalyst for his ambition to become an experienced and educated politician. For example, he gained exposure on diplomatic relations in England while his father Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr., served as American ambassador from 1938 to 1940. Furthermore, his Harvard

education remained a vital component in the development of his political mindset, which allowed him to become more informed on foreign relations. Kennedy's understanding of the attributes needed for effective leadership stemmed from his experience at Harvard. He believed that a strong political leader should be courageous and be ambitious in his desire to shift the nation to a new and more prosperous direction.⁸¹ Furthermore, the political rhetoric derived from his Harvard education primarily included fear as a vital element of his senatorial and presidential speeches. In his approach to a successful democracy, the liberal leader used his version of democratic ideals on how to overcome its flaws. As a result, he realized that "strong leadership, using fear as a method of manipulating public opinion, was essential for democratic survival."⁸² Kennedy shared with Johnson a similar belief regarding the necessity for some form of manipulation to fulfill their respective agenda for the success of democracy. However, he tended to exhibit his charismatic persona in presenting the national anxieties toward the American public. More importantly, his senatorial career contributed to Kennedy forging a distinctive political identity with an effective discourse that intrigued the nation and propelled him to the executive office.⁸³

The overall examination here of Kennedy's perception of foreign policy during his Senate tenure focuses heavily on the primary analysis of his various speeches and publications. This approach allows a more accurate comprehension of his mindset on foreign affairs, especially its progression upon entering the White House. In addition, the use of personal accounts of his advisers and fellow senators assisted in this understanding of the Massachusetts senator. In contrast, the analysis of his future Vice-President and successor, Lyndon Johnson,

⁸¹ Michael E. Meagher, "'In an Atmosphere of National Peril': The Development of John F. Kennedy's World View," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (Summer 1997): 470.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 476.

⁸³ John T. Shaw, *JFK in the Senate: Pathway to the Presidency* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 9.

involved a variety of primary sources. The use of personal accounts, newspaper articles, and the Congressional Record of the Senate became essential in grasping the perception of Johnson's tenure in Congress. Furthermore, this approach to Johnson differed from the study of Kennedy as the Texan senator became more actively involved in the operations of the Senate. Nevertheless, Kennedy's various speeches and publications proved insightful to the development of his perspective on foreign affairs.

In presenting an informative analysis of Kennedy's mindset on his path to the presidency, his 1960 book *The Strategy of Peace* reflected his stance on resolving various foreign and domestic issues. In the introduction of this book, prominent historian Allan Nevins expressed the attitude of the ambitious senator as essential in determining the direction of the nation. He advocated that Kennedy endeavored "with thoughtful force, both to convert men to a more strenuous and idealistic mood, and to discuss in concrete terms some pressing situations we face, and the best paths through them."⁸⁴ In furthering this notion, Kennedy's desire for a resilient country required courage and flexibility in effectively overcome its burdens. In addition, Nevins wrote that Kennedy wanted the nation to be "kept strong militarily and economically, but it must use its strength with a vision which in recent years has been lacking."⁸⁵ This volume of collective speeches by Kennedy conveyed his stance on pressing foreign and national issues in his campaign for the executive office.

In the examination of these speeches, the primary principle embedded in his rhetoric was the aspiration for the protection and spread of democratic ideals. He believed the nation's duty to the rest of the world derived from a need "not only to defend the integrity of this democratic society but also to help advance the cause of human freedom and world law – the universal cause

⁸⁴ John F. Kennedy, *The Strategy of Peace*, ed. Allan Nevins (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), xi.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, xiv.

of a just and lasting peace.”⁸⁶ This outlook on the promotion of democratic ideals domestically and internationally served as a vital outlook of the liberal leader to the direction of the nation. His continued advocacy for liberal ideas in his 1960 presidential campaign expressed in his previous works like *Why England Slept* and *Profiles in Courage*, reflected the maturity of these ideals and their preservation throughout his political career. For example, his published thesis focused on the rearmament of England in World War II assisted in his understanding the necessity for strong leadership in a democratic society. He asserted that “democracy must recognize its weaknesses; it must learn to safeguard its institutions if it hopes to survive.”⁸⁷ Furthermore, he noted that the U.S. should be keen in learning from the mistakes of England to ensure the survival of American democracy. The necessity of strong leadership in a democratic society served as a key attribute in his rhetoric of liberal ideals.

Toward Kennedy’s ability to handle the burdens of the presidency, he used his intellect to discover reasonable and effective solutions to resolve obstacles hindering American interests. As previously mentioned, his understanding of ideas derived from his collegiate education allowing him to use his extensive knowledge to respond to issues. According to prominent Kennedy historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr., the future president tended to be perceived as “a man of action who could pass easily over to the realm of ideas and confront intellectuals with perfect confidence in his capacity to hold his own.”⁸⁸ Kennedy possessed the ability to take action with a strong conviction in his rhetoric toward presenting his outlook on particular issues.

Prominent Kennedy adviser Theodore Sorensen presented a crucial outlook on the attitude of the president in his earlier days as senator. He provided a good analysis of the liberal

⁸⁶ Kennedy, *The Strategy of Peace*, 6.

⁸⁷ John F. Kennedy, *Why England Slept* (New York: Wilfred Funk, 1961), 224.

⁸⁸ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 104.

leader's speeches on foreign policy as his political career progressed. Sorensen argued that Kennedy focused on defense serving as the "bulk of diplomacy and disarmament was only a dream. But with increased perspective and responsibility came a renewed commitment to peace."⁸⁹ It became apparent that Kennedy's approach to defense changed as he matured with the necessity for peace being the main objective for him upon entering the presidency. In furthering the importance of his Senate speeches, one vital speech focused on the American interests for self-determination of Algeria. While this speech focuses on a region in North Africa, the convictions expressed toward it were similar to those exhibited to Indochina. He believed the dangers of Western colonialism affected the pressing issue of Vietnamese independence within French Indochina. As expressed by Sorensen, Kennedy understood around 1953-54 that the postponement of this independence and presumption of a French military victory could result in it being "more difficult the future would be for Vietnam and her sister states once they were fully free."⁹⁰ Around this time, he became aware of Ngo Dinh Diem with the future South Vietnam president expressing his anti-communist stance and advocacy for an independent Vietnam.⁹¹ As a result, it seemed likely that Diem influenced the liberal senator on his position toward the Vietnamese situation. Furthermore, Kennedy believed that the United States needed to maintain its support for Vietnam because "we have helped to shape its future...This is our offspring -- we cannot abandon it, we cannot ignore its needs..."⁹² Senator Kennedy realized the obligation of the United States to assist in some fashion in this persistent issue threatening Indochina. More

⁸⁹ Theodore C. Sorensen, *Kennedy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 26.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁹¹ George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1986), 48.

⁹² John F. Kennedy on Vietnam, 01 June 1956, Folder 04, Box 08, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 08 - Biography, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. Accessed September 5, 2017, <https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2360804098>.

importantly, his sentiments on this East Asian conflict reflected his awareness and comprehension on pressing foreign issues.

During the 1950s, American policy toward East Asia under the Eisenhower administration revolved around clamoring issues arising that needed effective resolution. In this process, both Kennedy and Johnson responded to these foreign issues through direct and firm discourse expressed in their respective rhetoric. For example, the United States and Japan signed a security treaty in September 1951 that focused on the Japanese allowing American military presence in East Asia. The implications of this treaty allowed Eisenhower to become involved in the region if circumstances arose that required American involvement. Furthermore, this treaty contributed to the United States developing more thorough relations with the Republic of China (ROC). Due to the People's Republic of China (PRC) being a communist nation, the ROC served as the Chinese government recognized by the Eisenhower administration. According to prominent Asian historian Michael Schaller, the aftermath of the Korean War further contributed to the Sino-American issues in East Asia. He conveyed that it resulted in extensive American and Chinese involvement in Indochina as the French asserted colonialism within the region.⁹³ Also, both the Eisenhower administration and Mao Zedong believed that they threatened each other's respective interests. For example, the assertive president perceived the PRC aimed to use Vietnam as a communist ally to control the region; while Mao viewed the United States intending to turn Vietnam into an anti-communist nation against China.⁹⁴ Furthermore, it became apparent that the extensive influence of the PRC in East Asia shifted the conflict of the Cold War to the region.⁹⁵

⁹³ Michael Schaller, *The United States and China: Into the Twenty-First Century*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 138.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 3.

As the 1950s progressed, Kennedy became more openly vocal on his stance toward foreign affairs through his public speeches. For example, he presented a crucial outlook on the necessity for a more unified government to allow the Eisenhower administration to execute a better efficient foreign policy. He stated that any irresponsible criticism must not be allowed to “undermine the prestige of our nation abroad, to interfere unduly with the Executive Branch, or to disparage policies of the administration in power which we would be supporting had they been promulgated by our own administration.”⁹⁶ While Kennedy possessed liberal ideals in contrast to the administration’s Republican ideas, he believed that there needed to be compromise for a stronger foreign policy and any negligent criticism hindered this objective. However, he asserted that the president had not been effective in conducting foreign relations.

One intriguing example involved the American response to the conflict in Indochina. During the early 1950s, the United States’ policy on the region varied constantly with the mindset being that a united military action by the French and other Asian nations was needed to prohibit the region from being consumed by communism. Kennedy stated that this stance seemed unlikely to receive support particularly “the support of the peoples of Indo-China themselves, until France relinquishes its hold on the Associated States of Indo-China.”⁹⁷ He understood the importance of obtaining their support in resolving the conflict, but the French refusal to renounce control prevented it. Furthermore, the Eisenhower administration did not believe that this stance on the conflict was the best course of action while Kennedy greatly disagreed.

Besides his belief in the essentialness for Vietnamese independence, his position on the Indochina conflict presented his thorough and active role in wanting a suitable American

⁹⁶ Speech, American Whig-Clisophic Society, Princeton University, 11 May 1954. Papers of John F. Kennedy. Pre-Presidential Papers. Senate Files. Speeches and the Press. Speech Files, 1953-1960. JFKSEN-0894-006. JFKL. Accessed September 28, 2016, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKSEN-0894-006.aspx>.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

approach toward it. For example, he believed that an increase in aid and usage of troops would “only result in further statements of confidence without ultimate victory over aggression...”⁹⁸ Kennedy understood that this approach would instill some reassurance, but it still did not ensure victory in the overall scheme of the conflict. In addition, he provided an intriguing depiction of the military position during the war with the French and possible American military involvement. Kennedy realized that the military situation that would result from French withdrawal “would not be greatly different from the difficulties which would prevail after the intervention of American troops without the support of the Indochinese or the other nations of Asia.”⁹⁹ His understanding on the overall structure of the war assisted in knowing the use of American troops and the withdrawal of French forces would result in similar issues without the support of the surrounding Asian nations. More importantly, he viewed the Indochina conflict similarly to Korea as the tension in the region stemmed from the constant battle against communism. He expressed that this fight should not be “for economic or political gain, but for the security of the free world, and for the values and institutions which are held dear in France and throughout the non-Communist world, as well as in the United States.”¹⁰⁰ Kennedy’s attitude on the Indochina conflict reflected his active role on foreign relations as senator.

Furthermore, other aspects of foreign policy presented by Kennedy pertained to the obstacles that hindered its effectiveness. He stressed that the lack of bipartisanship affected the strength of foreign affairs with it being crucial for a stronger policy. For example, he stated that “bipartisanship has all but disappeared, and what remains exists only through the cooperation

⁹⁸ Speech, Indo-China speech of 1954, 6 April 1954. Papers of John F. Kennedy. Pre-Presidential Papers. Senate Files. Speeches and the Press. Speech Files, 1953-1960. JFKSEN-0894-004. JFKL. Accessed September 28, 2016, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKSEN-0894-004.aspx>.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

and forbearance of the Democrats.”¹⁰¹ In this notion on bipartisanship, Kennedy shared Johnson’s outlook on its necessity for an effective foreign policy. Due to the inability of Republicans for compromise and flawed conception on foreign relations, the liberal senator asserted that the “Democrats have a definite obligation to check our present policies of drift and slide.”¹⁰² Due to this obligation for the Democrats to observe the ineffective foreign policy, he conveyed the importance for a shift to Democratic leadership in the next election. He believed that the Democrats would create a strong foreign policy that appeased Americans and the nation’s allies to “weld consistency of principle and flexibility of approach into a program securing world peace and justice for our nation, our world and our children.”¹⁰³ As the 1950s progressed, Kennedy’s desire on the undertaking of Democratic leadership reflected his position on the use of liberal ideals being vital for an efficient foreign policy.

In the second half of the 1950s, the Massachusetts senator continued to focus on foreign affairs as well as some exposure to domestic issues like civil rights. His vocal stance on the Indochina conflict in 1954 contributed to him attaining considerable attention and praise through the press with his realism.¹⁰⁴ This extensive admiration assisted him gaining national exposure in the eyes of the American people. As a result, it served as a crucial factor in establishing the foundation for his presidential aspirations. While his health issues, like Addison’s disease, hindered his activism in the Senate, he remained a reputable senator with his speeches on foreign and domestic issues. Another factor that supported the reputation of the liberal senator involved the publication of his 1956 book *Profiles in Courage* that focused on the careers of eight senators, who exhibited exceptional courage in their political careers. In looking at these men, he

¹⁰¹ Speech, American Whig-Clisophic Society, Princeton University, 11 May 1954. Papers of John F. Kennedy. Pre-Presidential Papers. Senate Files. Speeches and the Press. Speech Files, 1953-1960. JFKSEN-0894-006. JFKL.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Robert Dallek, *An Unfinished Life: John F. Kennedy, 1917-1963* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2013), 187.

understood the significance of political courage as they risked their careers to express their principles.¹⁰⁵ He admired their courage as he aimed to exhibit similar sentiments in his political career for the betterment of the nation. Furthermore, he stated that “great crises produce great men, and great deeds of courage.”¹⁰⁶ This statement presented by Kennedy displayed the necessity for strength and courage in political leaders toward confronting crises. Also, he expressed that a man “does what he must – in spite of personal consequences, in spite of obstacles and dangers and pressures – and that is the basis of all human morality.”¹⁰⁷ Kennedy recognized that men of strong vigor and courage would persevere through any obstacle to reach their intended objective. Finally, he formulated the stories of these courageous senators to instill the importance of courage as it offered hope and inspiration to the American people.¹⁰⁸ In furthering this notion, prominent Kennedy historian Robert Dallek conveyed that the significance of this book aimed to express the need for democracy and eliminate the persistent cynicism of Americans toward its leaders.¹⁰⁹

Following the publication of his 1956 book, Kennedy’s aspirations for the presidency slightly faltered as he believed that his viability as a candidate in the 1960 election still seemed unlikely. At this point, there were multiple factors that hindered his possibility as a presidential candidate. For example, some of these factors included his religious background as a Catholic, his questionable health, his lack of support from party leaders, and his youthfulness.¹¹⁰ However, Kennedy almost becoming the Vice-Presidential nominee in the 1956 election assisted in receiving more national exposure and fueled his prospect for president in 1960. While these

¹⁰⁵ John F. Kennedy, *Profiles in Courage* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2006), 1.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 225.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, 198.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 211.

aspirations lingered for the rest of the decade, his approach to foreign and domestic issues continued with the stance on the Cold War as well as civil rights.

Towards the end of the 1950s, the main domestic issue in the nation around on civil rights. While Johnson served an exceptionally active role toward civil rights, Kennedy tended to support the need for change on this issue but he was not as active as the Texan senator. He interacted with this issue cautiously to avoid major political opposition to his political ambitions like his presidential aspirations. More explicitly, he aimed not to “antagonize either northern liberals or southern conservatives.”¹¹¹ Due to his passion for foreign affairs, his outlook on domestic concerns like civil rights usually served as a form of political strategy. In the process of creating a new civil rights bill in 1957, Kennedy sided with both liberals and conservatives in his voting record on the various parts of the bill like agreeing with Title III and IV. For example, he supported Title IV, referred as the jury trial amendment, and it greatly weakened the bill resulting in considerable criticism toward him.¹¹² While he ended up supporting the final compromise on the bill, it became apparent that he used this issue to maintain his credibility within the Senate to fulfill his personal ambitions. When the Civil Rights Act of 1957 was passed with immense compromise devised by Lyndon Johnson, Kennedy received criticism for his position, but he sustained his standing in Congress. The Massachusetts senator’s cautious approach on civil rights reflected his calculative mindset that “frustrated some but persuaded others that he was a senator carefully cultivating higher ambitions.”¹¹³

Following the restrained approach on civil rights, Kennedy’s main priority remained foreign affairs with his persistent aspirations for the presidency. For instance, his appointment to the Foreign Relations Committee in 1957 supported his reputation as a vocal spokesman on

¹¹¹ Shaw, 64.

¹¹² Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, 216-217.

¹¹³ Shaw, 86.

foreign relations. To gain this crucial position on foreign affairs, he needed Johnson's support. He acquired his approval after the Majority Leader realized that "if Jack's presidential campaign faltered, Lyndon could rely on Joe and Jack for their support."¹¹⁴ At this point, it seemed evident that both Kennedy and Johnson were using each other for their own respective interests to get further ahead in their political career. In discussing the relationship between both liberal leaders, former senator and associate George A. Smathers conveyed interesting insights into their relations within the Senate. For example, he stated that Kennedy did not like Johnson as he "thought he was a little bit uncouth and somewhat of an oaf. I know Jack Kennedy admired Lyndon's drive. I know he admired Lyndon's dedication..."¹¹⁵ While he perceived Johnson negatively, Kennedy appreciated his resilience and determination in confronting issues as Majority Leader.

The relationship between both liberal senators was complex, but they both possessed some respect for each other. In terms of their respective approaches to attain support for bills, they exhibited crucial differences in achieving this goal. George Smathers stated that "Kennedy was not a hands-on person like Johnson. Kennedy was in a way embarrassed, I don't know if this is the right word, but Kennedy was reluctant to ask people to do things."¹¹⁶ This depiction of Kennedy seemed interesting as he was not as actively involved with other senators unlike the aggressive Johnson. Furthermore, Smathers asserted, "when you're president, you've got to ask people to help you. If you don't come and ask them, why they're not going to help you."¹¹⁷

While Johnson extensively asserted his presence as Majority Leader, Kennedy tended not to be

¹¹⁴ Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, 221.

¹¹⁵ Transcript, George A. Smathers Oral History Interview #4: Kennedy and Johnson, September 5, 1989, by Donald A. Ritchie, 85. Accessed September 28, 2016, http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/resources/pdf/Smathers_interview_4.pdf.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 93.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

assertive with his associates within the Senate, which greatly differed from his approach as president.

In spite of this reluctant stance exhibited by Kennedy, he remained a strong advocate on foreign policy as the space race became a major issue of the Cold War. In 1957, he wrote an informative article on his stance toward foreign relations. His article titled “A Democrat Looks at Foreign Policy” described two critical weaknesses that crippled American foreign policy. These two weaknesses involved the failure “to appreciate how the forces of nationalism are rewriting the geopolitical map of the world...and second, a lack of decision and conviction in our leadership...”¹¹⁸ He observed the issues of American foreign policy that needed to be corrected for a more strengthened and effective one. In furthering this notion, Kennedy expressed his opinion on how to deal with foreign affairs through a strategic and opened mindset. For example, he stated that implementing diplomacy and military strategy tended to have “a temptation to fight today’s battles with the pattern books and position papers of yesterday’s successes.”¹¹⁹

During the grand scheme of the Cold War, he realized the American response to world affairs required a more modern approach in dealing with it. Furthermore, he presented interesting perspectives on American policy toward East Asia and the Middle East. In relation to the 1956 Suez Crisis, he supported the creation of Israel as its democratic stability and military strength endured opposition from its enemies.¹²⁰ Also, his outlook on East Asia proved enlightening as he believed that the nation needed to focus on the political and military strength of Korea as well as the impact of Japan in the region. More importantly, his perception on the lack of recognition of China by the United States conveyed a vital aspect of his stance on foreign policy. He asserted that the non-recognition of the communist nation possessed strong reasoning, but “we must be

¹¹⁸ John F. Kennedy, “A Democrat Looks at Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Affairs* 36, no. 1 (October 1957): 44.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 50.

very careful not to strait-jacket our policy as a result of ignorance and fail to detect a change in the objective situation when it comes.”¹²¹ Despite the reasoning behind this attitude on the PRC, Kennedy recognized that the United States should be open-minded on any possible changes to establish more reasonable relations. For example, the role of the communist nation in trying to resolve the tension within Indochina during the 1954 Geneva Conference enhanced their international standing. As a result, the PRC for the rest of the decade aimed to overcome the isolation imposed by the United States with its intention to persuade the neutralist governments in Laos and Cambodia.¹²²

During 1958, Kennedy expressed his concern on the situation in the Formosa Strait surrounding the islands of Quemoy and Matsu. He became worried with the possibility of the United States being unceremonious involved with the conflict between the nationalist and communist influence in the region. He conveyed the probable scenario that would result in war “at a time and place not of our choosing, in an argument over two islands not essential to our security, and by an action of Chiang Kai-Shek not initiated with our consent.”¹²³ In addition, he agreed with the options exhibited by the United Nations in resolving this issue through some form of demilitarization or neutralization of Quemoy and Matsu.¹²⁴ In addition, the liberal senator perceived the necessity for stronger leadership. As a result, his outlook on the Eisenhower administration usually reflected some form of agreement on the need for strategic diplomacy and military strength. On the nation’s response to international affairs, he stated his optimism that with “a sufficient clarity of will and purpose within the Administration can gain

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 65.

¹²³ Speech, Foreign affairs: The Challenge Abroad, October 1958. Papers of John F. Kennedy. Pre-Presidential Papers. Presidential Campaign Files, 1960. Speeches and the Press. Speeches, Statements, and Sections, 1958-1960. JFKCAMP1960-1030-004. JFKL. Accessed January 23, 2017, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKCAMP1960-1030-004.aspx>.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

the support of both parties and of the broad public to meet these challenges in unity.”¹²⁵ These various perceptions of foreign policy reflected his understanding of world affairs and the strategic approaches needed to confront them.

As the end of the 1950s loomed, Kennedy’s presidential ambitions served as his primary objective rather than the senatorial duties in Congress. He believed that his extensive foreign policy experience made him a viable candidate. Furthermore, it became apparent to him that a strong claim to the presidency required foreign relations and assuring peace in the world to be the main priority over domestic concerns.¹²⁶ This perspective conveyed by the senator proved essential in comprehending his attitude on the vital credentials to win the presidency. According to Robert Dallek, Kennedy’s experience derived from his senatorial career “strengthened his resolve to reach for executive powers that promised greater freedom to implement ideas that could improve the state of the world.”¹²⁷ Despite his lack of activism within the Senate, unlike Johnson, he attained the experience and exposure that allowed him to be a strong and viable presidential candidate.

Following the 1960 Democratic convention that resulted in Kennedy receiving the nomination, he focused on winning the national election as he clashed with Republican nominee and former Vice-President Richard Nixon. However, it should be noted that Kennedy attained the nomination over Lyndon Johnson because the Massachusetts senator constantly campaigned, unlike the Majority Leader. As a result, Johnson eventually agreed to be Kennedy’s running mate to assist in attaining southern support. In relation to the overall election, the Democratic nominee expressed his opinion on foreign and domestic issues with a more passionate stance on a more effective foreign policy. Also, the U-2 incident in May 1960 created tension between the United

¹²⁵ Kennedy, “A Democrat Looks at Foreign Policy,” 59.

¹²⁶ Robert Dallek, *Camelot’s Court: Inside the Kennedy White House* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2014), 17.

¹²⁷ Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, 226.

States and the Soviet Union resulting in the summit meeting to discuss possible solutions for peaceful coexistence. However, the 1960 summit meeting between Eisenhower and Khrushchev did not reach this objective. As a result, Kennedy perceived this failed meeting as a wake-up call for the nation's leaders and Americans on the dangers facing the nation as well as the dire need for strong leadership.¹²⁸

Besides this compelling perspective on the dynamics of the Cold War, Kennedy presented an insightful perception on the possibility of China being involved in the negotiations on the ban of nuclear tests. He stated that improved relations with the communist nation on this issue would assist to prohibit atomic testing “on the mainland of China without inspection – and because Chinese possession of atomic weapons could drastically alter the balance of power.”¹²⁹ As Kennedy perceived the significance of Chinese involvement in the overall scheme of international affairs, he believed this possible route on established relations proved vital in his mindset to achieve peace in the world. More importantly, he asserted that his main priority as president would focus on “the rebuilding of strength and purpose within this country and throughout the non-Communist world.”¹³⁰ Kennedy's attitude on foreign policy remained a fundamental aspect of his presidential campaign to receive support from Americans as the more qualified candidate for the presidency.

The overall significance of John F. Kennedy's tenure in the Senate served as a vital aspect in the development of his perception of foreign policy as he aimed to reach the presidency. He acquired considerable knowledge on foreign affairs from his collegiate education at Harvard, particularly his published thesis *Why England Slept*. In terms of his political

¹²⁸ Shaw, 114.

¹²⁹ Russell Baker, “Kennedy Favors Peiping Contacts,” *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Jun 15, 1960. Accessed October 12, 2016, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/114951234>.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

experience, he served as a U.S. representative for Massachusetts from 1947 to 1953 and U.S. senator from 1953 to 1960. His tenure as senator primarily assisted in developing his mindset on foreign relations as it would fulfill Kennedy's personal ambitions for higher political position like the presidency. Furthermore, he focused on American foreign policy toward East Asia like Indochina. He became heavily vocal on his stance on policy toward this region with the conflict in Indochina, the relations with the People's Republic of China, and its impact in the context of the Cold War. During his progression as senator, his presidential aspirations rather than senatorial duties tended to dominate his time. When the 1960 election neared, his relationship with Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson proved instrumental as the Texan senator desired the same position. While Kennedy ended up with the Democratic nomination and the presidency, Johnson's agreement to be his Vice-President served as a crucial indicator of their respective motivations to gain entry into the White House. Despite Kennedy reaching the presidency before the Texan senator, it will be essential in examining Johnson's tenure in the Senate to further comprehend the development of his stance on foreign affairs.

The political career of Lyndon Baines Johnson included distinguished positions in the American government spanning from his time as a Texas congressman, Minority and Majority Leader of the Senate, Vice-President, and President of the United States. Historical perspectives on Johnson's career tend to focus on his presidency. While his ineffective leadership to end the Vietnam War greatly tarnished his legacy, his tenure as U.S. Senator served as a positive reminder of his success as a politician. As senator, the development of his political mindset, specifically his use of authority to fulfill his own agenda, assisted in setting the foundation for his outlook as president. In his tenure, he commanded an assertive presence fueled with ambition as he became active in resolving domestic and foreign issues. While he sometimes collaborated

with the Eisenhower administration to resolve pressing issues, he generally used persuasion to fulfill his interests. Due to his extensive activism as a senator, it further validated his aspiration to run for president in the 1960 election, but resulted in his selection as Vice-President within the Kennedy administration. Johnson's tenure as senator from 1949 to 1961 proved essential in his ambition for meaningful political power and helped shape his perception on domestic and foreign issues of the nation.

The foundation of his career as U.S. Senator originated with the controversial 1948 election. The unusual voting records in this election, which resulted in him receiving the nomination, created his reputation as an ambitious and resilient politician who did not let anything stand in his way. While the corruption related to Johnson's victory tended to be the primary focus of the election, his political background served as a crucial reminder of his active role in confronting the national issues of the country. His ambition to become U.S. Senator stemmed from his desire for power furthering the southern perception that this position possessed a sustainable amount of it.¹³¹

In terms of his upbringing, he was influenced by his family and the social environment of the Texas Hill Country. Both factors assisted him in developing his attitude on how to confront issues threatening the social and political aspects of Texas. More importantly, it further solidified his stance that "the common people needed assistance in their struggle against outside forces."¹³² As his political career flourished with his active involvement in politics, he usually downplayed his Texas background to avoid political bias but his speeches tended to include references to Texas' past. For example, he frequently made references to the Alamo; he

¹³¹ Robert A. Caro, *Master of the Senate: The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, Vol. III (New York: Vintage, 2003), 90-91.

¹³² Mitchell Lerner, "'Almost a Populist': Texas, the South, and the Rise of Lyndon Baines Johnson," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 117, no. 3 (January 2014): 242.

perceived it as a vital example of the determination of people willing to sacrifice their lives to defend their way of life against outside aggressors.¹³³

While Johnson tried to limit reference to his Texan background later in his career, he vocally asserted this perception, on his path to Congress, of the necessity for the nation to assist its people. However, his tenure in the House from 1941 to 1948 seemed to be filled with despair and hopelessness because Johnson did not possess any meaningful political power.¹³⁴ In relation to his political standing at this point, he positioned himself as a modern liberal, as he advocated for an active role for government, but remained more affiliated with Texas interests as well as some assertion of right-wing ideals.¹³⁵ His liberalism reflected his support for an active government, similar to prominent liberal leader Franklin Roosevelt, which embodied the political philosophy of the nation in the postwar era. More explicitly, politics acted as a prominent role in his life from his upbringing resulting in becoming “a master of the political game, but without power he didn’t want to remain in it.”¹³⁶ Johnson took the necessary risk to run for the Senate with the possibility of losing his position in Washington to acquire more power within Congress.

Besides this calculated risk by Johnson running for the Senate, his immense experience as a congressman validated his credibility as a viable candidate for the position. For example, his success in raising the living standard for his district as well as his service on the Armed Services and Atomic Energy committees reflected his qualifications to be an effective senator.¹³⁷ His attitude on the necessity for a stronger program in national defense represented a crucial outlook on his stance on foreign affairs. In furthering this notion, he believed that opponents against the

¹³³ Ibid., 243.

¹³⁴ Caro, *Master of the Senate*, 113.

¹³⁵ Bruce J. Schulman, *Lyndon B. Johnson and American Liberalism: A Brief Biography with Documents* (New York: Bedford Books of St. Martin’s Press, 1995), 29.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1908-1960* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 297.

use of federal power should be perceived as old-fashioned isolationists because of their desire in not using funds for preparedness and international obligations.¹³⁸ Also, Johnson asserted that this outdated perception could possibly lead the nation into another international war.¹³⁹ The lack of vision expressed by his opposition on the necessity of federal authority in foreign affairs contributed to his expressed discontent on this issue. For example, he exhibited his liberalist ideals with the government and its need to be prepared and actively involved in the scheme of international relations. Johnson's stance on foreign relations, tied to his eleven years dealing with military and foreign issues as a congressman, further validated his credibility to voters as a strong possibility to become senator. In spite of his controversial victory, Johnson embodied the skills needed to be an effective senator through his ambitious and calculating nature in not letting anything stand in his way. Most importantly, his victory in this contested election further fueled his determination to solidify his mark as a distinguished senator within Congress.¹⁴⁰

The aftermath of the 1948 election resulted in Johnson entering the upper house of Congress and signaled the beginning of his tenure as a dominant presence in the Senate. Throughout his time as a senator, he established the reputation as an assertive and manipulative leader who committed calculative actions to fulfill his own agenda. At the outset of his career as senator, he was appointed to the Armed Services Committee, attaining the support of prominent Southern senator and Chairman of the Committee, Richard Russell. In order to elevate his position of power within the Senate, it became apparent to Johnson that he needed the support of southern senators like Russell, requiring him to forge some form of alliance with them.¹⁴¹ However, he ended up using their support to further his senate career as it progressed. When he

¹³⁸ Ibid., 313

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Dallek, *Lone Star Rising*, 348.

¹⁴¹ Caro, *Master of the Senate*, 124.

began his senatorial career with the Armed Services Committee, he confronted a major social issue in Texas related to the civil rights of Mexican-Americans which set the foundation for his involvement in the 1960s movement. He faced the social issue of civil rights in his state as he responded to the 1949 Longoria Affair. He voiced his assertive opinion explicitly, which served as his trademark attribute executed throughout his senatorial career. More importantly, his political mindset reflected his commanding presence using political power to effectively resolve the incident. In terms of a political approach, his participation in resolving the affair at the onset of his senate career represented a major opportunity for him to establish himself as an assertive and active senator, in spite of any possible political ramifications from his involvement with it. Furthermore, it embodied his assertive activism exhibited in his tenure as well as his time as the chief executive of the nation.

Besides his involvement in the Longoria Affair, his position in the Armed Services Committee acted as the primary catalyst for his exposure to be actively involved in the foreign affairs of the nation. While he confronted issues related to his state, he maintained his stance on foreign affairs. During his entry into the Senate, the United States became entangled in the early stages of the Cold War with President Truman wanting to stop the spread of communism through his containment policy. In addition, the rhetoric of American diplomat George Kennan expressed in his “long telegram” address and 1947 *Foreign Affairs* article further advocated this approach.¹⁴² While the Soviet Union acted as the primary communist threat of the United States, Truman endured the first major military incident in the emergence of the Korean conflict at the outset of the 1950s. After the North Korean military crossed the thirty-eighth parallel and invaded South Korea in its attack on Syngman Rhee’s army, Truman perceived this action as part

¹⁴² John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York: Penguin Books, 2007), 30-32.

of the Sino-Soviet agenda to spread communism in Asia.¹⁴³ As a result, Truman ordered military forces to Korea to preserve the line of defense in the peninsula. More importantly, he called for the United Nations to instigate police action to prohibit any further aggression as well as prevent an escalation of the war.¹⁴⁴ Johnson agreed with the President's assertive course of action, as the freshman senator believed it necessary to prevent the spread of communism. In relation to the possible usage of nuclear weaponry, Johnson expressed that he was not a military specialist but discussions on the appropriate course of action depended on the Soviet influence in the war.¹⁴⁵ In addition, the senator viewed this conflict as a valuable opportunity to use his expertise on defense preparedness in his position on the Armed Services Committee.¹⁴⁶ This attitude on the Korean conflict demonstrated the opportunistic nature of Johnson to use the power associated with the committee on the war.

Furthermore, Johnson's overall reputation as senator tended to validate his opportunistic and manipulative mindset when confronting foreign affairs. He became regarded as a calculating man who only acted after considerable preparation when he knew success seemed definite.¹⁴⁷ This complex personality of Johnson served as a strong foundation for his rise in the Senate through his extensive usage of manipulation to suit his interests like asserting meaningful political power. In relation to the Korean War, his experience on defense preparedness reflected his ambition to become more active and develop his reputation as an experienced senator on foreign relations. Also, he became aware in his early days in the Senate that furthering his

¹⁴³ Randall B. Woods, *Quest for Identity: America Since 1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 55-56.

¹⁴⁴ Merle Miller, *Lyndon: An Oral Biography* (New York: Putnam, 1980), 148.

¹⁴⁵ Letter, Lyndon B. Johnson to Shelburne H. Glover, 12/5/50, "Legislative (Leg.) Atomic Bomb (General)," Legislative Files, 1950-52, United States Senate, 1949-1961, Box 227, LBJ Library.

¹⁴⁶ Miller, 148.

¹⁴⁷ Howard E. Shuman, "Lyndon B. Johnson: The Senate's Powerful Persuader," in *First Among Equals: Outstanding Senate Leaders of the Twentieth Century*, ed. Richard A. Baker and Roger H. Davidson (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, 1991), 201.

political career would require a strong position of authority within committees.¹⁴⁸ After he used his persuasion to attain a position on the Armed Services Committee, a desirable committee for senators, he utilized it to further his reputation as a strong authority figure through his actions on pressing concerns like the Korean conflict. When he agreed to Truman's stance on the conflict, he urged Richard Russell and the Senate Committee on Armed Services to create a preparedness subcommittee with him acting as its chairman.¹⁴⁹ The creation of this subcommittee directed by Johnson displayed his leadership to take charge in confronting the war as it became a vital example of his ability to create an effective Senate committee.

As chairman of the Senate Preparedness Subcommittee, he became actively involved in the operations of the subcommittee with its response to the progression of the Korean conflict. In terms of its operations, Johnson tried to emulate the Truman Committee from World War II which focused on investigating the issues related to American war production. Nevertheless, distinctive differences between the two committees became apparent as Johnson led his subcommittee with his own personality. Some of the main contrasts between the two committees involved the control implemented within them and the openness of their respective work being conducted, especially Johnson's preservation of its secrecy.¹⁵⁰ In relation to Johnson's desire to maintain the committee's secrecy, he wanted avoid its actions being heavily scrutinized to minimize the possibility of bad publicity. As a result, Johnson succeeded in making reports instead of hearings to explain the subcommittee's work, which limited the likelihood of discontent toward its actions.¹⁵¹ He strategically organized the Preparedness Subcommittee to preserve its secrecy and ensure that its opinions not be perceived negatively.

¹⁴⁸ Miller, 156.

¹⁴⁹ Shuman, 204.

¹⁵⁰ Caro, *Master of the Senate*, 320-322.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 323.

Although he maintained the confidentiality of the committee, its response to the Korean War proved instrumental in the committee's outlook on how to confront this conflict. At this point, Johnson strongly urged for military preparedness to show the world that the United States would act as the beacon for democracy.¹⁵² More explicitly, he conveyed the importance for all Americans that valued freedom to "lay aside petty and personal differences to unite in this fight against unprovoked aggression."¹⁵³ His perspective on the necessity for immediate action in the war effort to overcome the shortage of manpower, like new qualifications for military service, reflected Johnson's assertive leadership to use the power of the subcommittee aimed in instigating these changes. In terms of the presentation of the bill to the Senate, Johnson, as chairman, presented its various provisions with subsequent discussion from senators to determine whether to implement it.¹⁵⁴ As expressed in a 1951 *New York Times* article, Johnson argued the necessity of the manpower bill for the draft age to be changed from nineteen to eighteen as well as the extension of military service from twenty-one to twenty-six months.¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, he advocated this stance asserting that the "need for action is great and immediate."¹⁵⁶ While he adamantly perceived the provisions exhibited in the bill to be appropriate to resolve the manpower issue, the bill passed with minor adjustments to the draft age and tenure of military service. These changes included the draft age being reduced to 18 ½ and the military service elevated to twenty-four months.¹⁵⁷ Despite the enactment of the bill not containing Johnson's

¹⁵² Release by Sen. Johnson regarding Korean Situation, 7/18/50, "7/18/50, Release by Sen. Johnson regarding 'Korean Situation'," Statements of Lyndon Baines Johnson: 1950-October 1951, Box 10, LBJ Library.

¹⁵³ Statement of Senator Johnson 'On Korean Situation', 6/27/50, "6/27/50, Statement of Senator Johnson 'On Korean Situation'," Statements of Lyndon Johnson: 1950-October 1951, Box 10, LBJ Library.

¹⁵⁴ *Minutes of the Senate Democratic Conference (58th Congress-88th Congress), 1903-1964*, ed. Donald A. Richie (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1998), 478. Accessed February 24, 2016, <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CDOC-105sdoc20/pdf/CDOC-105sdoc20.pdf>.

¹⁵⁵ Harold B. Hinton, "One Division Ready for Defense of U.S., Draft Backer Says," *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Feb 14, 1951. Accessed February 9, 2016, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/111841739>.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ Dallek, *Lone Star Rising*, 395.

original provisions, it remained a vital piece of legislation that he played a considerable part in creating as chairman of the Senate Preparedness Subcommittee.

The significance of his role in the Armed Services Committee with its branch, the Preparedness Subcommittee, greatly assisted in establishing a respectable reputation for Johnson. Due to his assertive leadership in the committee, he gained national exposure through the extensive coverage expressed in magazines and newspapers like *Newsweek* and the *New York Times*.¹⁵⁸ This publicity on Johnson's senate career as chairman of his own subcommittee further asserted his authority using the power embedded to this position. This position presented him with a considerable amount of political authority, which resulted in him using its full potential to fulfill his interests as an active and rising senator. The Republican victory in the 1952 election resulted in his removal as chairman of the Senate Preparedness Subcommittee. However, his ascension to higher positions in the Senate, like Senate Minority Leader, depicted his ambition to redefine this institution with its increased political power and harnessing its power for himself.¹⁵⁹

While the Korean conflict ended with a stalemate in 1953, Johnson's active tenure as chairman of the Senate Preparedness Committee served as a crucial indicator of his activism as senator. More importantly, he maintained his stance on foreign affairs while focused on confronting the issues related to his state. This ability to sustain his priorities presented his leadership skills in responding appropriately toward them. For example, his balance on national and foreign issues resulted in being a "real-life master of pluralist politics, deftly building coalitions and making deals between contending interests to move legislation through the Senate."¹⁶⁰ While he heavily focused on the Korean conflict as chairman of the subcommittee, he continued to prioritize his agenda. He believed effectiveness required the passage of bills and

¹⁵⁸ Shuman, 205.

¹⁵⁹ Caro, *Master of the Senate*, 350.

¹⁶⁰ Schulman, 40.

implementing policies as they acted as the main tenets of government, which embodied American liberalism.¹⁶¹ The desire to be an effective senator served as the foundation for Johnson's ambitions through his usage of power to enact his liberalist ideals.

In the early 1950s, Johnson acted as chairman of the Senate Preparedness Committee with his active role in the response to the Korean conflict. During his time as leader of the committee, he became the Senate Majority Whip from 1951 to 1953. This position served as a precursor for his rise to more prominent positions like Senate Minority Leader. As a result, the significance of his involvement to confront the Korean War, while acting as Majority Whip, represented Johnson's ability to balance his priorities as well as pursue his activism in attaining positions with meaningful power. While his role as chairman gave him national exposure, his election to Majority Whip signified his reputation as a rising star in the Senate and the Democratic Party.¹⁶² Due to his elevation to this crucial position, he intended to use it extensively through the application of various tools like his well-known Johnson treatment and the recruitment of an effective staff. His tenure as Majority Whip set the foundation for the Texan to use these techniques as a stern and persuasive senator aimed at fulfilling his personal interests. Due to his manipulative tactics toward senators, he became a dominant presence in the Senate with his reputation only intensifying as he attained both Minority and Majority Leader positions in the progression of his senatorial career.

In relation to the significance of the Johnson treatment, he needed to be well-informed on the various dynamics of the Senate. As a result, he used various senators or close confidants to assist in recovering information for him. He wanted to be informed of any possible disapproval of particular pieces of legislation and learning the perceptions of certain senators to use in

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 41.

¹⁶² Dallek, *Lone Star Rising*, 392.

persuading them. After his tenure as Senate Majority Whip, he was elevated to the prestigious position of Minority Leader in 1953 acting as the leader of the Democratic Party in the Senate. His usage of the Johnson treatment and the importance of his staff allowed him to become an influential and effective leader. In relation to his rise to this position, his reputation as an active and persuasive senator contributed to his selection but the influence of prominent Georgia senator Richard Russell guaranteed it.¹⁶³ While the influence of other senators assisted in Johnson's rise as Minority Leader, his ability to effectively manipulate and evaluate issues validated his ambitious nature to be a dominant presence within it.

In this prominent role, Johnson began to redefine the authority tied to this position and used it extensively to confront pressing issues affecting the nation. For example, he faced difficulty with the Republican Party as to who was the dominant force in the Senate once Eisenhower became president in 1952. However, Johnson responded to the discontent of Senate Majority Leader William Knowland. He responded to Knowland stating that if "anyone has more problems than a majority leader with a minority, it is a minority leader with a majority."¹⁶⁴ In spite of this limitation, the Democratic leader of the Senate aimed to implement his power to its full potential for effective change toward resolving the various issues of the nation.

This role as the voice of the liberal majority somewhat satisfied his ambitions in his rise as their leader, but he most likely desired to act as the Senate Majority Leader. While this objective became fulfilled in 1955, he still conveyed his gratitude for his election as Minority Leader. He expressed his dedication to exercise this power in his pledge on executing "his best

¹⁶³ Robert W. Merry, "The Prism of History: Johnson Was King Among 20th-Century Senate Leaders," *CQ Weekly* (April 16, 1988): 982. Accessed March 22, 2016, <http://library.cqpress.com/cqweekly/WR100403118>.

¹⁶⁴ *Congressional Record*, 83rd Cong., 2nd sess., 2218, as quoted in *Minutes of the Senate Democratic Conference (58th Congress-88th Congress)*, 487.

efforts, cooperation, energy and ability in the position to which he had been named.”¹⁶⁵ As he dictated his responsibility to satisfy liberalist interests, the importance of his philosophy proved essential to comprehend his execution of power within this position.

Later in his senatorial career, Johnson provided a detailed breakdown of his ideals and it proved enlightening to understand his perception toward wielding power as a senator. Johnson’s article “My Political Philosophy”, published in 1958, assists in grasping his philosophy when he attained crucial positions of power like Minority and Majority Leader. He asserted that expressing it in a couple of words seemed difficult, but he defined himself as “a free man, and American, a United States Senator, and a Democrat, in that order.”¹⁶⁶ This assertion conveyed Johnson’s outlook on defining himself with its importance to better comprehend his priorities as senator. In furthering this notion, he expressed the various tenets of his personal philosophy as it clearly outlined Johnson’s ideals executed throughout his career. He believed that the voice of Americans needed to be heard, solutions to national issues needing to be available to resolve them, the necessity of resources to be used extensively to serve governmental policies, and aimed to prevent the waste of valuable sources of opportunity for the nation and its people.¹⁶⁷ These principles embodied Johnson’s attitude on how the nation should confront any potential issues through his personal ambition aimed to fulfill them.

After he expressed his gratitude to the Senate for making him its liberal leader in 1953, he needed to determine how to effectively utilize this position. The significance of persuasion remained a valuable asset for Johnson in its success to reach this prominent role. He used this technique more frequently as he acquired more significant power. Furthermore, he exercised his

¹⁶⁵ *Minutes of the Senate Democratic Conference (58th Congress-88th Congress)*, 488.

¹⁶⁶ Lyndon B. Johnson, *A Time for Action: A Selection from the Speeches and Writings of Lyndon B. Johnson, 1953-64* (New York: Pocket Books, 1964), 15. “My Political Philosophy” was originally published in *The Texas Quarterly*, Vol. 1, no. 4, Winter 1958.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

persuasive personality offering benefits to other senators that assisted their political and personal interests, which contributed to his superiority over them.¹⁶⁸ This control possessed by Johnson served as a crucial indicator of his ability to manipulate anyone if he needed to assert his dominance or gain support for legislation. In relation to his approach on legislation, he acted as a legislative pragmatist in his belief that anything could be accomplished if it seemed worth the effort.¹⁶⁹ Johnson examined the overall process in passing legislation with a more practical approach in their success, which provided another layer of his complex personality.

As he actively progressed as Minority Leader, he continued to maintain his charismatic personality and political ideals in his quest for a more bipartisan Senate. The primary concern for Johnson stemmed from the necessity to unite the Democrats in the institution before devising a reasonable solution for bipartisanship. In his speech to the Senate Democratic Conference at the outset of his 1953 election, he stated that one of his “deepest convictions is that there are more vital issues to hold Democrats together than there are issues to divide them.”¹⁷⁰ He realized the only way to create a strong foundation to institute cooperation between both parties required the unity of the Democratic establishment within the Senate. This disunity among Democrats stemmed from their ambitions to maintain the respective interests of their constituents. More explicitly, he asserted that if his fellow Democrats aimed to be “positive Americans – and not negative oppositionists – I am convinced that the time is not too far distant when the Democratic party will again be in the majority.”¹⁷¹ In his desire to further unify Democrats, he used his power to appoint all-liberal senators to at least one vital committee with him as the Chairman of

¹⁶⁸ Doris Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 112.

¹⁶⁹ Ralph K. Huitt, “Democratic Party Leadership in the Senate,” *The American Political Science Review* 55, no. 2 (June 1961): 337.

¹⁷⁰ Johnson, *A Time for Action*, 25.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 27.

the Policy Committee being crucial in scheduling legislation to be discussed.¹⁷² It eased the overall process for him to implement his power more effectively toward his path for a bipartisan Senate.

To achieve his goal of a united Senate, he needed to be heavily involved with the main Republican leader as President Eisenhower controlled the fate of legislation sent to him for approval. While his interaction with the president did not become more prominent until his rise as Majority Leader, he ended up confronting him on issues discussed in the Senate. From 1953 to 1955, his meetings with Eisenhower became regular sessions to learn about programs and policies. Johnson's former mentor Sam Rayburn as Speaker of the House served as another vital aspect of these meetings. In spite of the president not being fond of Johnson's assertiveness, he perceived his interactions between him and Rayburn as more informative and constructive than his sessions with Senate Republican leaders.¹⁷³ This relationship with Eisenhower assisted Johnson in maintaining senatorial issues like party unity and foreign affairs, which displayed his activism as Senate Democratic leader.

While Johnson focused on the operations of the Senate in his continuous interaction with the president, the Eisenhower administration endured the lingering presence of the Cold War as anti-communist sentiment proliferated across the nation. In seeking reelection in the 1954 election, he endured the vocal and aggressive Joseph McCarthy with his anti-communist sentiments and the emergence of McCarthyism. This movement stemmed from anxieties through the perceived notion that the United States did not possess a strong advantage in the overall context of the Cold War.¹⁷⁴ While Johnson aimed to unite his party and further extend his power in the Senate, he tried to not personally respond to the ideas of McCarthyism. As the momentum

¹⁷² Huitt, 338.

¹⁷³ Alfred Steinberg, *Sam Rayburn: A Biography* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1975), 290.

¹⁷⁴ Woods, *Quest for Identity*, 68.

of the movement began to diminish, Johnson acted effectively through strategy and persuasion to receive enough support from a majority of the Senate to assist in condemning McCarthy's actions.¹⁷⁵ More importantly, Johnson's response to McCarthy displayed his strategic planning to confront the Wisconsin senator at the appropriate time without jeopardizing the reputation of his party or his personal interests for reelection.

The important role exhibited by Johnson in censuring McCarthy illustrated the activism and influence of the Senate Democratic leader. After he secured his tenure for another six years, Johnson focused more on national politics and personal ambitions like foreign policy with less devotion toward his Texas political base to further establish himself as a national leader.¹⁷⁶ Due to political influence Johnson had attained, signified by his reelection, he ascended to the position of Senate Majority Leader as the Democratic Party attained the majority after the 1954 election. Johnson was unanimously elected with the massive approval by Democrats of his active tenure. For example, Georgia senator Walter George expressed that Johnson acted as the catalyst to unite the Democratic Party through his leadership "that decries against the spirit of factionalism in our party."¹⁷⁷ It became apparent that the new Majority Leader acted as the driving force to lessen the division among Democrats and achieve unity within the party.

His selection as the leader of the Senate from 1955 to 1961 served as the most successful period of Johnson's senatorial career with his increased presence on national and foreign issues confronting the nation. It expressed a reasonable amount of authority, but Johnson redefined it with his ambition to extensively use its power. In furthering this notion, Senator George A. Smathers stated that Johnson "elevated the majority leadership to a much more powerful position than it ever had been before, there's no doubt about that, just because of his own driven

¹⁷⁵ Caro, *Master of the Senate*, 553-555.

¹⁷⁶ Schulman, 49.

¹⁷⁷ *Minutes of the Senate Democratic Conference (58th Congress-88th Congress)*, 495-496.

personality.”¹⁷⁸ Johnson’s reign as Majority Leader epitomized the transformation of a prominent role in the Senate with his immense usage of power. Prominent historian Doris Kearns expressed that his time as the leader of the Senate served as a rare instance that the institution possessed a centralized form of leadership.¹⁷⁹ Johnson’s assertive leadership, fueled by the power tied to his new role, established a precedent of a strong driving force within the Senate.

As he began his tenure as Majority Leader, he faced various domestic and foreign issues endured by the nation, resulting in his close collaboration with the Eisenhower administration. In the mid-1950s, the emergence of the Bricker Amendment possessed the ability to greatly diminish the executive authority of the president on foreign policy. Johnson did not favor this stance to limit the presidential power to effectively conduct foreign affairs. He devised a calculated response to ensure this amendment did not become implemented. For example, he persuaded Senator Walter George to create an alternative proposal that expressed that no treaty would be allowed to be superior to the laws of the nation.¹⁸⁰ As a result, the Bricker Amendment failed to be implemented but the George Amendment experienced similar defeat in the Senate. In terms of Johnson’s role to prohibit any limitation of executive power on foreign policy, his strategic and persuasive character assisted in ensuring the amendment’s defeat. More importantly, he wanted dual credit for his party and himself to be perceived as the leader that aided the president.¹⁸¹ This assertive activism by Johnson on the preservation of executive power toward foreign affairs proved instrumental with its extensive usage exhibited within his administration as president.

¹⁷⁸ Transcript, George A. Smathers Oral History Interview #3: Lyndon B. Johnson as Majority Leader, August 29, 1989 and October 24, 1989, by Donald A. Richie, 60. Accessed February 24, 2016, http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/resources/pdf/Smathers_interview_3.pdf.

¹⁷⁹ Doris Kearns, “Lyndon Johnson’s Political Philosophy,” *Political Sciences Quarterly* 91, no. 3 (Autumn 1976): 395.

¹⁸⁰ Miller, 158-159.

¹⁸¹ Caro, *Master of the Senate*, 531.

Following the defeat of the Bricker Amendment, Johnson tended to focus on foreign issues threatening the nation. His relationship with Eisenhower proved crucial in confronting these issues because of the need for bipartisanship. In their complex relationship, they exhibited differing outlooks on domestic and economic issues, but Eisenhower appreciated Johnson's dominant presence in the Senate.¹⁸² As a result, Johnson believed in the necessity to cooperate with the president on preserving a strong stance on foreign policy. However, some Democrats believed that the Senate leader needed to be more aggressive toward the president on resolving pressing issues. In furthering this notion, Senate expert and former *New York Times* journalist, William S. White, expressed that Johnson challenged Eisenhower on domestic issues, but he tended to support him on foreign affairs.¹⁸³ He stated that the Democratic leader "wouldn't fight him on foreign affairs because he had a very traditional view of the proper role of the Presidency in foreign affairs; namely, he believed the President was responsible for them."¹⁸⁴ Johnson's lack of confrontation with Eisenhower on foreign affairs further showed his tendency to aim for cooperation with the Republican president to fulfill his ambition for bipartisanship.

The relations between Johnson and Eisenhower on foreign policy endured a major conflict with the 1956 Suez Crisis, which involved the invasion of Egypt by Western powers like Israel, the United Kingdom, and France. By 1956, the relationship between both leaders declined because of differing interests on national issues like natural gas and social security.¹⁸⁵ Their respective perspective on how to appropriately respond to the Suez Crisis involved some cooperation, but Johnson remained reserved on Eisenhower's actions to resolve it. While he

¹⁸² Thomas M. Gaskin, "Senator Lyndon B. Johnson, the Eisenhower Administration and U.S. Foreign Policy, 1957-60," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 24, no. 2 (Spring 1994): 341.

¹⁸³ It should be noted that White wrote the 1957 book *Citadel: The Story of the U.S. Senate* with a detailed study on the various changes in the Senate within postwar American politics.

¹⁸⁴ Transcript, William S. White Oral History Interview I, 3/5/69, by Dorothy Pierce McSweeney, 7, LBJ Library. Accessed March 9, 2016, http://www.lbjlibrary.net/assets/documents/archives/oral_histories/white_w/white1.pdf.

¹⁸⁵ Miller, 190.

wanted to assist the president in overcoming the conflict, Johnson most likely perceived it as a valuable opportunity to further elevate his stature on foreign affairs, especially increasing his prospect to run for the executive office in the 1960 election.¹⁸⁶ Despite this underlying objective for Johnson's conduct during the crisis, his objective to remain bipartisan on this issue remained his primary goal until he differed with Eisenhower's stance on using sanctions on Israel. Their differing outlooks on this issue made it difficult for the president to implement the Eisenhower Doctrine, which proposed to provide military and economic assistance to any Middle Eastern nation that desired it for protection against communism.¹⁸⁷ As a result, the Senate leader used his power to prohibit the passage of the Eisenhower Doctrine until the threat of sanctions no longer remained an issue.¹⁸⁸ This strategic use of power presented Johnson's authority and shrewdness with his impact on foreign policy and the importance for cooperative relations between them.

After the end of the Suez Crisis, in late 1956, and the passage of the Eisenhower Doctrine in early 1957, Johnson continued to act as a dominant presence as Majority Leader on foreign and domestic issues. While he served a major role in the crisis, he faced a domestic challenge in the emergence of a crucial civil rights bill. Throughout his senatorial career, Johnson shared the stance of other southern senators in their disapproval of passing any form of civil rights bill. This attitude on civil rights stemmed from the political necessity to attain the support of southern Democrats like Russell and limit any criticism that hindered the progression of his career.¹⁸⁹ However, his perception on civil rights changed with his desire to act on creating a bill that aimed for all Americans to possess the ability to vote. While this changed outlook possibly stemmed from personal ambition to use this issue to further himself as a contender for the 1960

¹⁸⁶ Philip A. Walker, Jr., "Lyndon B. Johnson's Senate Foreign Policy Activism: The Suez Canal Crisis, a Reappraisal," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (Fall 1996): 996.

¹⁸⁷ Miller, 203.

¹⁸⁸ Walker, Jr., 1005.

¹⁸⁹ Miller, 144.

election, the Senate leader intended to do whatever it took in creating a sufficient civil rights bill, at the expense of betraying fellow senators that supported him.¹⁹⁰ In his quest for its passage, he believed it might divide the party with the southern caucus heavily against civil rights.

In spite of this lingering threat for Johnson, he realized that the provisions of a civil rights bill did not need to be too significant, since the passage alone would significantly impact the lives of African Americans. For example, Senator George Smathers stated that Johnson “down in his heart had more compassion for the black people than anybody.”¹⁹¹ In the overall process to ensure the bill became discussed on the Senate floor, the primary obstacle that hindered the passage of the bill involved the provisions of Part III, focused on the protection of a broad variety of civil rights.¹⁹² As a result, Johnson strategically resolved this issue with the elimination of Part III, resulting in the bill primarily focused on voting rights. The passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1957 served as a vital example of Johnson’s calculative and resilient personality and his legislative expertise and assertive leadership. While this act only responded to the voting aspect of civil rights, Johnson’s full use of power as Majority Leader to pass this seemingly-weak bill still symbolized a major success for his leadership as an advocate for equality. More importantly, it served as a crucial indicator of his capability to fight for civil liberties with his administration as president containing unprecedented civil rights legislation.

After the successful passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1957, Johnson’s priorities reverted back to foreign policy with the American response to *Sputnik* during the Cold War. In terms of his relationship toward the Eisenhower administration, he restrained his bipartisanship stance on foreign policy because his potential as a presidential candidate became more apparent, requiring

¹⁹⁰ Caro, *Master of the Senate*, 870.

¹⁹¹ Transcript, George A. Smathers Oral History Interview #3, 70. Accessed February 24, 2016, http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/resources/pdf/Smathers_interview_3.pdf.

¹⁹² Caro, *Master of the Senate*, 911.

Johnson to establish his own record on foreign affairs.¹⁹³ Due to the Soviet Union's success with *Sputnik*, Johnson desired to advocate his perspective on the necessity for the United States to become more active in its foreign policies. More explicitly, he expressed in his own political philosophy that the American government "cannot accept stalemate in any area – foreign or domestic. It must seek the national interest solution, vigorously and courageously and confidently."¹⁹⁴ Furthermore, his response to the triumph of the Soviet Union on its orbital launch resulted in disbelief that "it might be possible for another nation to achieve a technological superiority over this great country of ours."¹⁹⁵ Besides his astonishment, he believed the nation needed to take charge of this development to assert its superiority over its communist enemy.

In furthering this notion, he expressed his own version of the state of the union address in early 1958. He stated the importance of victory in the space race with the control of space meaning the "control of the world, far more certainly, far more totally, than any control that has ever or could ever be achieved by weapons, or by troops of occupation."¹⁹⁶ Also, a 1958 *New York Times* article further conveyed Johnson's outlook on the necessity for more assertive foreign policy with his discontent on "the state of the nation's defenses, and is determined to his astonishing energies to do something about the missile lag."¹⁹⁷ As a result, Johnson wanted to revive the Preparedness Subcommittee, previously used during the Korean conflict, to discuss the American space and missile program. After the revival of the subcommittee, Johnson

¹⁹³ Gaskin, 341.

¹⁹⁴ Johnson, *A Time for Action*, 24.

¹⁹⁵ Lyndon B. Johnson, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963-1969* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1971), 272.

¹⁹⁶ Johnson, *A Time for Action*, 43.

¹⁹⁷ James Reston, "Senator Johnson's Move: An Analysis of the Texan's Technique In Summarizing the State of the Union," *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Jan 8, 1958. Accessed February 9, 2016, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/114397538>.

proceeded over hearings on these activities resulting in the creation of the Special Committee on Space and Aeronautics as he acted as its chairman.¹⁹⁸

In late 1958, the outcome of this committee involved the establishment of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). Due to his active involvement in its creation and the maintenance of the Democratic majority in the Senate from the 1958 election, he received approval from Eisenhower to serve as the spokesman for the program as Johnson desired to advocate its importance to the United Nations.¹⁹⁹ In his speech to the United Nations, Johnson expressed that this development in the space race was vital in providing a “fresh start for humankind which space affords, man may at last free himself of the waste of guarding himself against his ignorance of his neighbors.”²⁰⁰ This optimistic approach presented by Johnson conveyed the opportunity of the space program to ease tension in the world. Also, he stressed that the nation possessed the strength and the resources necessary to successfully confront present and future challenges.²⁰¹ Due to his active role in creating NASA as a response to the Soviet Union’s success with *Sputnik*, Johnson exhibited his assertive stance on foreign policy as Majority Leader, using its power to further express his dominant presence in the national scene of American politics.

In the aftermath of his success in creating the NASA program, his reputation as an assertive and ambitious Senate leader in effectively responding to the pressing domestic and foreign issues demonstrated his suitability to be a viable presidential candidate for the 1960 election. His immense activism, fueled with his strategic usage of power to fulfill his agenda in the Senate, displayed the ambitious and resilient nature needed to be president. In the grand

¹⁹⁸ Gaskin, 348

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 349.

²⁰⁰ Johnson, *A Time for Action*, 74.

²⁰¹ W.H. Lawrence, “Johnson Demands Bold U.S. Actions to end Recession,” *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Apr 20, 1958. Accessed February 9, 2016, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/114412455>.

scheme of the election, the two strong Democratic candidates involved Johnson and John F. Kennedy, with the latter possessing strong support from Democrats. While the Senate leader did not comprehend the viability of Kennedy to become the Democratic nominee, he remained concerned with the constant fear of failure persisting throughout the campaign.²⁰²

In relation to their respective attitudes on issues like foreign policy, both candidates took identical stances on their support for foreign aid as their senatorial career progressed.²⁰³ In contrast, their political ideals differed slightly in the Eighty-Sixth Congress (1959-1961); Kennedy acted more liberal while Johnson tended to be closer to the center of the political spectrum.²⁰⁴ While the differing positions on the political scale between Kennedy and Johnson, the Majority Leader continued to be persistent on being successful in attaining the nomination. While he received support from his mentor Sam Rayburn, the Speaker of the House informed Johnson that he needed to extensively campaign across the nation like Kennedy, but he wanted to use his strong record as the head of the Senate.²⁰⁵ This lack of campaign by Johnson most likely decreased his chances to attain the nomination while Kennedy's popularity increased. This miscalculation resulted in him not attaining the nomination with the subsequent outcome being his acceptance to serve as Vice-President under Kennedy. While his expertise on foreign affairs assisted in the campaign, he served another dominant role in the outcome of the election, using this experience to assist Kennedy as well as his valuable contribution in attaining southern support.²⁰⁶ As the 1960 presidential campaign reached its end, the outcome of the election proved historical with the close margin of Kennedy's victory over Nixon. He won with 49.72 percent of

²⁰² Robert A. Caro, *The Passage of Power: The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, Vol. IV (New York: Vintage, 2013), 17.

²⁰³ Charles H. Gray, "A Scale Analysis of the Voting Records of Senators Kennedy, Johnson and Goldwater, 1957-1960," *The American Political Science Review* 59, no. 3 (September 1965): 619.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 616.

²⁰⁵ Steinberg, 324.

²⁰⁶ Nicholas Evan Sarantakes, "Lyndon Johnson, Foreign Policy, and the Election of 1960," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 103, no. 2 (October 1999): 172.

the vote compared to Nixon's 49.55 percent. The foundation of the election between both candidates revolved on the significance of foreign affairs instead of domestic concerns. They realized that the Cold War dominated the mentality of the nation as foreign policy tended to unite the American people.²⁰⁷ According to Robert Dallek, there were various reasons that contributed to Kennedy's slim victory over the experienced Nixon. He asserted that the nation's anxiety on the ineffective policy over the Soviet threat, Kennedy's more appealing charm than Nixon's roughness, and Johnson's assistance to attain southern support influenced the support toward Kennedy to win the election.²⁰⁸ While these factors played a role in his victory, his reputation and vigor presented in his campaign further validated his election to the executive office. For example, prominent Kennedy historian Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. expressed that he drastically transformed during the campaign "from the vigorous but still uncertain figure of early September to a supremely assured and powerful leader."²⁰⁹ After the 1960 election, Johnson's senatorial career ended with their victory resulting in his desire to utilize his skills developed as senator in the White House. Despite the optimism exhibited by the former Majority Leader, his tenure as Vice-President did not end up how he wanted it. More importantly, his lack of meaningful political power further validated the conception that his tenure as senator served as the most satisfying and active time of his career.²¹⁰

In conclusion, the respective approaches of Kennedy and Johnson to American foreign policy stemmed heavily from their tenure in the Senate. While John Kennedy expressed his attitude on foreign affairs through his speeches and publications, Lyndon Johnson used his activism as a dominant Democratic leader to depict his stance with subsequent speeches being

²⁰⁷ W.J. Rorabaugh, *The Real Making of the President: Kennedy, Nixon, and the 1960 Election* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009), 203.

²⁰⁸ Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, 295.

²⁰⁹ Schlesinger, 76.

²¹⁰ Caro, *Master of the Senate*, 1040.

used to reinforce it. In spite of their devotion to foreign relations, they remained informed of domestic issues like civil rights with Johnson tending to be more active than Kennedy. Also, they expressed their sentiments on the Eisenhower administration's foreign policy, particularly Johnson's complex relationship with the president. It assisted in his strong stance on foreign relations with his response to the Suez Crisis and space race. In terms of East Asia, he only focused on the Korean conflict as he generally became enveloped with his duties in the Senate. Furthermore, his overall tenure as senator proved essential in comprehending his ambition to use meaningful political power, which became vital when he became president. Finally, Kennedy's election to the presidency reflected the progression of his experience with foreign affairs from the Senate. He vocally expressed his stance on issues affecting East Asia, like the conflict in Indochina and Sino-American relations. In comparison, Kennedy became more engaged with foreign relations than Johnson as the Texan senator favored attention on domestic concerns given the opportunity. The aftermath of the 1960 presidential election signaled Kennedy as the chief executive with Johnson as his Vice-President in confronting foreign and domestic issues of the nation within the grand scheme of the Cold War.

CHAPTER III

THE KENNEDY ADMINISTRATION'S PERCEPTION TOWARD THE GEOPOLITICS OF EAST ASIA: JANUARY 1961-JULY 1962

At the start of the 1960s, the administration of John F. Kennedy focused on creating a more constructive and strategic approach to foreign policy. His election to the executive branch validated a new mindset on the course of the nation to a better, more prosperous and secure state. While he narrowly won the election, the outcome reflected the faith of the American people in his ability for strong leadership in the Cold War. Throughout his presidency, he tended to focus more on foreign affairs as it represented the bulk of the issues confronting the country. The ideological clash between the United States and the Soviet Union served as the backdrop of American foreign policy with the administration making decisions related to its repercussions on the fight against communism. During this period, the nation focused on the East Asian region as the area where the spread of communism seemed likely. Due to his interest and exposure on foreign relations as senator like the Indochina conflict and 1958 Formosa Strait crisis, Kennedy possessed crucial background on how to effectively make reasonable decisions on these issues. In this important region, his foreign policy agenda focused on relations with Laos, China, and Vietnam. The Kennedy administration's perception of East Asia proved vital in its execution of foreign policy to prohibit the spread of communism within the region. Furthermore, the first half of his presidency from his inauguration to the neutralization of Laos assisted in presenting the liberal leader's developing mindset in facing the geopolitical atmosphere of East Asia.

The administration needed to be strong and efficient with experienced and strategic individuals assisting the president on foreign relations. Some of his cabinet members consisted of Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy, and Deputy Special Assistant for National Security Affairs Walt W. Rostow. These instrumental figures served as the core of Kennedy's foreign policy advisers. His selection of highly intellectual and open-minded men reflected his desire for his administration to be receptive to new ideas for a stronger approach on domestic and foreign issues.²¹¹ For example, the debate on the possible admission of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations in 1961 required immense strategic thinking to determine its repercussions. Due to the nation's stance against the PRC's entry into the organization, it would possibly result in the United States withdrawal if the communist nation was admitted to the U.N.; in contrast, its denial to the U.N. could have a negative impact on the United Nations.²¹² The lack of approval of the United States toward the communist inclusion into the organization served as a crucial attribute of Kennedy's foreign policy. More explicitly, the administration perceived this dispute with a cautious approach in their support of postponing their decision until circumstances arose that favored their own interests.²¹³ This tension of world affairs over the PRC's possibly entry into the United Nations showed Kennedy needing to be vigilant in confronting this issue.

The reaction of the Republic of China (ROC) to the PRC's possible inclusion into the U.N. became an aspect of the president's foreign policy. Due to the close relations between the ROC and the U.S., Kennedy needed to accommodate the ROC's interests in the region and the communist nation's entry to the organization greatly hindered the anti-communist objective. As a

²¹¹ Robert Dallek, *An Unfinished Life: John F. Kennedy, 1917-1963* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2013), 321.

²¹² William W. Boyer and Neylân Akra, "The United States and the Admission of Communist China," *Political Science Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (September 1961): 332.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 339.

result, President Chiang Kai-shek conveyed this sentiment in an April 1961 letter to Kennedy. He admired the president's ideals in the fight against communism filled with vision and resolution. In terms of the PRC, Chiang believed that their entrance might further fuel the communist threat in East Asia, especially their continued collaboration with the Soviet Union. Also, Chiang expressed its negative impact on the U.N. and the interests of the ROC in the grand scheme of world affairs. He asserted that it threatened the ROC because "my Government cannot possibly accept the so-called 'two-China' or any other arrangement that would affect the character of the Republic of China's right of representation in the United Nations."²¹⁴ Chiang understood the ramifications on the authority of the ROC in the U.N. with the prospect of the communist nation's entry. Another undesirable consequence involved its influence on the organization upon admission. He adamantly voiced that their admittance would have "the effect of further encouraging the Communist bloc in its malicious attempts to obstruct and sabotage the world organization."²¹⁵ Following this vocal letter to the president, Kennedy agreed with his stance against the inclusion of the People's Republic of China into the United Nations. Finally, Chiang Kai-shek continued his assurance to the president on maintaining the commitments between both nations on this issue. He expressed his obligation to "use every opportunity to strengthen the United Nations as the best means of preserving genuine world peace and protecting the independence of small nations."²¹⁶ After the frequent collaboration with the leader of the ROC, Kennedy understood the necessity to remain aware of their concerns while focusing on other pressing foreign issues.

²¹⁴ Letter, Chiang Kai-shek to John F. Kennedy, April 1, 1961. Papers of John F. Kennedy. Presidential Papers. National Security Files. Countries. China: Subjects: Chiang Kai-shek correspondence, April 1961-September 1963. JFKNSF-026-005. JFKL. Accessed October 24, 2016, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKNSF-026-005.aspx>.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Letter, Chiang Kai-shek to John F. Kennedy, April 17, 1961. Papers of John F. Kennedy. Presidential Papers. National Security Files. Countries. China: Subjects: Chiang Kai-shek correspondence, April 1961-September 1963. JFKNSF-026-005. JFKL.

In addition to the issue of PRC representation in the U.N., the situation in Laos served as one of the more pressing issues needed to be confronted by the administration. Early in his presidency, Kennedy became informed by his predecessor Dwight Eisenhower of the importance of Laos in the region. He needed to act strongly to avoid the country falling under communist influence, especially stopping the “Domino theory” to come into fruition. One early description to the president of the conditions in Laos stemmed from a memorandum presented by Secretary Rusk. He expressed his concern that the complexity and lack of success as the “Lao government is not widely representative and lacks broad international support.”²¹⁷ Rusk informed Kennedy of the ineffective nature of the Lao forces in combatting the communist forces and Laos’ lack of support, with the United States being one of its few allies. Furthermore, the president’s beliefs on facing any issues, particularly foreign like Laos, stemmed from the vigorous message expressed in his inaugural address. He asserted the determined mindset of his administration that they would “pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty.”²¹⁸ This perspective embodied the ideals of the liberal leader as he executed his presidential duties in confronting the pressing issues of the nation. Also, he adamantly stated in resolving these issues the U.S. should “never negotiate out of fear. But let us never fear to negotiate.”²¹⁹ Kennedy understood the significance of negotiation to resolve any conflict, but the power of fear tended to complicate progress.

Besides the emphasis on the Laotian conflict during the early part of his presidency, Vice-President Johnson made some contributions to Kennedy’s foreign policy. Due to Kennedy

²¹⁷ Memorandum, Secretary of State Dean Rusk to President John F. Kennedy, 2 February 1961. Papers of John F. Kennedy. Presidential Papers. President's Office Files. Countries. Laos: General, 1961: January-March. JFKPOF-121-007. JFKL. Accessed January 19, 2016, <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKPOF-121-007.aspx>.

²¹⁸ Inaugural Address, 20 January 1961. Papers of John F. Kennedy. Presidential Papers. President's Office Files. Speech Files. JFKPOF-034-002. JFKL. Accessed January 31, 2017, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKPOF-034-002.aspx>.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

wanting to limit his involvement in the decision-making process, he tended to be used for international trips to foreign nations to exhibit the peaceful intentions of the administration. Nonetheless, the vice president traveled to these nations presenting the nation's objectives as well as relaying information to the president on the conditions of a particular country. In terms of expressing the goals of the United States on international affairs, Johnson delivered a thorough speech at the tenth anniversary of the creation of the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE). He asserted the overall purpose of American foreign policy stemmed from its desire "to maintain an environment in which free societies can survive and flourish. By free societies we mean those in which the consent of the governed plays an important role."²²⁰ The objective of the nation's foreign policy was to safeguard prosperous and democratic nations in the world. Furthermore, this goal of the United States was tied with the foundation of NATO, especially the possible usage of military force to ensure it. Johnson expressed the administration's aim to "insure that any potential aggressor will know that he would be confronted with a suitable, selective, swift, and effective military response."²²¹ The vice president asserted the stance of the administration on how it would handle any threats toward the security of the nation.

In furthering the role of Johnson on foreign relations, the relationship between him and Kennedy remained similar to their time from the Senate. While Kennedy was not extremely fond of the Texan, he realized Johnson's experience with diplomatic relations served as a valuable asset for his policies. However, he did not want Johnson to be a dominant presence as the former

²²⁰ Lyndon B. Johnson, *A Time for Action: A Selection from the Speeches and Writings of Lyndon B. Johnson, 1953-64* (New York: Pocket Books, 1964), 83.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 85.

Majority Leader would desire a more active role, thus hindering his foreign policy objectives.²²² For example, Kennedy maintained the appearance of a courteous relationship with Johnson to limit the possibility for the Vice-President to publicly express the faults of the administration.²²³ Also, he advocated that Johnson be included in the formal discussions with his advisers and the National Security Council, but Johnson was not involved in the informal deliberations where Kennedy tended to finalize his decisions.²²⁴ Nevertheless, Johnson's international trips assisted in fulfilling Kennedy's ambitions for his foreign policy. His May 1961 trip to Southeast Asia became a crucial source of insight for the president to further comprehend the situation within the region. At this point, the mindset of government officials toward Laos was that its non-communist leadership lacked effective means to resist communist forces. As a result, the communist Pathet Lao, supported by the PRC, the Soviet Union, and North Vietnam, greatly benefitted from this weakness. Also, they took advantage of its weakened foundation through the "political and social fabric of Laos bringing the country into a state of a chaos and near civil war."²²⁵ Due to the increased presence of communist influence and tension in the country, the United States wanted to act accordingly to effectively diminish its expansion. As the nation had been involved with the East Asian country since 1955, it became aware of these developments that threatened its security. In response, the United States expressed its desire to defend Laos against communist aggression, but it disagreed with its Western allies on the possibility for compromise.²²⁶ Following Kennedy's rise to the presidency, he became enlightened to the dangers affecting Laos and aimed to overcome them. He expressed the nation's stance in a

²²² Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1961-1973* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 9.

²²³ Robert A. Caro, *The Passage of Power: The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, Vol. IV (New York: Vintage, 2013), 176.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 179.

²²⁵ Briefing, Laos – Background and Information, 30 January 1961. Papers of John F. Kennedy. Presidential Papers. President's Office Files. Countries. Laos: General, 1961: January-March. JFKPOF-121-007. JFKL.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

telegram to Prime Minister Prince Boun Oum Nachampassak. He assured him of continued American support for “the Royal Government and the people of Laos in their determination to preserve their national integrity and sovereignty.”²²⁷ Kennedy wanted to maintain good relations with the Laotian leadership in confronting its conflict. Therefore, Johnson’s trip to the region proved essential to uncover any changes in the various countries like Laos in hampering the expansion of communist influence.

The exposure to Southeast Asia for Johnson was informative and enlightening with the various changes in the fight against communism. He expressed his perception on the changes in the region and stressed that his comments did not advocate policies.²²⁸ In presenting his notions on the atmosphere of the region, he perceived the situation in Laos greatly hindered the prestige of the United States in Southeast Asia. The general consensus among the leaders visited by the vice president was that the rhetoric of the administration needed to be reinforced with some action promptly.²²⁹ In furthering this notion, Johnson expressed that these nations like South Vietnam, Taiwan, and Thailand desired action with the turbulent nature of Laos as well as the possible hypocrisy of the U.S. in emphasizing Western concerns over Asian ones, in light of the Vienna summit.²³⁰ The June 1961 summit between President Kennedy and Premier Khrushchev aimed to discuss various pressing world issues like Laos, Berlin, and South Vietnam.

After Johnson’s various travels, he reached viable conclusions in how to appropriately confront pressing issues in the region. Some of these presumptions involved the possibility for a

²²⁷ Telegram, President Kennedy to Prime Minister Prince Boun Oum Nachampassak, 2 February 1961. Papers of John F. Kennedy. Presidential Papers. President’s Office Files. Countries. Laos: General, 1961: January-March. JFKPOF-121-007. JFKL.

²²⁸ Memorandum, Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson to President John F. Kennedy, 23 May 1961. Papers of John F. Kennedy. Presidential Papers. President’s Office Files. Special Correspondence. Johnson, Lyndon B., 1961: January-May. JFKPOF-030-019. JFKL. Accessed November 7, 2016, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKPOF-030-019.aspx>.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

strong foundation in these nations threatened by communism, and leadership in the respective countries stemmed from confidence in the authority of the United States. More importantly, they did not favor the presence of American military forces and it seemed desirable to allay their fears as well as allow flexibility in executing American policies.²³¹ This last notion expressed by Johnson aligned with Kennedy's attitude on conducting affairs in Laos. He engaged the Laotian conflict with his conviction for American military involvement being perceived as a last resort.²³² Furthermore, Johnson presented his opinion on how to act against the communist threat in Vietnam. He understood that it could overcome this influence, but the U.S. needed to determine whether to fully support Ngo Dinh Diem and appropriately coordinate its diplomatic and military objectives.²³³ The impact of Johnson's May 1961 trip to Southeast Asia proved essential in presenting his perspective on foreign relations and enlightened Kennedy on the conditions in the region allowing him to respond accordingly.

While the Laotian conflict acted as his primary foreign issue in the region, other factors contributed to his decision-making process in resolving it like the fallout of the Bay of Pigs fiasco and the Chinese influence within Laos. In terms of the failed Bay of Pigs invasion, Kennedy approved the CIA sponsored assault on Cuba to overthrow the dictatorship of Fidel Castro. In the events leading to its execution, the president remained skeptical as he feared the ramifications on the relations between Cuba and the Soviet Union as well as its impact on the Laotian conflict. On the other hand, Schlesinger expressed the opinion that "if we did in the end have to send American troops to Laos to fight communism on the other side of the world, we

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, 445.

²³³ Memorandum, Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson to President John F. Kennedy, 23 May 1961. Papers of John F. Kennedy. Presidential Papers. President's Office Files. Special Correspondence. Johnson, Lyndon B., 1961: January-May. JFKPOF-030-019. JFKL.

could hardly ignore communism ninety miles off Florida.”²³⁴ Kennedy realized the necessity of facing this communist threat lingering in the nation’s sphere of influence as its outcome affected his policies in East Asia. Due to this failed invasion, it warned the president to maintain his caution in evaluating foreign operations and coordinate them properly with the intent of not letting anyone make decisions for him.²³⁵ Also, he comprehended the need to eliminate the uncertainty and inaction in conducting these operations with federal agencies like the State and Defense departments and CIA. More importantly, it became apparent that his approval of the invasion might be perceived as “diplomatically unwise and militarily doomed from the outset.”²³⁶ The significance of the Bay of the Pigs debacle enlightened Kennedy to become more strategic in conducting foreign policy as well as understanding the possible chain reaction in executing it.

Besides the impact of the failed Bay of Pigs invasion on his decision-making on Laos, the influence of the People’s Republic of China in the Laotian conflict served as another crucial aspect of Kennedy’s foreign policy. At this point, the PRC developed into an influential power in East Asia with the United States and the Soviet Union needing to strategically adjust to this shift in foreign affairs. While the PRC and the Soviet Union tended to collaborate with each other in the previous decade, relations began to slowly deteriorate in the early 1960s. Due to their tense relations, China’s influence on Asian matters came to be perceived as more concerning and impactful in their role in nations like Laos. The principal outlook of the Kennedy administration on the PRC involved their belief that China would not initiate a major military intervention, but it remain concerned about possible retaliation against a strong military involvement in northern

²³⁴ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 249.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 426.

²³⁶ Theodore C. Sorensen, *Kennedy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 301.

Laos.²³⁷ Furthermore, Kennedy's appointed Ambassador at Large W. Averell Harriman conveyed his opinions on the influence of the PRC in the nation. He expressed his stance that the administration became concerned that "the Chinese might pour in substantial troops from the North and Vietnam and they would be tied down for endless fighting in the jungle without any end to the affair."²³⁸ Harriman conveyed the apprehension regarding the potential of Chinese intervention in Laos being similar to their role in the Korean War. He asserted that the United States preferred that "Laos would not have been the place that our military would have selected as the battlefield with the communists in Southeast Asia."²³⁹ In terms of these diplomatic issues, it seemed likely that Harriman proved more influential than Johnson for Kennedy. The prospective of Chinese involvement in the Laotian conflict served as another strong influence on Kennedy's tactical handling of the crisis.

As the conflict progressed, limited success on both sides affected the mindset of both Kennedy and Mao Zedong on their respective approaches in the country. Most importantly, the precarious stalemate in the summer of 1961 seemed to be a very probable opportunity for thorough Sino-American rapprochement.²⁴⁰ Besides this impasse in the Laotian conflict, the PRC dealt with the deteriorated relations with the Soviet Union and the economic fallout from the disastrous Great Leap Forward continued. This failed internal movement lasted from 1958 to 1962 with China wanting to be equally industrialized like the West, but it resulted in one of the worst famines in history.²⁴¹ Nevertheless, it remained plausible for the Kennedy administration to orchestrate a reasonable compromise to improve relations between the nations. However, any

²³⁷ Noam Kochavi, "Limited Accommodation, Perpetuated Conflict: Kennedy, China, and the Laos Crisis, 1961-1963," *Diplomatic History* 26, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 109.

²³⁸ William Averell Harriman, interviewed by Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., January 17, 1965, 53. John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program. Accessed February 13, 2017, <https://archive2.jfklibrary.org/JFKOH/Harriman.%20W.%20Averell/JFKOH-WAH-02/JFKOH-WAH-02-TR.pdf>.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Kochavi, 109.

²⁴¹ Henry Kissinger, *On China* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012), 107.

chance for improvement of relations depended on the position of the PRC and Mao remained committed to a policy of opposition to what he saw as American imperialism.²⁴² Kennedy understood the improbability of improved relations between the U.S. and the PRC. Interestingly, the continued tensions between the Soviets and Chinese created speculation by American policymakers that the United States and Soviet Union could align together against the PRC.²⁴³

Furthermore, the concern over the nuclear capability of the Chinese started to become another issue entangled with foreign affairs. While it became more persistent with the nuclear test ban talks in 1963, the administration began to be more aware of the PRC's development of nuclear weaponry. For example, the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed Secretary McNamara on the impact of the communist nation attaining nuclear capability. They stated that the creation of these weapons would have "a marked impact on the security posture of the United States and the Free World, particularly in Asia."²⁴⁴ The Kennedy administration needed to be aware of the consequences of the People's Republic of China harnessing nuclear weapons. Also, the Joint Chiefs further asserted that the nation should develop solutions "to counter this impact through coordinated political, psychological, economic, and military actions."²⁴⁵ The PRC's continued influence over the Laotian conflict, the deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations, and their possible nuclear capability resulted in Kennedy being constantly informed on China to be thorough in appropriately handling them.

²⁴² Lawrence Freedman, *Kennedy Wars: Berlin, Cuba, Laos, and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 251.

²⁴³ Michael Schaller, *The United States and China: Into the Twenty-First Century*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 153.

²⁴⁴ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume XXII, Northeast Asia, Part 1, China*, eds. Edward C. Keefer, David W. Mabon, and Harriet Dashiell Schwar (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1996), Document 36. Memorandum, Joint Chiefs of Staff to Secretary of Defense McNamara, June 26, 1961. Accessed February 13, 2017, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v22/d36>.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

The influence of the communist nation would constantly be discussed in the Kennedy administration in their approach to East Asia. In addition to the previously mentioned factors, the decline of Sino-Soviet relations served as a major change in the order of international affairs. Kennedy perceived this shift in their relationship as another reason to rethink policy toward the PRC. The decline of these relations stemmed from varying factors with the common thread being their conflicting interests. It became apparent that their respective national interests spurred tension, but the differing interpretations of communism acted as the main catalyst for its deterioration.²⁴⁶ While both nations voiced similar ideological sentiments, their divergent opinions on how to effectively spread communism greatly hindered their relationship. Furthermore, Mao Zedong aimed to expand influence of Chinese ideals to different parts of the world. In this process, he advocated the use of tradition and nationalism to fulfill this objective with “his faith in the resilience, capabilities, and cohesion of the Chinese people.”²⁴⁷ The communist leader believed in the strength of the nation’s people to assist in the expansion of its power. During these tense relations between the Soviet Union and PRC, Mao disagreed with Khrushchev’s desire for some form of accommodation with the Western powers. As a result, Kennedy approached this situation with optimism in alleviating Soviet-American tensions as well as vigilant for improved relations with the PRC.²⁴⁸ The decline of Sino-Soviet relations became a strong factor in how President Kennedy dealt with the region as both communist nations seemingly possessed different agendas.

In the midst of these growing tensions in 1961, Kennedy experienced various foreign policy issues that required extensive attention. In early June, the president looked to relieve some

²⁴⁶ Chen Jian, *Mao’s China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 9.

²⁴⁷ Kissinger, 108.

²⁴⁸ Warren I. Cohen, *America’s Response to China: A History of Sino-American Relations*, 5th ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 207.

tension with the Soviet Union in his meeting with Premier Khrushchev at Vienna. He desired to establish clear and direct communication with the Soviet leader to discuss their respective intentions. Furthermore, it seemed vital in expressing their interests and engaged to eliminate any misconceptions that might lead to war.²⁴⁹ Also, the worldwide attention to this summit affected the relationship between the USSR and PRC. For example, a June 1961 *New York Times* article assessed the impact of Khrushchev's performance with its implications on the Soviet Union's communist influence compared to China. The article stated that his inability "to obtain at least propaganda success would strengthen his ideological opponents in Peiping."²⁵⁰ It seemed likely that any undesirable outcome from the summit for the communist bloc would fuel the authority of the PRC. In terms of the outcome of the summit, it allowed for Kennedy and Khrushchev to better understand each other's personalities. Their meeting exposed their ideological differences and complex perceptions with Khrushchev's intimidating presence and Kennedy's determined resolve.²⁵¹ While the president struggled with Khrushchev in their discussions, he remained firm and vocal on expressing the American stance toward peaceful coexistence.

Furthermore, the hostility in Laos served as one of the focal points of the discussion with its implications in the region. In their conversation on Laos, both leaders expressed the impact of the conflict in the overall scheme of their respective interests. They agreed that the nation was not strategically important "and was not vital to either side. However, the United States became involved in Laos by treaty and other commitments."²⁵² Kennedy wanted to express his stance to Khrushchev on American involvement in the Laotian conflict and his desire to resolve it. More

²⁴⁹ Richard Reeves, *President Kennedy: Profile of Power* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 157.

²⁵⁰ Seymour Topping, "Khrushchev and Vienna: Soviet Premier Stakes His Prestige on Gains from Meeting with Kennedy," *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Jun 3, 1961. Accessed February 13, 2017, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/115477559/>.

²⁵¹ James N. Giglio, *The Presidency of John F. Kennedy*, 2nd ed. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 76.

²⁵² *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume XXIV, Laos Crisis*, ed. Edward C. Keefer (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1994), Document 108. Memorandum of Conversation, June 4, 1961. Accessed February 13, 2017, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v24/d108>.

explicitly, the president wanted to see it resolved with “an effective cease-fire and a peaceful settlement.”²⁵³ While he desired that this issue progress toward resolution in his dialogue with the Soviet leader, it remained a persistent theme in his foreign policy until the neutralization talks the following year.

Following the Vienna summit in June 1961, the areas of interests for Kennedy pertained to the tension in Laos and growing tension in Vietnam. These two countries became the constant battles against communism for the United States in East Asia. Despite the president’s assertion of the lack of significance of the country, Laos still remained vulnerable to communistic influence. In an early May press conference, Kennedy presented his outlook on imperative issues of his foreign policy related to the communist threat in Southeast Asia. He stated that the United States could assist threatened nations in the region through ideological support, military assistance, or economic aid. However, he stressed that the countries need to “organize the political and social life of the country in such a way that they maintain the support of their people.”²⁵⁴ President Kennedy understood the extent of American support to these nations did not guarantee success in prohibiting communism as it rested on the stability of the respective country. Furthermore, he conveyed his acceptance of successes and failures in the application of foreign policy. In the same press conference, the president voiced that “we all recognize that our failures are going to be publicized and so are our successes and there isn’t anything that anyone can do about it or should.”²⁵⁵ He realized any positive or negative outcomes from his policies would be analyzed by the American public, but he aimed to persevere to fulfill his objectives.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ President John F. Kennedy’s News Conference #11, May 5, 1961. Papers of John F. Kennedy. Presidential Papers. President's Office Files. Press Conferences. 5 May 1961. JFKPOF-054-013. JFKL. Accessed February 13, 2017, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKPOF-054-013.aspx>.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

In furthering this notion, the liberal leader wanted to be constantly informed of the progress of policies in Laos and Vietnam. According to his Ambassador at Large Harriman, Kennedy tended to deal personally with various aspects of foreign policy as the president seemingly acted as his own Secretary of State.²⁵⁶ This tendency capitalized on his experience with foreign relations as a senator. Also, Kennedy desired to always “stay ahead of problems; nothing exasperated him more than to be surprised by crisis.”²⁵⁷ He regularly sought information on any changes in order to respond accordingly and limit the chances of unpredicted calamities. Similarly, his approach on the usage of presidential power proved vital in the execution of his foreign policy. In his perspective, he believed the authority embedded in the presidency needed to be appreciated and executed wisely. Kennedy focused “not of its power but its opportunities, and he was sobered by the Presidency, thinking not of its power but its obligations.”²⁵⁸ He comprehended the duties of the president and aimed to fulfill them passionately. Furthermore, the growing tension in Laos and Vietnam served as opportunities for Kennedy to strongly assert his authority. He aimed to adhere to his conviction as a dedicated leader taking responsibility for any triumphs and failures.²⁵⁹ The president acted vigorously in the application of his foreign policy in East Asia toward fulfilling his obligations as the leader of the free world.

In the aftermath of the Vienna talks and increased discord in the region, Kennedy focused on finding a solution to deteriorate conditions in Laos to find reasonable solutions. According to Secretary of Defense McNamara, the situation in the nation began to worsen due to the ineffectiveness of the Lao forces. In August 1961, Secretary Rusk expressed his concern to Kennedy and presented possible options for dealing with this situation. He stated that the

²⁵⁶ Schlesinger, 425.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Sorensen, 389.

²⁵⁹ Robert Dallek, *Camelot's Court: Inside the Kennedy White House* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2014), 188.

administration “should continue diplomatic negotiations but be ready to take military action to defend Indochina under a plan prepared by SEATO.”²⁶⁰ Kennedy understood the probable assistance of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) in relieving strain within the region. Also, National Security Advisor Bundy perceived the connection between Laos and Vietnam as instrumental in combating communism. While resolution in Laos was not achieved until the following year, he presented the military aspect of American involvement in the country. Bundy conveyed that the president knew “you didn’t want to have U.S. Armed Forces, and especially not U.S. ground forces, committed to Laotian loose-living or loose operation.”²⁶¹ It seemed incompatible to have American military involvement with the Laotian forces not being structured effectively. Also, American diplomat and foreign adviser Charles E. Bohlen shared his outlook on Kennedy’s approach to the escalated conflict in Laos. He conveyed that the American leader realized that military involvement might worsen “conditions and a long drawn-out war without end.”²⁶² While the United States sent military forces to Laos, Kennedy strategically developed his stance on limiting their involvement. Through this exchange of information and opinions from his advisers, the president steadily analyzed the given options and their repercussions. Kennedy perceived decision-making as immensely precarious and he tended to make his own decisions without major influence of any one particular source.²⁶³

In this overall process, Vice President Johnson remained in the background of the internal debate on administrative decisions. Normally, he attended the meetings associated with major

²⁶⁰ Robert S. McNamara and Brian VanDeMark, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Vintage, 1996), 37.

²⁶¹ McGeorge Bundy, interviewed by Richard Neustadt, March 1964, 136. John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program. Accessed January 23, 2017, <https://archive1.jfklibrary.org/JFKOH/Bundy,%20McGeorge/JFKOH-MGB-01/JFKOH-MGB-01-TR.pdf>.

²⁶² Charles E. Bohlen, interviewed by Arthur M. Schlesinger, May 21, 1964, 10. John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program. Accessed August 31, 2016, <http://archive2.jfklibrary.org/JFKOH/Bohlen,%20Charles%20E/JFKOH-CEB-01/JFKOH-CEB-01-TR.pdf>.

²⁶³ Dallek, *Camelot’s Court*, 36.

imperatives of the administration. Kennedy wanted Johnson to be informed of daily operations whether foreign or domestic, but this outlook changed as his presidency progressed. Concern grew over the former Senate leader's aggressive nature being used to attain a more prominent role in the decision-making.²⁶⁴ This attitude contained some credibility as Johnson consistently exercised his assertiveness in the Senate. However, the vice president did not present any strong indication of overstepping his authority. During the cabinet meetings, he tended to remain silent because Johnson believed his duty was to agree with Kennedy's policies.²⁶⁵ While he usually conveyed his opinions during his senatorial career, he sought to support the president's approach on issues like Laos in achieving their anti-communist goal.

In furthering this notion, Johnson voiced his approval of Kennedy's stance on the country through personal correspondence. For example, he became aware of an editorial from the *Waco News Tribune* on the crisis in Laos that expressed discontent with the United States' role. This early April editorial criticized the nation's commitment through financial and military aid warning that failure to stop a communist victory would "be a most damaging blow to the standing of the United States as an effective major power."²⁶⁶ This interesting outlook on the Laotian conflict proved insightful for Johnson on the public perception on American involvement. Also, it argued that the withdrawal of communist forces and a cease-fire needed to occur to overcome this tensed issue. If these objectives were not achieved, the outcome for the region would be "the de facto recognition of a Communist conquest, result in the partitioning of Laos and a furthering weakening of the free world's position in Southeast Asia."²⁶⁷ After Johnson read the contents of this editorial, he responded accordingly to reassure the author of the

²⁶⁴ Caro, *The Passage of Power*, 184.

²⁶⁵ Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, 19.

²⁶⁶ Editorial, "Withdrawal of Rebels in Laos is Real Need" by Harry Provence, *Waco News Tribune*, 4/7/61, "Foreign Relations: Laos," Vice Presidential Papers, Box 81, LBJ Library.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

administration's position on the country. In an April 12 letter to the author, Harry Provence, he conveyed that the resolution to the Laotian situation still needed further discussion, but he assured Provence that "it will not be settled on the basis of appeasement or surrender."²⁶⁸

Johnson advocated the American outlook on Laos not being resolved through any form of defeat in the fight against communism.

As Johnson continued to assert the attitude of the nation on foreign affairs, Kennedy endured the immense details to find a reasonable solution to the Laos situation. Throughout the second half of 1961, the president communicated extensively with his advisers like Bundy, Rusk, and McNamara to understand his options to solve the crisis. For example, his Deputy Special Assistant for National Security Affairs Walt W. Rostow presented his perspective on how to face the conflict. In mid-August, he informed Kennedy that the appropriate course of action was to "exhaust every possibility of a respectable negotiated settlement in Laos."²⁶⁹ It seemed compromise served as the most viable option for the president in handling the situation. Also, Rostow expressed his concern that the aftermath of these negotiations would be a weakened government led by Souvanna Phouma. He asserted that the administration needed to have "vigorous forward planning to maximize the chance that a Laos which might emerge from the present negotiations would, in fact, remain neutral and independent."²⁷⁰ During this exchange, Kennedy favored Rostow's stance on the compromise on Laos, especially remaining aware of the possible political environment in its aftermath.

²⁶⁸ Letter, Lyndon Johnson to Harry Provence, 4/12/61, "Foreign Relations: Laos," Vice Presidential Papers, Box 81, LBJ Library.

²⁶⁹ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume XXIV, Laos Crisis*, ed. Edward C. Keefer (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1994), Document 163. Memorandum from the President's Deputy Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Rostow) to President Kennedy, August 17, 1961. Accessed February 13, 2017, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v24/d163>.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, Document 205. Memorandum from the President's Deputy Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Rostow) to President Kennedy, October 11, 1961. Accessed February 13, 2017, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v24/d205>.

After his deliberations with his advisers, he understood that negotiation was essential in relieving hostility in Laos. During these extensive discussions, four choices seemed applicable to this crisis. Some of these possibilities involved leaving the Pathet Lao in charge, providing reasonable military aid to assist them, and accepting a division of the nation.²⁷¹ In breaking down these choices, the first option was not acceptable with the second being applied as the United States exhibited some financial and military aid. Interestingly, the third option appeared plausible, but it would be extremely difficult in protecting it without massive military intervention.²⁷² Also, this alternative on the division of a nation would be considered in the Vietnamese conflict. Finally, the fourth and favored approach in the negotiations aimed toward the neutralization of Laos. The progression of these deliberations for neutralization remained a constant trend for Kennedy in his foreign policy until the subsequent year.

In light of these steady negotiations on Laos, the gradual tension in Vietnam became another vital aspect of Kennedy's foreign policy in East Asia. The situations in both nations dominated his time on foreign affairs in the region. While the Laotian conflict seemingly would be resolved through compromise, Vietnam consumed Kennedy's time on combating communism in the region. He perceived the country as being more likely to collapse to the communistic influence. In the grand scheme of the Cold War, the progression of the Vietnam War resulted in both the United States and the Soviet Union becoming involved in a conflict linked to their allies.²⁷³ While the escalation of the tension continued, the president wanted to respond cautiously and appropriately to avoid any backlash or misstep in executing foreign policy. For instance, he did not want an internal debate that could create discontent within the nation in light

²⁷¹ Sorensen, 641.

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York: Penguin Books, 2007), 134.

of the failed Bay of Pigs invasion.²⁷⁴ The cautious approach on Vietnam seemed appropriate in the decision-making process, which reinforced Kennedy's desire to not be limited in his options.

In late September 1961, he laid out his thinking on the conflict in Vietnam in his address to the United Nations. He voiced his intention to prevent the expansion of communism in the threatened nations of East Asia. Kennedy expressed his stance that the solution to this problem depended on "whatever measures can be devised to protect the small and weak from such tactics. For if they are successful in Laos and South Vietnam, the gates will be opened wide."²⁷⁵ He adamantly conveyed his perception on the developing situation in Laos and Vietnam as essential to combat the spread of communism. As a result, the relationship with South Vietnam proved crucial in confronting the internal discord and relieving it. He perceived the leadership of President Diem as vital in this crisis, but Kennedy wanted to persuade the Vietnamese leader to dictate on their terms.²⁷⁶ Also, the administration believed that American assistance through Diem acted as a feasible approach on resolving it. Despite the reasoning behind this approach, the president became informed on Diem's lack of effective leadership that remained a constant trend for his presidency.

In relation to his collaboration with officials, Kennedy communicated with General Maxwell Taylor on the conditions in Vietnam aiming to avoid any further decline. Taylor's visit to South Vietnam in October 1961 informed Kennedy on the status of the nation. For example, Kennedy wanted Taylor to evaluate the conditions and determine "what could be accomplished by the introduction of SEATO or United States forces into South Vietnam, determining the role,

²⁷⁴ Dallek, *Camelot's Court*, 172.

²⁷⁵ Address to the United Nations, 9/26/61, "Vietnam: Statements by Pres. Kennedy on Vietnam," Country File, NSF, Box 212, LBJ Library.

²⁷⁶ Reeves, 220.

composition and probable disposition of such forces.”²⁷⁷ He needed to become fully aware whether the situation justified the possible introduction of American military involvement. In expanding this approach, both Taylor and Rostow sent memos to the president informing him of their recommendation to send forces to Vietnam. However, Rusk and McNamara advised against this policy. Due to this massive disagreement on whether extensive military aid was needed, the executive leader viewed both proposals to determine their viability. He strongly asserted that “he did not wish to make an unconditional commitment to prevent the loss of South Vietnam and flatly refused to endorse the introduction of U.S. combat forces.”²⁷⁸ His management of these differing opinions from his advisers reflected his resilience to make difficult decisions in the midst of chaos. Also, it seemed probable that he did not want to further escalate the war with the Berlin crisis happening at the same time.²⁷⁹ Furthermore, Ambassador to India John Kenneth Galbraith conveyed to Kennedy the concern over Diem’s control over South Vietnam. He expressed that the administration wanted results not promises and the South Vietnamese leader tended not to follow through his commitment.²⁸⁰ Galbraith advocated that Diem’s failure to implement reforms requested by the administration should result in the withdrawal of American support.²⁸¹ Due to his inadequate leadership, it seemed appropriate to reduce or eliminate support for Diem. However, the lack of a strong alternative likely affected Kennedy’s mindset in not supporting Galbraith’s stance. More importantly, his earlier diplomatic failure with the Bay of Pigs still resonated for Kennedy and he remained concerned that making the wrong decision over

²⁷⁷ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume I, Vietnam, 1961*, ed. Ronald D. Landa and Charles S. Sampson (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1988), Document 157. Draft Instructions from the President to His Military Representative (Taylor), October 11, 1961. Accessed January 19, 2016, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v01/d157>.

²⁷⁸ McNamara and VanDeMark, 39.

²⁷⁹ Freedman, 317.

²⁸⁰ Memorandum for the President from Ambassador Galbraith: Policy in Vietnam, 21 November 1961, Folder 03, Box 02, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 01 - Assessment and Strategy, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. Accessed September 4, 2017, <https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2120203023>.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

Vietnam would tarnish his own leadership. Nevertheless, he maintained Galbraith's sentiments as he expressed his intentions for Vietnam in an insightful letter to Diem on the United States' relations with South Vietnam. In a December 1961 letter, he told Diem that the nation possessed motives similar to the Republic of Vietnam. He stated the United States remained "devoted to the cause of peace and our primary purpose is to help your people maintain their independence."²⁸² However, Kennedy stressed that once the actions of communist forces against the ROV ceased, "the measures we are taking to assist your defense efforts will no longer be necessary."²⁸³ He wanted to emphasize the continued support of the U.S. until the communist threat dissipated.

From early to mid-1962, the developments in Vietnam continued to worsen with the administration needing to adjust its policy. In his 1962 state of the union address, the president perceived the war in Vietnam as "a war of attempted subjugation -- and it will be resisted."²⁸⁴ As a result, Kennedy tried to find a sensible approach that allowed him to maintain American involvement in the country without a strong military presence. His approach sought to strengthen its counterinsurgency operations with the objective being to train the South Vietnamese to combat the communist forces.²⁸⁵ This approach seemed practical for Kennedy to continue the nation's support of South Vietnam without massive military intervention. Also, Secretary of Defense McNamara concurred with Kennedy on this form of training being a justifiable tactic. More importantly, McNamara conveyed his opinion that its success could defend the withdrawal of American support "or enough time would elapse to indicate it would fail – in which case our

²⁸² Letter, President Kennedy to President Diem, 12/14/61, "Vietnam: Statements by Pres. Kennedy on Vietnam," Country File, NSF, Box 212, LBJ Library.

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Excerpt from President Kennedy's State of the Union Message, 11 January 1962, Folder 07, Box 02, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 01 - Assessment and Strategy, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. Accessed September 4, 2017, <https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2120207015>.

²⁸⁵ McNamara and VanDeMark, 48.

withdrawal would also be justified.”²⁸⁶ This outlook on the possible removal of American presence in Vietnam proved enlightening in the overall scheme of the conflict. Vice President Johnson presented a similar perspective on whether the nation should leave the country. He believed that the administration needed to be in control of this decision. More explicitly, he stated they should accept “whether we commit major United States forces to the area or cut our losses and withdraw should our other efforts fail.”²⁸⁷ This outlook proved intriguing with Johnson’s desire for immense American intervention during his presidency. In terms of exposure of the United States’ role, Kennedy wanted to limit public knowledge of the steady military presence in the nation. He favored concealing these actions to avoid national concern that the growing discord in Vietnam could lead to an enlarged American role in the war.²⁸⁸ Kennedy understood full disclosure of these developments would stimulate national anxieties hindering the application of his foreign policy.

Finally, the participation of other Asian nations like the PRC in the Vietnam War served as an essential aspect of the conflict. The relations between the North Vietnamese and China proved complex with their differing interests. For example, the leadership of North Vietnam under Ho Chi Minh possessed views of the United States similar to those of Mao Zedong, but there remained some concern about Chinese ambitions. More specifically, North Vietnam needed the support of the PRC against the United States but worried that “Beijing’s engagement might undermine their privileges and special position in Laos.”²⁸⁹ While concerns over their

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Memorandum, Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson to President John F. Kennedy, 23 May 1961. Papers of John F. Kennedy. Presidential Papers. President's Office Files. Special Correspondence. Johnson, Lyndon B., 1961: January-May. JFKPOF-030-019. JFKL.

²⁸⁸ Dallek, *Camelot's Court*, 268.

²⁸⁹ Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 111.

respective agendas existed, Sino-Vietnamese relations remained a strong factor in the war that Kennedy needed to address it in his foreign policy.

In the midst of the Vietnamese conflict, the negotiations on the Laotian crisis looked to be moving toward the neutralization of Laos. In a May press conference, Kennedy expressed that the administration wanted to relive regional tension through “a diplomatic solution which will make the chances of...war far less likely.”²⁹⁰ This ongoing process persisted from May 1961 to July 1962 with diplomats from various nations agreeing to this settlement. Before it became finalized, Kennedy possessed doubts that the resolution of the conflict would occur. In the previous year after the Vienna summit, he believed that certain obstacles could prohibit a neutralized state of Laos. Some of the major hurdles pertained to the desire of the PRC for the Pathet Lao to be victorious and the immense desire for the Lao to become the dominant power in Laos.²⁹¹ These two obstacles contained strong reasoning for the president to be skeptical of neutralization. For example, the role of the PRC to support the Pathet Lao reflected their continued desire to spread their ideals in the region. During the Geneva Conference on Laos, Mao supported the neutralized approach to collaborate their alliance with the Soviet Union who advocated it. However, the reasoning for this surprised change stemmed from the communist leader wanting “to win time for the Pathet Lao to consolidate and develop its forces for the eventual seizure of power.”²⁹² The shifting agenda of the PRC on Laos reflected its firm stance toward maintaining its influence within Asian affairs. For the remainder of his presidency, Kennedy needed to be constantly aware of the agenda of the PRC in conducting his foreign policy in East Asia. Nonetheless, the outcome of the conference on the neutrality of Laos, with

²⁹⁰ President Kennedy's News Conference, 17 May 1962, Folder 07, Box 02, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 01 - Assessment and Strategy, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. Accessed September 4, 2017, <https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2120207037>.

²⁹¹ Schlesinger, 513.

²⁹² Zhai, 5.

no direct interference in their affairs, assisted in calming tensions in the region. More importantly, the neutralization of Laos proved instrumental in resolving one of Kennedy's pressing dilemmas in East Asia.

The first sixteen months of Kennedy's presidency focused on various foreign issues that affected the security of the nation. He focused extensively on the pressing concerns in East Asia with numerous nations being threatened by communism. In the grand scheme of world affairs, the United States focused primarily on three nations in the region including Laos, China, and Vietnam. Both Laos and Vietnam were the main focus for the president as they seemed probable to collapse from communistic influence. However, the importance of Kennedy's outlook on China proved more substantial with the PRC serving as one of the dominant sources of communism in the region. Furthermore, their relationship with the Soviet Union further validated the attention given to China. During this period, Kennedy constantly collaborated with his advisers like Rusk, Bundy, and McNamara in conducting foreign affairs on these countries. Also, he readily exchanged communications with foreign leaders like Chiang Kai-shek and Ngo Dinh Diem assuring them of American support for their respective nations. In terms of Diem, his support of the South Vietnamese leader likely stemmed from the lack of a strong alternative but his ineffective leadership in the war effort concerned Kennedy. Due to this diplomatic obstacle, the president seemed to be somewhat inexperienced in not being able to find another reasonable approach. As the 1960s progressed, the executive leader realized that Diem would not effectively lead against the Viet Cong that eventually culminated in his assassination. While he focused on East Asia, he still engaged with other foreign issues like the Bay of Pigs incident in Cuba and the Vienna summit. These two events tied into the overall scheme of the Cold War as Kennedy and Khrushchev asserted their respective stances on world affairs. In relation to the Soviet Union,

growing tensions emerged with the PRC from their conflicting ideological and national interests. Furthermore, the influence of the PRC on the conflicts in Laos and Vietnam remained a strong indicator of their prominence in the region. While the Laotian crisis was resolved through neutralization, the continued tension in Vietnam remained a dominant issue in Kennedy's foreign policy in East Asia for the remainder of his presidency.

CHAPTER IV

THE TRANSITION OF AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY TOWARD EAST ASIA:

AUGUST 1962-NOVEMBER 1964

The second half of Kennedy's presidency continued to focus on foreign issues related to East Asia that impacted the interests of the nation. While the Laotian crisis was temporarily resolved through neutralization, the persistent discord in Vietnam remained a prevailing concern of Kennedy's foreign policy. As he aimed to prevent the expansion of communism, the country's internal conflict served as a major concern for world order. In the overall structure of world affairs, the ideological clash between the United States and the Soviet Union acted as the backdrop for the tension in the Asian region. Furthermore, Sino-Soviet relations continued to decline as the Chinese agenda increasingly differed from its communist ally. As a result, Kennedy's outlook on China proved essential in responding to the PRC's influence in the region. In spite of the resolution of the Laotian crisis, Vietnamese forces violated Laos' neutrality during the conflict for their interests. Furthermore, the growing criticism of Diem's leadership in the war effort and his sudden death complicated the president's handling of his Vietnamese policy. Kennedy's assassination in late 1963 triggered shock waves in the world including its implications for American foreign policy in East Asia. The sudden rise of Lyndon Johnson to the presidency resulted in his full briefing on the American stance in the region. While he had developed some experience on foreign relations as senator and vice-president, he needed to be

prepared to confront the tense climate of the Cold War. Furthermore, the 1964 presidential election signified the support of the American people for Johnson remaining president for another four years. The transition of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations on American foreign policy showed their differing perceptions with Kennedy exhibiting more flexible approaches than Johnson in confronting the turmoil within East Asia.

Following the neutralization of Laos, recognized at the Geneva Conference in July 1962, Kennedy focused on the discord in Vietnam as well as the continued influence of the PRC in the region. During this period, the president continued to receive assistance from his advisers on foreign policy but he started to become more adamant on making his own decisions. Nevertheless, he believed further investigation into the situation in Vietnam proved instrumental resulting in General Maxwell Taylor's September visit to the country. Kennedy wanted to be enlightened on the situation and to find a reasonably swift course of action that could achieve positive results.²⁹³ During his trip, Taylor's communications with key officials like Ngo Dinh Nhu, Special Advisor and brother to the President of the Republic of Vietnam, conveyed the American stance on the war to the South Vietnamese leadership. For example, he discussed with Nhu on the setting of the country and the progress made against the communist threat of North Vietnam. In a memorandum of this meeting, he assured the advisor that Kennedy placed great "importance on the lessons to be learned from the struggle...in Vietnam."²⁹⁴ Also, Nhu expressed to Taylor of his understanding of the Vietnamese people's desire to restore stability. He stated that the Vietnamese started to become "more and more aware of the fact that this was their war

²⁹³ Robert Dallek, *Camelot's Court: Inside the Kennedy White House* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2014), 282.

²⁹⁴ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume II, Vietnam, 1962*, eds. David M. Baehler, John P. Glennon, and Charles S. Sampson (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1990), Document 279. Memorandum for the Record, September 14, 1962. Accessed March 20, 2017, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v02/d279>.

and that, with it, they would gain democracy, new ideas, political and social freedom – in fact a complete reversal of values.”²⁹⁵ This interaction between Taylor and Nhu allowed for a better understanding of the situation in Vietnam and an appreciation of the success of the South Vietnamese. Furthermore, Taylor’s report of this encouraging news contributed to Kennedy becoming more positive about the course of policy toward the country.

While these deliberations with the South Vietnamese leadership seemed uplifting, there remained some skepticism among the American public regarding the success of the war. For example, the press, like the *New York Times*, reported that tension between the South Vietnamese military leaders and American advisers hindered their success and disputed the success of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) in their struggle against the Viet Cong.²⁹⁶ This lack of confidence stemmed from the stalemate between the ARVN and North Vietnamese forces from the previous month. An August 1962 *New York Times* article argued that the ARVN began developing their strength, but their communist enemy experienced similar progress. In more detail, it stated that American advisers assisted the South Vietnamese with new approaches in jungle warfare but it seemed that “the Vietcong is also becoming more ‘effective’ and is growing.”²⁹⁷ While this article questioned on the progress made by South Vietnamese forces, the administration remained optimistic on its ability to combat the North Vietnamese.

In spite of negative feedback from the media, the information conveyed by Taylor fueled this hopeful attitude on the progress of the war. More specifically, he presented an increase of the Strategic Hamlet program with it being implemented to prohibit communist expansion in the

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Dallek, *Camelot’s Court*, 285.

²⁹⁷ Tad Szulc, “Vietnam Conflict Seen at Impasse,” *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Aug 22, 1962. Accessed March 21, 2017, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/116225458/>.

countryside.²⁹⁸ Since his last visit, he reported improvements made in different areas like “the reduced loss of weapons to the enemy, and in the freeing of a larger segment of the population and of the national territory from VC [Viet Cong] domination.”²⁹⁹ Kennedy received this optimistic news on the improved situation in Vietnam and responded by conveying his assurances to the South Vietnamese leadership. This resulted in the president’s communications with Nguyen Dinh Thuan, Diem’s Secretary of State, to discuss these changes in the struggle. In late September, he discussed that recent developments seemed encouraging with Thuan advising that their relations be maintained. In light of the pessimistic outlook of the war from the press, Kennedy conveyed that “it should not be forgotten that there were strong factors on our side, and it was for that reason that the U.S. wished to carry through on the present policy.”³⁰⁰ At this point, the DRV began losing momentum allowing for a political settlement to become feasible. Kennedy reassured Thuan on not allowing the media to hinder his outlook on the development of the conflict. Furthermore, the president expressed his appreciation of their progress against the communist forces and stressed that success would improve their public image.³⁰¹ After Kennedy communicated with Thuan on the changes in Vietnam, his stance on foreign policy began to shift in response to this new strand of optimism. It contributed to his directive toward McNamara to start developing a plan for the withdrawal of the American military presence from the country. Kennedy wanted to limit American personnel in Vietnam, but he desired their gradual removal

²⁹⁸ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume II, Vietnam, 1962*, eds. David M. Baehler, John P. Glennon, and Charles S. Sampson (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1990), Document 288. Paper Prepared by the President’s Military Representative (Taylor), September 20, 1962. Accessed March 20, 2017, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v02/d288>.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁰ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume II, Vietnam, 1962*, eds. David M. Baehler, John P. Glennon, and Charles S. Sampson (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1990), Document 292. Memorandum of Conversation between President Kennedy and the Vietnamese Secretary of State at the Presidency (Thuan), September 25, 1962. Accessed March 20, 2017, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v02/d292>.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*

with McNamara devising a three-year plan for this reduction.³⁰² This change in policy toward Vietnam is instrumental in understanding Kennedy's attitude toward the conflict. His new optimism from these developments validated a gradual withdrawal of military presence.

As the president began advocating this steady removal of the American military presence, he still needed to consider other strategic options if the progress of the war did not remain favorable. In his execution of foreign policy, Kennedy's objective for Vietnam remained "to halt a Communist-sponsored guerrilla war and to permit the local population peacefully to choose its own future."³⁰³ While the elections in South Vietnam were not fully democratic, Kennedy wanted to hinder communistic influence within their government. More explicitly, the president strongly expressed to his advisers and Joint Chiefs that he did not want to further U.S. involvement in the region and conceal the amount of American personnel within Vietnam.³⁰⁴ In the context of the Cold War, he maintained his commitment to prohibit the expansion of communism and eliminate this threat from Vietnam. During this period, Kennedy received advice from his predecessor Dwight Eisenhower on various options in confronting the war. Prior to Taylor's optimistic report, the former president suggested to Kennedy that he should consider military escalation, like possible air strikes in North Vietnam, similar to the tactics used in ending the Korean War.³⁰⁵ While it seemed possible that Kennedy took his suggestion under consideration, he likely did not favor this approach in spite of the lack of success in the war.

Due to Kennedy's desire to avoid military escalation, he considered another alternative with the possibility for neutralization as a way to resolve the conflict. This option was previously discussed in 1961, but it seemed unlikely with the communist forces dominating the fight against

³⁰² Robert Dallek, *An Unfinished Life: John F. Kennedy, 1917-1963* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2013), 526.

³⁰³ Theodore C. Sorensen, *Kennedy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 649.

³⁰⁴ Dallek, *Camelot's Court*, 260.

³⁰⁵ Richard M. Filipink Jr., *Dwight Eisenhower and American Foreign Policy During the 1960s: An American Lion in Winter* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015), 55.

the South Vietnamese. According to presidential adviser Theodore Sorensen, however, it remained a viable option since the neutralization of “*both* North and South Vietnam had been envisioned by the 1954 Geneva Accords.”³⁰⁶ Given the recent progress of the ARVN against the Viet Cong, discussions on a neutralized Vietnam now appeared more promising. Also, an August 1962 *New York Times* article stated that the Viet Cong expressed their approval for a neutral settlement similar to the Laos agreement. In spite of this seemingly positive development, they further stressed that “such a settlement would be a temporary one, the eventual goal being reunification with Communist North Vietnam.”³⁰⁷ Their eventual desire to unite with the communist ideals of North Vietnam hindered the movement for neutralization. Furthermore, the Viet Cong insisted that the American military presence be removed from South Vietnam as well as their enemy’s forces be united with them into one army that aimed “to safeguard the fatherland’s sovereignty independence, territorial integrity and security.”³⁰⁸ The administration viewed the Viet Cong’s proposal as communist propaganda and did not take it seriously. At this moment, talks stalled but neutralization remained a feasible option for future consideration. Due to Kennedy’s desire for gradual withdrawal of American involvement, it seemed probable that neutralization could further encourage its execution.

As he became aware of the various developments in the conflict, Kennedy responded with a desire for the steady removal of American military personnel and openness to a neutralized Vietnam as the solution for the war. Around early October, the State Department informed Kennedy that the Viet Cong began spreading the message for neutralization and persistent pressure for a conference becoming likely “if the Viet-Cong continue to suffer military

³⁰⁶ Sorensen, 649.

³⁰⁷ “Vietcong Proposes a Neutral Vietnam,” *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Aug 19, 1962. Accessed March 21, 2017, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/116116193/>.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

reverses.”³⁰⁹ This development increased the viability of a neutralized Vietnam as a solution to end the conflict. Furthermore, they stated that the objective for the country remained to restore peace without surrendering their independence.³¹⁰ Finally, the State Department asserted that a communist victory would drastically impact the region and lead to the spread of communism. More positively, they stressed that American support for South Vietnam that resulted in victory would show “underdeveloped nations can defeat ‘wars of liberation’ with our help... and save the tough and hard fighting Vietnamese people from the Communist regime they manifestly do not want.”³¹¹ This analysis of conditions in Vietnam suggested that the resolution of the war was probable with the continued support of the United States. More importantly, it enlightened Kennedy to find a strategically strong approach to attain victory in light of the developments in Vietnam and the unforeseen crisis in Cuba.

In the midst of developments in the Vietnamese conflict, Kennedy diverted his attention from Vietnam to heavily focus on the intense Cuban Missile Crisis. While this crisis happened in Cuba, it still contained implications in his handling of foreign affairs in East Asia. Kennedy’s response to this imminent crisis reflected his leadership and strategic prowess to resolve it. Also, his approach to this predicament would show his ability to assert his authority reasonably with this stance being applied to Vietnam. In relation to the thirteen days of crisis, it stemmed from the administration becoming aware that the Soviet Union deployed ballistic missiles to Cuba. This provocation, which raised the possibility for nuclear war, required an immediate response. It seemed likely that if the president did not remove the missiles, he would lose the presidency to

³⁰⁹ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume II, Vietnam, 1962*, eds. David M. Baehler, John P. Glennon, and Charles S. Sampson (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1990), Document 297. Paper Prepared in the Department of State: Developments in Viet-Nam Between General Taylor’s Visits—October 1961-October 1962, n.d. Accessed March 20, 2017, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v02/d297>.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹¹ *Ibid.*

someone that promised to remove them.³¹² Also, he expressed to McGeorge Bundy that no discussion was needed in their removal with their threat to national security.³¹³ Kennedy understood the sensitivity of this situation and, in confronting it, aimed to avoid public anxiety until he formed an appropriate course of action.

In terms of national perception, some politicians criticized Kennedy's approach to Cuba and its support for the Soviet Union. Prior to the crisis, John G. Tower, the first Republican senator in Texas since Reconstruction, criticized Kennedy's inability to effectively assert leadership against the adjacent communist threat in Cuba. He stated that the administration needed to "exercise our legal and moral right as a free people to protect this hemisphere from European and Asiatic aggression."³¹⁴ In furthering this notion, Eisenhower conveyed similar resentment toward the young president stemming from his ineffective handling of the Bay of Pigs. The former president recommended to Kennedy for an immediately decisive military response toward Cuba.³¹⁵ Due to Kennedy's reluctance to this recommendation, it contributed to Eisenhower consistently criticize the president publicly to adhere to his suggestion. As a result, the president grasped the serious threat this crisis posed and early deliberations led Kennedy to consider an air strike leading to an invasion of the island.³¹⁶ After discussions with the Executive Committee of the National Security Council (ExComm), he realized this approach proved too dangerous with the high probability for nuclear calamity. Nevertheless, he understood that Eisenhower's public discourse aimed to motivate him to take stronger action. He reassured his

³¹² Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, 545.

³¹³ Richard Reeves, *President Kennedy: Profile of Power* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 372.

³¹⁴ John G. Tower, "Excerpts from John Tower Speech about Failures of the Kennedy Administration given in California," September 27, 1962, University of North Texas Libraries, *The Portal to Texas History*. Accessed August 31, 2016, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph611877/m1/1/>.

³¹⁵ Filipink Jr., 48-49.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 49.

predecessor that he understood the seriousness of this threat and planned to act responsibly to avoid unfavorable results.

As the Cuban Missile Crisis progressed, members of the administration expressed their respective opinions on how to confront this crisis. For example, Kennedy wanted to avoid at all costs any form of surveillance to be perceived as an act of war. He wanted to negotiate with Khrushchev and the Soviet Union to find a reasonable compromise that could resolve this dilemma. When the suggestion for a blockade arose, it served as a viable option with the intention being to halt any further missiles delivered to Cuba. According to Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell L. Gilpatric, McNamara and Robert Kennedy tended to favor the blockade instead of any form of air strike. Gilpatric stated that the Attorney General “was extremely effective against the air strike.”³¹⁷ Also, the Attorney General remained skeptical of the military advisers on their claim toward precision bombing.³¹⁸ Due to Bobby Kennedy’s disapproval of air strikes, it seemed likely that the president came to the same conclusion or was persuaded by his brother. Besides the influence of his brother’s stance on the crisis, Kennedy appreciated the advice from McNamara with his sensible approach being somewhat similar to the president. The Secretary of Defense supported the blockade option with the threat of military action being used to compel Khrushchev to remove the missiles. This approach would not cause tension with the nation’s allies and could be a part of a compromise in which the missiles in Cuba would be removed while the United States removed its supply in Turkey.³¹⁹ After further deliberations on the practicality of a blockade, Kennedy approved it and understood that McNamara’s proposal for some form of exchange being a viable solution to the crisis.

³¹⁷ Roswell L. Gilpatric, interviewed by Dennis J. O’Brien, May 27, 1970, 56. John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program. Accessed March 21, 2017, <https://archive2.jfklibrary.org/JFKOH/Gilpatric,%20Roswell%20L/JFKOH-RLG-02/JFKOH-RLG-02-TR.pdf>.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Dallek, *Camelot’s Court*, 314.

After Kennedy's decision on the implementation of the blockade, his televised speech on October 22 proved essential for informing the American people on the current situation in Cuba. This speech reflected his leadership on expressing the administration's stance to this tense crisis. In response to this critical threat, he stated that the usage of Cuba as a strategic base for the Soviet Union created "an explicit threat to the peace and security of all the Americas."³²⁰ Kennedy asserted his concern on the proximity of this danger toward the security of the nation. He urged Khrushchev to remove their missiles from the communist island in order to halt this danger and resume reasonable relations between them. More importantly, Kennedy strongly advocated his objective aimed "not the victory of might, but the vindication of right – not peace at the expense of freedom, but both peace and freedom, here in this hemisphere, and, we hope, around the world."³²¹ He stressed the necessity of removing the Soviet missiles for the resolution of this crisis and for maintaining peace in the region and the world. More importantly, Kennedy perceived his speech as being vital in uniting the American people behind the blockade and compelling Khrushchev to remove the weapons.³²² Moreover, he showed his determination to find a sensible solution that would avoid any undesired outcomes like nuclear war.

While the crisis would be resolved on October 28 with the removal of the Soviet missiles, the administration faced another pressing diplomatic issue in South Asia around the same time. During the Cuban Missile Crisis, conflict arose over the Himalayan border between the PRC and India. This tension stemmed from previous border issues like Bhutan in 1959 that resulted in fighting between them.³²³ In the current world situation, the disputed border clash between the communist nation and democratic republic resulted in an interesting predicament for their allies.

³²⁰ John F. Kennedy, *Let the Word Go Forth: The Speeches, Statements, and Writings of John F. Kennedy*, ed. Theodore C. Sorensen (New York: Delacorte Press, 1988), 273.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, 278.

³²² Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, 558.

³²³ Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 3rd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2013), 527.

As the United States and Soviet Union became heavily involved with the crisis in Cuba, they did not fully assist their respective allies until it reached a reasonable conclusion. Due to the immense presence of China, this conflict provided crucial implications for the interests of the United States in the region. As the Cuban crisis started to diminish and it seemed that compromise was likely, the Kennedy administration began further discussions on their response to the border conflict. The president remained informed on the continued decline of Sino-Soviet relations and applied this information in his decision-making process. By the end of October, the compromise accepted by the Soviet Union on the resolution of the Cuban Missile Crisis greatly affected the Chinese perception of their ally. It contributed to the usage of Chinese propaganda criticizing the Soviets for forsaking the communist movement and surrendering to American imperialism.³²⁴ Due to this persistent tension, the Soviet response proved to be intriguing with its impact on the border conflict and the tensed environment from the missile crisis. In spite of this strain, Khrushchev remained supportive of the PRC in accordance to the 1950 Treaty of Friendship and Alliance. According to prominent diplomat Henry Kissinger, the Soviet Union's response stemmed from maintaining the appearance of stable Sino-Soviet relations.³²⁵ As Khrushchev focused more on the threat of nuclear war, however, the Soviet leader changed his stance, reducing Soviet assistance to China and supporting the Indian government.³²⁶

As the Cuban Missile Crisis neared its end and the Sino-Indian border conflict continued, Kennedy became enlightened on the dynamics of the border dispute between the PRC and India. He received information from National Security Adviser Carl Kaysen and Ambassador to India John Kenneth Galbraith on its conditions to determine his response. In a late October letter,

³²⁴ Lorenz M. Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 219.

³²⁵ Henry Kissinger, *On China* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012), 190.

³²⁶ Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 211.

Kaysen explained the Chinese and Indian approaches before Kennedy discussed it with India Ambassador Braj Kumar Nehru. He stated that Chinese forces forced the Indians to retreat with them offering a cease-fire and a 20 kilometer reduction of enemy lines, but the Indian government rejected it.³²⁷ Interestingly, the Soviets perceived the proposal as reasonable and informed Nehru about their inability to intervene.³²⁸ This position reinforced the belief that Soviet Union still remained implicitly supportive of the PRC. As a result, Kennedy viewed the differing positions of the Chinese and Indians with his intention to respond accordingly. Due to the Soviet presence, he wanted to prevent any unnecessary issues arising that could affect the negotiations to resolve the missile crisis. In his meeting with Ambassador Nehru, he conveyed his outlook on the border dispute and received news regarding its developments. After Nehru informed the president about the aggression of the Chinese, Kennedy suggested to Nehru that he and Galbraith needed to inform the Indian government to translate sympathy and support into their military actions.³²⁹ Due to Nehru's use of similar terminology to persuade Kennedy for American military aid, he used the same sentiments to the Indian ambassador in uncovering India's other avenues for possible military assistance. Furthermore, the ambassador expressed Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's stance on American involvement in the conflict. He asserted that any American presence did not reflect the nation using the dispute for their own gain like establishing an anti-communist bloc.³³⁰ The prime minister attempted to encourage Kennedy to assist India, but he remained adamant that it would not join its crusade. While Prime Minister Nehru wanted to minimize the significance of any American involvement, Kennedy did

³²⁷ Letter, Carl Kaysen to John F. Kennedy, October 26, 1962. Papers of John F. Kennedy. Presidential Papers. National Security Files. Countries. India: General, October 1962: 26-27. JFKNSF-107-022. JFKL. Accessed March 22, 2017, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKNSF-107-022.aspx>.

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Carl Kaysen, Record of Meeting with the President, October 26, 1962. Papers of John F. Kennedy. Presidential Papers. National Security Files. Countries. India: General, October 1962: 26-27. JFKNSF-107-022. JFKL

³³⁰ Ibid.

not directly assist India and kept his focus on the threat in Cuba. However, his interaction with the Indian Ambassador assisted in remaining informed on the conditions of the border dispute.

In understanding the importance of the border dispute, the dominant presence of the PRC continued to be a pressing concern for the administration. It seemed probable that a Chinese victory would intensify their already strong influence in the region. Due to Khrushchev's ineffective leadership in the Cuban Missile Crisis, Mao Zedong believed that a Chinese victory against India would strengthen the PRC's image as the superior communist nation.³³¹ Kennedy and his advisers comprehended the lack of success of the Indian military against the communist forces. U.S. Ambassador to India Galbraith recollected in an interview that Kennedy's initial response on the Chinese attack on India led to his agreement that Galbraith would handle it.³³² Due to Kennedy's devotion to the Cuban crisis, he entrusted Galbraith to deal with the diplomatic issues related to the conflict. The president developed his stance on the border issue in light of intelligence from Galbraith. Furthermore, Kennedy and Galbraith's collaboration on the dispute further validated the notion that they wanted to confront it themselves.³³³ Nevertheless, Kennedy's response to the Chinese strength in the conflict resulted in limited military support for India.

During this process, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) tended to remain in control of Indian forces with the PRC likely being victorious.³³⁴ As this outcome seemed increasingly likely, the president's communication with Prime Minister Nehru presented this concern becoming reality. In a November 12 letter, Nehru complained to Kennedy about the limited

³³¹ Lüthi, 224.

³³² John Kenneth Galbraith, interviewed by Vicki Daitch, September 12, 2002, 18. John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program. Accessed March 22, 2017, <https://archive1.jfklibrary.org/JFKOH/Galbraith.%20John%20Kenneth/JFKOH-JKG-02/JFKOH-JKG-02-TR.pdf>.

³³³ Bruce Riedel, *JFK's Forgotten Crisis: Tibet, the CIA, and Sino-Indian War* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2015), 117.

³³⁴ Spence, 537.

success of the nation's forces against further Chinese aggression. In spite of this lack of progress, he agreed with the president's perception that they needed to "strive for a world of peace and friendly relations with all countries and that the only methods which we should adopt are the methods of peace."³³⁵ Nehru shared Kennedy's outlook on the need to find a peaceful solution to the ongoing clash with the PRC over the Himalayan border. However, the Prime Minister stressed that this dispute would end but "it has to be in a manner which preserves the honour and integrity of India."³³⁶ While Kennedy respected Nehru's stance and continued American support, India still lost to the PRC and the Chinese maintained their claim of the territory south of the McMahon Line.³³⁷ In response to the communist victory, it seemed probable that Kennedy adjusted his outlook on the PRC, and saw Chinese influence being strengthened. Until this point, he favored improvement in Sino-American relations but the continued growth of the PRC's influence concerned him. Despite the PRC victory in the Sino-Indian border conflict, Kennedy's ability to balance both this dispute and the missile crisis reflected his flexibility and resilience in responding to multiple issues simultaneously.

Following the dual resolution of the Sino-Indian conflict and Cuban Missile Crisis, the administration turned its attention back to the continued discord in Vietnam. At the turn of 1963, Kennedy and his advisers remained optimistic on the war based on Taylor's October report. At the beginning of the year, Kennedy conveyed his perspective on the nation's issues in his state of the union address. Prior to his address, the American people largely supported his leadership with a 74 percent approval rating.³³⁸ This address served as an insightful medium for the

³³⁵ Letter, Jawaharlal Nehru to John F. Kennedy, November 12, 1962. Papers of John F. Kennedy. Presidential Papers. National Security Files. Countries. India: Subjects: Nehru correspondence, November 1962: 11-19. JFKNSF-111-016. JFKL. Accessed March 22, 2017, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/AssetViewer/Archives/JFKNSF-111-016.aspx>.

³³⁶ Ibid.

³³⁷ Kissinger, 191.

³³⁸ Dallek, *Camelot's Court*, 335.

president's mindset on his approach to combat the pressing concerns of the country. He addressed the various world issues that the nation confronted like Berlin, Laos, and Vietnam. For example, he asserted that the "people of West Berlin remain both free and secure. A settlement, though still precarious, has been reached in Laos. The spearpoint of aggression has been blunted in Viet Nam."³³⁹ Kennedy informed the American public on the developments of foreign issues to validate the effectiveness of the administration. He further expressed his desire to establish "stability in Southeast Asia, an end to nuclear testing, new checks on surprise or accidental attack, and, ultimately, general and complete disarmament."³⁴⁰ While the war served as one of his priorities, the regulation and limitation of nuclear testing served as another aspect of his foreign agenda. Lastly, he wanted to remain hopeful and assured the nation that he would assert his leadership to fulfill peace in the world. He stated that "we still welcome those winds of change -- and we have every reason to believe our tide is running strong."³⁴¹ His state of the union address showed his optimism in solving world issues like reaching a settlement for the Vietnam War.

During early 1963, Kennedy continued to focus on international affairs like the tension in Vietnam and limiting nuclear proliferation. While he endured these aspects of his foreign policy, the growing domestic tension over civil rights shifted his attention. Due to his intense emphasis on foreign relations, he tended to not fully devote time on improving it with concern over political implications. On the other hand, it seemed probable that not producing a reasonable proposal on civil rights would result in the loss of liberal support and limit American

³³⁹ State of the Union Address, January 14, 1963. Papers of John F. Kennedy. Presidential Papers. President's Office Files. Speech Files. State of the Union message, reading copy, 14 January 1963. JFKL. Accessed March 20, 2017, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKPOF-042-021.aspx>.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ Ibid.

approval needed for the 1964 presidential election.³⁴² As Kennedy faced this problem, it would possess some moral implications on his conduct of foreign relations. In his actions in East Asia, he constantly advocated for freedom in nations threatened by communism. If he did not respond to the civil rights issue, his policy would be perceived as being hypocritical with the limitations of African Americans at home. On this issue, Vice President Johnson maintained his support for the president. However, he presented a similar outlook on the repercussions of civil rights on the nation's foreign policy. In an April 1963 speech, he stressed that the United States enforced the importance of freedom and the preservation of human rights acted as a strong attribute in fighting against the communist threat. As a result, he stated that the nation "must make it clear not only by words, but by example and precept. Our own house must be in order."³⁴³ Johnson conveyed his perspective on the necessity for the United States to confront this domestic problem in order to continue being perceived as a morally strong nation. In furthering this notion, Kennedy understood this issue needed to be confronted with its implications on the image of the nation. He expressed that this racial discrimination greatly hindered the country's leadership as well as "marred the atmosphere of a united and classless society."³⁴⁴ In June 1963, this contributed to him advocating for a law prohibiting discrimination in all public accommodations. While the civil rights legislation did not reach fruition until the year after his death, his response to this crucial domestic issue reflected his ambition for it to be successful as well as reaffirming the moral character of the country.

While Kennedy's response to civil rights assisted in relieving some domestic tension, the East Asian region started to become more turbulent with developments in Laos and Vietnam. In

³⁴² Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, 592.

³⁴³ Lyndon B. Johnson, *A Time for Action: A Selection from the Speeches and Writings of Lyndon B. Johnson, 1953-64* (New York: Pocket Books, 1964), 118.

³⁴⁴ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 951.

early 1963, Vietnamese forces invaded Laos to fulfill their military interests thus violating the 1962 neutrality agreement. This violation of the agreement required adjustment needing to be made in foreign policy. In light of these changes, Kennedy conveyed his attitude on foreign affairs in a speech at American University in early June. He vocally expressed his stance on the American position on international concerns like the growing discord in East Asia. He asserted that peace needed to be reached through some form of mutual cooperation. He stated that reduced tensions could be achieved with conflicting nations living “together in mutual tolerance, submitting their disputes to a just and peaceful settlement.”³⁴⁵ Kennedy argued the necessity for diplomacy between conflicted nations being necessary to attain a peaceful resolution. In terms of the communist threat in the Far East, he admitted the importance for reasonable solutions through diplomatic means and self-restraint military approach. Kennedy stated that the United States would need to “persevere in the search for peace in the hope that constructive changes within the Communist bloc might bring within reach solutions which now seem beyond us.”³⁴⁶ The president believed that vital changes needed to happen to diminish communist influence in the region. While Sino-Soviet relations continued to deteriorate, Chinese authority would be prevalent with the PRC wanting to further itself as the dominant communist power. Besides the warfare in East Asia, the desire for the limitation of nuclear testing served as another aspect of Kennedy’s foreign policy. In the speech, he stated the significance of reducing the usage of nuclear weapons to avoid the possibility for nuclear war. As a result, the president asserted that the negotiations to outlaw nuclear testing would “place the nuclear powers in a position to deal more effectively with one of the greatest hazards which man faces in 1963, the further spread of

³⁴⁵ Press Copy of American University Speech, June 10, 1963. Papers of John F. Kennedy. Presidential Papers. President’s Office Files, 1/20/1961-11/22/1963. Speech Files. National Archives. Accessed February 22, 2017, <https://research.archives.gov/id/193862>.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

nuclear arms.”³⁴⁷ In August 1963, this objective would be fulfilled with the signing of a treaty limiting nuclear testing. In his discussion of the communist threat and the limitation of nuclear testing, Kennedy’s speech revealed his desire for a practical solution to these issues that would allow for peaceful coexistence.

Besides the importance of his American University speech, the Vietnamese violation of the Laotian neutrality agreement contributed to his changing outlook on the region. In June 1963, Kennedy’s advisers communicated with the president on the conditions in East Asia in relation to the inclusion of Laos to the Vietnamese conflict. For example, a memorandum sent to National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy discussed the foundation of the problem in Vietnam being derived from the aggressive nature of the North Vietnamese and their desire to assert their communist influence in Laos and Vietnam. Also, the memo elaborated that if the United States wanted to be successful in South Vietnam, the administration “must pursue our intention of preventing further expansion of Communist control in Laos.”³⁴⁸ This information was disclosed to the president in a scheduled meeting in mid-June allowing him to devise a response to this change. Furthermore, it became apparent that failure to respond accordingly would result in other Asian nations getting the impression that force could be “used to erode Free World positions without the risk of serious consequences.”³⁴⁹ Kennedy accepted this evidence on the implications of Laos in the fight against communism within the Vietnam War. After his consideration on the various options presented by his advisers and intelligence agencies, he approved the option that aimed to establish a reconstructed Laotian government through a cease-fire and a withdrawal of

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

³⁴⁸ Memo, William H. Brubeck to McGeorge Bundy, June 18, 1963. Papers of John F. Kennedy. Presidential Papers. National Security Files. Meetings and Memoranda. National Security Action Memoranda [NSAM]: NSAM 249, Laos Planning. JFKNSF-341-009. JFKL. Accessed December 7, 2016, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKNSF-341-009.aspx>.

³⁴⁹ Memo, The Situation in Laos, June 18, 1963. Papers of John F. Kennedy. Presidential Papers. National Security Files. Meetings and Memoranda. National Security Action Memoranda [NSAM]: NSAM 249, Laos Planning. JFKNSF-341-009. JFKL.

Vietnamese forces.³⁵⁰ Also, the president permitted the alternative that focused on finding a solution that resulted in the non-communist control of the Panhandle area including the Ho Chi Minh trail.³⁵¹ Kennedy wanted to prohibit the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) from using its access to their advantage against South Vietnam. Nevertheless, he wanted to possess some credible options in handling the tension in Laos while factoring its impact on the Vietnamese war.

During his decision-making process on Laotian policy, he knew that the influence of China still played a considerable role in his approach to handling it. Sino-American historian Noam Kochavi argued that the PRC's belligerent outlook on Asian affairs contributed to Kennedy's reluctance on the usage of military forces in Laos to avoid retaliation from the Chinese.³⁵² This concern was credible as the Chinese intervened under similar circumstances in the Korean War. In this context, Kennedy tended to maintain his cautious outlook exhibited throughout his presidency. He maintained this stance related to Laos and Vietnam of not sending military forces into the region. In spite of the influence of China's power, he emerged as a pre-cautious leader that acted to prevent direct confrontation with the PRC. More importantly, the president's limited success in using Laos to establish Sino-American relations stemmed from the aggressive nature of the communist nation.³⁵³

In the midst of the various developments in East Asia, the administration continued its desire for the reduction of nuclear testing. From June to August 1963, negotiations persisted on this objective with the support of various nations like the Soviet Union, the United States, and

³⁵⁰ Memo, Carl Kaysen to Dean Rusk, June 25, 1963. Papers of John F. Kennedy. Presidential Papers. National Security Files. Meetings and Memoranda. National Security Action Memoranda [NSAM]: NSAM 249, Laos Planning. JFKNSF-341-009. JFKL.

³⁵¹ Ibid.

³⁵² Noam Kochavi, "Limited Accommodation, Perpetuated Conflict: Kennedy, China, and the Laos Crisis, 1961-1963," *Diplomatic History* 26, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 130.

³⁵³ Ibid., 135.

the United Kingdom. While the initial approach sought a comprehensive ban on nuclear weaponry, it concluded with the limitation of nuclear testing. Kennedy's determination on the passage of this treaty reflected his resilience and commitment to lessen the possibility of nuclear war. As a result, the treaty was signed on August 5, 1963, with the consent of American, Soviet, and British officials. Also, his leadership and flexible approach in the negotiation process assisted in its success in being "the first effective arms control agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union."³⁵⁴ Furthermore, the president continued to persevere through political opposition like Eisenhower's lack of confidence on his leadership. While the former president approved the outcome of the negotiations, he warned Kennedy to remain observant of the Soviet Union's actions to ensure their compliance of the treaty.³⁵⁵ In spite of the signing of the treaty in early August, Kennedy still needed to gain consent from Congress to allow the nation's support for this vital nuclear ban. In late September, the Senate approved the Limited Test Ban Treaty (LTBT) with a majority vote of eighty over nineteen.³⁵⁶ Following its ratification in the Soviet Union and United Kingdom, it eventually resulted in the enforcement of the treaty starting on October 10. Most importantly, Kennedy's effective role in the passage of this nuclear ban reflected his strong leadership and immense desire to establish standard guidelines on nuclear testing.

In the overall process of the passage of the LTBT, Kennedy heavily favored this approach on the reduction of nuclear testing with his concern on the PRC's development on nuclear capability. The president aimed to minimize their progress in successfully conducting nuclear testing. As Kennedy focused his attention on the impact of the treaty on the Soviet

³⁵⁴ Andreas Wenger and Marcel Gerber, "John F. Kennedy and the Limited Test Ban Treaty: A Case of Presidential Leadership," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (June 1999): 461.

³⁵⁵ Filipink Jr., 54

³⁵⁶ Wenger and Gerber, 479.

Union, the growing anxiety of the Chinese persisted with their intention to be a prominent nuclear power. Due to the deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations, it seemed unlikely that the Soviet Union could influence the PRC on the nonproliferation of nuclear weapons.³⁵⁷ For Kennedy and his advisers, the continued rift between the communist nations further fueled their concern on the belligerence of the Chinese. During the summer, the administration conducted intense discussion on the progress of the Chinese nuclear program. In these discussions, they enlightened the president that the communist nation might conduct a successful nuclear test by early 1964.³⁵⁸ This probability of Chinese proliferation of nuclear weaponry contributed to Kennedy's motivation for the passage of the LTBT. Furthermore, their increased progress stimulated the intent to comprehend their intentions. As a result, the PRC under Mao Zedong would continue to be a dangerous threat in East Asia "until the present regime is changed or changes itself, and as such can seriously threaten U.S. interests in that region of the world."³⁵⁹ The growth of the PRC's nuclear program and the assertive leadership of Mao Zedong created the necessity to establish a restricted ban on nuclear testing. Prior to the execution of the LTBT, the Chinese responded negatively on the objective of this treaty. For example, Premier Zhou Enlai believed that this agreement expanded the Sino-Soviet rift as well as hindered any improvement of Sino-American relations.³⁶⁰ Also, Vice Premier Chen Yi stated that relations could improve if the United States would "restore our legal rights in the United Nations...and

³⁵⁷ Lüthi, 247.

³⁵⁸ Memo, Robert H. Johnson to W.W. Rostow, July 19, 1963. Papers of John F. Kennedy. Presidential Papers. National Security Files. Robert W. Komer Files. China (CPR): Nuclear explosion, 1961-1963 (1 of 2 folders). JFKNSF-410-004. JFKL. Accessed December 7, 2016, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKNSF-410-004.aspx>.

³⁵⁹ Memo, Mose Harvey to W.W. Rostow, July 19, 1963. Papers of John F. Kennedy. Presidential Papers. National Security Files. Robert W. Komer Files. China (CPR): Nuclear explosion, 1961-1963 (1 of 2 folders). JFKNSF-410-004. JFKL.

³⁶⁰ "Record of Conversation between Premier Zhou Enlai, Vice Premier Chen Yi, and Pakistani Ambassador Raza," August 12, 1963, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, PRC FMA 113-00452-05, 18-22. Obtained and translated by Christopher Tang. Accessed March 6, 2017, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/121572>.

rescind their military bases threatening China, including their nuclear bases.”³⁶¹ These conditions proved unlikely to happen given the American stance on China. More importantly, the joint effort of the United States and Soviet Union on this treaty greatly contributed to their inability to impede the Chinese nuclear program.³⁶² In spite of the implementation of the LTBT in early October, the PRC did not agree to its provisions and remained a viable threat.

Although the Chinese continued to develop their nuclear program, the initiation of the Limited Test Ban Treaty still signified one of Kennedy’s positive feats in his presidency. This achievement would be short-lived as the discord in Vietnam persisted. During this period, discussion on the neutralization of the country was considered as a possible solution to the war. This outlook was previously expressed in the previous year with its effect on Laos. French president Charles de Gaulle supported this approach to ease the tensed relations. However, Kennedy believed its failure on Laos limited the chances of success in Vietnam. Also, South Vietnam likely would not remain neutral because the communists in the North could influence them.³⁶³ Nevertheless, this approach revealed the options considered by Kennedy in the search for an effective solution to the conflict. In furthering this notion, the McNamara-Taylor mission served as an informative way to gain insight on the conditions of the war. This operation allowed Kennedy to comprehend the effectiveness of Diem’s leadership and the success of American personnel training the South Vietnamese. He wanted to use the information gathered to formulate his next course of action. More explicitly, his decision-making process on Vietnam revolved around his intent to avoid irreversible consequences.³⁶⁴ He did not want to make major political changes without a full briefing of the situation. Also, his concern over Diem persisted over his

³⁶¹ Ibid.

³⁶² Lüthi, 271.

³⁶³ Robert S. McNamara and Brian VanDeMark, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Vintage, 1996), 62.

³⁶⁴ Reeves, 604.

lack of strong leadership. Earlier in the summer, the president conferred with his advisers on the ineffectiveness of Diem's regime. Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Roger Hilsman conveyed that any actions taken by Diem would not limit the possible attempts to overthrow him in the coming months.³⁶⁵ Also, U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam Frederik Nolting and Hilsman differed in whether civil war would happen if a coup proved successful.³⁶⁶ Kennedy became informed on the probable repercussions for South Vietnam from Diem's removal as its leader. Around the time of the mission, Kennedy privately followed several options like intensifying pressure on Diem to restore internal stability and indicating to the Vietnamese generals that the U.S. remained open for a coup.³⁶⁷ Following the McNamara-Taylor mission, Kennedy realized that Diem acted as an ineffective leader but steady progress was being made in the training of South Vietnamese forces.

Following this new information, the president conveyed his perception of the war through a prepared statement to the American people. In early October, he stressed that the United States would continue its "policy of working with the people and Government of South Vietnam to deny this country to communism and to suppress the externally stimulated and supported insurgency of the Viet Cong as promptly as possible."³⁶⁸ He maintained the nation's position of supporting South Vietnam against the communist threat and aimed to overcome the expansion of the Viet Cong. Subsequently, the president developed a stronger approach on Vietnam based on the recommendations of McNamara and Taylor. As a result, he approved the "implementation of

³⁶⁵ Notes on Kennedy Meeting on Diem Regime in July, 1963, 04 July 1963, Folder 11, Box 02, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 01 - Assessment and Strategy, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. Accessed September 4, 2017, <https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2120211039>.

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

³⁶⁷ Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, 676.

³⁶⁸ White House Statement, 10/2/63, "Vietnam: Statements by Pres. Kennedy on Vietnam," Country File, NSF, Box 212, LBJ Library.

plans to withdraw 1,000 American military personnel by the end of 1963.”³⁶⁹ Kennedy favored this strategic decision as a response to the progress of the South Vietnamese forces. He knew that this incentive allowed for the gradual withdrawal of military personnel to lessen American involvement in the conflict. Also, Deputy Secretary of Defense Gilpatric stated that he maintained “his general reluctance to see us sucked in militarily to Southeast Asia.”³⁷⁰ In the previous year, Kennedy discussed with McNamara this possibility but there was no significant development that would allow this approach. If he committed this action in 1962, Kennedy would be confronted with extensive political opposition and intensified national security concerns.³⁷¹ In late October, however, his consent on this steady withdrawal seemed practical with his perception that the war needed to be resolved by the South Vietnamese.

In relation to Diem, he still did not fully believe that the Vietnamese leader would be able to overcome the Viet Cong forces. In an October 29 conference, some of his advisers concurred with his sentiment over Diem’s ineffective leadership. For example, Ambassador at Large W. Averell Harriman expressed that the majority of South Vietnamese people did not support him and he believed that Diem could not attain victory.³⁷² Also, he further stated that the administration’s objectives for the country would be “more difficult to achieve with Diem in control.”³⁷³ In spite of the unlikelihood of success under Diem, Kennedy remained hesitant in allowing his removal to happen. Furthermore, Kennedy’s close relationship with Diem likely

³⁶⁹ National Security Action Memorandum Number 263, October 11, 1963. Papers of John F. Kennedy, Presidential Papers, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda Series, National Security Action Memoranda, National Security Action Memorandum Number 263. JFKL. Accessed December 7, 2016, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/w6LJoSnW4UehkaH9Ip5IAA.aspx>.

³⁷⁰ Transcript, Roswell Gilpatric Oral History Interview I, 11/2/82, by Ted Gittinger, 6. Accessed March 21, 2017, http://www.lbjlibrary.net/assets/documents/archives/oral_histories/gilpatric_r/GilpatricR.PDF.

³⁷¹ Dallek, *Camelot’s Court*, 342.

³⁷² *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume IV, Vietnam, August-December 1963*, ed. Edward C. Keefer (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1991), Document 234. Memorandum of Conference with President Kennedy, October 29, 1963, 4:20 pm. Accessed September 4, 2017, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v04/d234>.

³⁷³ *Ibid.*

affected his decision-making in not finding other alternatives, prior to this point, resulting in his options becoming limited.³⁷⁴ As a result, the sudden death of Diem created some concern about the war effort. Due to the administration being aware of the coup, Kennedy reflected on his encouragement of this takeover and accepted responsibility for not trying to stop it.³⁷⁵ While Kennedy tended to exhibit flexibility in his foreign policy, his handling of the coup showed his struggle to find the appropriate response toward Vietnam.

In spite of this development, he exhibited resilience on his Vietnamese foreign policy to maintain his decision on gradual military withdrawal. While withdrawal could be perceived as an indicator of defeat, he understood that the United States would continue to support the South Vietnamese but the steady removal of its personnel proved vital to avoid an enlarged American role. In early November, Kennedy participated in the Honolulu Conference with the objective of reconsidering policy on Vietnam. In a November 14 press conference, he expressed his attitude on the war in response to the conference. He asserted that it revolved around determining “what American policy should be, and what our aid policy should be, how we can intensify the struggle, how we can bring Americans out of there.”³⁷⁶ He presented the necessity of evaluating the American stance on the conflict in light of Diem’s death. However, he retained his outlook on American withdrawal and allowing the South Vietnamese to restore Vietnam as a freely independent nation.³⁷⁷

As the end of 1963 loomed, the sudden assassination of the president created instability and uneasiness on the execution of American foreign policy toward East Asia. Due to his death,

³⁷⁴ Lawrence Freedman, *Kennedy’s Wars: Berlin, Cuba, Laos, and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 397.

³⁷⁵ Dallek, *Camelot’s Court*, 418.

³⁷⁶ President John F. Kennedy’s Press Conference #64, November 14, 1963. Papers of John F. Kennedy. Presidential Papers. President’s Office Files. Press Conferences. 14 November 1963. JFKPOF-061-007. JFKL. Accessed March 27, 2017, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKPOF-061-007.aspx>.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

he did not convey his sentiments on the climate of world affairs in his address at Dallas. In his undelivered speech, he advocated that the United States needed to maintain its strength as its enemies “have not abandoned their ambitions, our dangers have not diminished, our vigilance cannot be relaxed.”³⁷⁸ The president conveyed the atmosphere of the world with the United States needing to be attentive on international relations. Also, he stressed that the nation “in this generation, are - by destiny rather than choice- the watchmen on the walls of world freedom.”³⁷⁹ He expressed his prevailing outlook on the significance of the U.S. to continue being the symbol for freedom. In examining his conduct of foreign relations on China and Vietnam, Kennedy responded to both nations with a cautious and flexible approach. In relation to the possible rapprochement of Sino-American relations, he entered his presidency with confidence and remained open to improving them. However, the belligerent nature of the PRC under Mao Zedong hindered this possible relationship like their development of the nuclear program and active involvement in the region. In spite of this inability, he still exhibited more flexibility and willingness than his successor Lyndon Johnson to consider forming these relations.³⁸⁰ In his first year, Johnson’s commitment to strengthen these relations remained unfavorable in light of the growing influence of the PRC. In terms of the Laotian conflict, Kennedy assisted in the successful negotiations for a neutralized Laos. While it did not endure as North Vietnamese invade it during the Vietnamese conflict, he implemented policy that aimed to limit their strategic usage of the country. Finally, the president’s approach on Vietnam remained consistent on limited American support by sending military personnel to train the South Vietnamese. By the end of 1963, it seemed likely that his gradual withdrawal of American presence would be

³⁷⁸ Kennedy, *Let the Word Go Forth*, 404.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁰ Kevin Quigley, “A Lost Opportunity: A Reappraisal of the Kennedy Administration’s China Policy in 1963,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 13, no. 3 (September 2002): 192.

implemented. If he expanded military involvement, his attitude more likely leaned toward restrained escalation allowing for possible withdrawal.³⁸¹ Nevertheless, his practical and flexible approach on foreign policy in the region reflected his strong leadership in preserving the security of the nation. His untimely death resulted in his Vice-President Lyndon Johnson gaining the reins of the presidency and responding to the pressing foreign issues like the turbulent nature of the Vietnam War.

Following the assassination of John F. Kennedy, Johnson became enlightened on the conditions in East Asia and the policies toward the region. During this transition, he maintained the senior officials for his cabinet like McNamara, Rusk, and Bundy. He comprehended the importance of continuity in presenting strong leadership to reassure the American people.³⁸² In his first speech as the new president, he addressed Congress on the nation's stance on foreign affairs following Kennedy's demise. On the American outlook on Vietnam, he stated that the United States would continue its pursuit for peace and desire to be "resourceful in our pursuit of areas of agreement, even with those with whom we differ; and generous and loyal to those who join with us in common cause."³⁸³ Johnson exhibited his intention to sustain the national discourse for world peace similar to the actions of his predecessor. However, his state of the union address in January 1964 revealed his perception on handling foreign affairs as president. He asserted that the United States possessed "a unique opportunity and obligation to prove the success of our system, to disprove those cynics and critics at home and abroad who question our purpose and our competence."³⁸⁴ He understood that the nation needed to exhibit its authority in the international arena to refute any criticism on its ineffectiveness. Furthermore, he stated that

³⁸¹ Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1961-1973* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 98-99.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 54.

³⁸³ Johnson, *A Time for Action*, 150.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 170.

the country needed to be united in its quest for “a world that is free from hate; a world of peace and justice and freedom and abundance for our time and for all time to come.”³⁸⁵ From this address, Johnson looked to respond assertively in confronting the nation’s foreign issues like Vietnam and the growing influence of the PRC.

At the start of 1964, Johnson’s approach to East Asia pertained to his outlook on facing the PRC and the continuous impact of the Vietnamese war on Laos. In terms of communist China, he became aware of its immense presence that threatened the stability of the region. During the first months of his presidency, Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Hilsman conveyed a vital outlook on improving Sino-American relations. He expressed the desire to change American policy on China to more of a containment approach instead of complete isolation. At this point, the U.S. only recognized Taiwan as the legitimate representative of China and supported its position in the United Nations.³⁸⁶ In his December 1963 speech, Hilsman argued that the United States needed to exhibit a stronger outlook on conducting relations with mainland China and remain open to negotiation.³⁸⁷ Furthermore, he stated that the nation be “determined to keep the door open to the possibility of change... which might advance our national good, serve the free world, and benefit the people of China.”³⁸⁸ Hilsman grasped the influential nature of the PRC, but he insisted that the president be open to this approach. Due to this perceptive outlook on Sino-American relations, it presented a viable response to the PRC with Johnson probably taking Hilsman’s suggestion under consideration.

³⁸⁵ Ibid., 184.

³⁸⁶ Robert Garson, “Lyndon B. Johnson and the China Enigma,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 32, no. 1 (January 1997): 65.

³⁸⁷ Roger Hilsman, “United States Policy toward Communist China,” December 13, 1963, *The Department of State Bulletin* 50, no. 1280 (January 6, 1964): 16. Accessed March 27, 2017, <https://archive.org/details/departmentofstat501964unit>.

³⁸⁸ Ibid., 17.

In furthering the American policy toward communist China, the administration faced interesting developments with the French recognition of the PRC. In January 1964, French president Charles de Gaulle recognized the communist nation hindering American strategy on China. Johnson and his advisers anticipated this diplomatic action and it furthered their disdain for French interference toward the nation's conduct of Sino-American relations.³⁸⁹ Also, this political change contributed to increased tension in Laos resulting in Johnson becoming concerned on American presence in the country. In an early February telegram, U.S. Ambassador to Laos Leonard S. Unger said he believed the French's recognition of the PRC created perplexing issues for the United States. He stated that the French desire for increased influence in Southeast Asia stemmed from Gaulle thinking "he can make deals with Chicoms to mutual benefit two countries."³⁹⁰ Unger's reaction of French relations with China resulted in taking it into consideration on U.S. policy toward Laos. Also, he further questioned whether the United States should allow the expansion of French influence because it would likely reduce American leverage in the region.³⁹¹ After Johnson became aware of the implications of Sino-French relations on Laos, he started comprehending the increased progress of the PRC from this crucial relationship. Furthermore, the expansion of its nuclear program became another pressing concern for Johnson in conducting foreign policy.

As the year progressed, the nation's concern on the development of the Chinese nuclear program persisted which required intensive discussions on the appropriate response. In the previous year, Kennedy tried to weaken the PRC's nuclear capability with the Limited Test Ban Treaty. Due to the resistance of the communist nation to the treaty, they aimed to not abide to its

³⁸⁹ James C. Thomson, Jr., "On the Making of U.S. China Policy, 1961-9: A Study in Bureaucratic Politics," *The China Quarterly* 50 (1972): 231.

³⁹⁰ Telegram, Leonard S. Unger to Dean Rusk, 2/5/64, "Laos Cables (2 of 2): Vol I, 11/63-4/64," Country File, Asia and the Pacific: Laos, NSF, Box 265, LBJ Library.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*

guidelines with their lack of participation. As a result, the Johnson administration needed to establish reasonable courses of action on the possibility in limiting their nuclear capabilities. The State Department discussed the possible option for a threatened retaliated response if the Chinese exhibited extensive aggression.³⁹² Upon further deliberations, the unlikelihood for Chinese aggression weakened this possible scenario. State Department officials deemed it likely that an American military response to the PRC without this action would greatly impact the perception of the United States. More explicitly, it would confirm the Chinese outlook of the U.S. and “play into the hands of efforts by Peiping to picture U.S. hostility to Communist China as the source of tensions and the principal threat to the peace in Asia.”³⁹³ After they informed the president of these scenarios, he intended to exhibit a reasonably assertive stance in his policy on China but he believed that he needed to be strategically wise in executing it. Both Johnson and his advisers agreed to execute foreign policy through this fashion to avoid the prospect of nuclear war.³⁹⁴

Besides the emphasis on the nuclear capability of the PRC, Johnson faced the continuously intense conditions of the Vietnam conflict. He perceived the war somewhat similar to Kennedy in terms of its importance in preventing the spread of communism. Both presidents wanted to contain the discord in the East Asian region. However, Johnson differed in his judgement regarding the severity of the consequences to the United States should the South Vietnamese forces be defeated by the Viet Cong. For example, he conveyed that the collapse of South Vietnam proved more severe than the direct usage of American military forces.³⁹⁵ Johnson sustained this perception in his execution of foreign policy on Vietnam throughout his

³⁹² Memo, “An Exploration of the Possible Bases for Action Against the Chinese Communist Nuclear Facilities,” 4/14/64, “China Memos Vol I: 12/63-9/64,” Country File, Asia and the Pacific: Cambodia and China, NSF, Box 237, LBJ Library.

³⁹³ Ibid.

³⁹⁴ Jonathan Colman, *The Foreign Policy of Lyndon B. Johnson: The United States and the World, 1963-1969* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 7.

³⁹⁵ McNamara and VanDeMark, 102.

presidency. In furthering this notion, General Taylor stressed that the collapse of South Vietnam would result in other regional nations like Laos and Cambodia to fall to communism and instigate a reduction of American influence in Southeast Asia.³⁹⁶ Furthermore, Taylor's analysis on the conditions of Vietnam likely influenced Johnson in his handling of the war. During the beginning of his tenure, he did not want his decisions toward Vietnam to result in the war becoming a significant political concern.³⁹⁷ Also, he wanted to exhibit the nation's strong resolution to overcome the war effectively and his desire to revitalize domestic reform.³⁹⁸ As the year progressed, American support toward South Vietnam intensified with an increase of advisory personnel and the introduction of combat forces.³⁹⁹ Nevertheless, he still desired to find other viable solutions to resolve the turbulent war.

During the progression of the year, the conditions remained the same and the growing concern of increased Chinese involvement became factored into his conduct of foreign affairs. In furthering this aspect, Sino-Soviet relations further declined with their differing positions on how to militarily and diplomatically confront the war.⁴⁰⁰ Defense Secretary McNamara expressed that the Chinese viewed a North Vietnamese victory as "a first step toward eventual Chinese hegemony over the two Vietnams and Southeast Asia and toward exploitation...in other parts of the world."⁴⁰¹ He reinforced the necessity to remain constantly aware of the PRC's influence within the war. More importantly, McNamara further stated that communist success "in Vietnam

³⁹⁶ Colman, 31.

³⁹⁷ Robert A. Caro, *The Passage of Power: The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, Vol. IV (New York: Vintage, 2013), 535.

³⁹⁸ Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, 100.

³⁹⁹ Summary of Public Statements on Vietnam and Indochina by U.S. Officials During Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson Administrations, 1950-1967, 01 January 1950, Folder 02, Box 01, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 01 - Assessment and Strategy, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. Accessed September 4, 2017, <https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2120102003>.

⁴⁰⁰ Lüthi, 302.

⁴⁰¹ United States Policy in Vietnam, by Robert S. McNamara, Secretary of Defense, 26 March 1964, Department of State Bulletin, 13 April 1964, Folder 08, Box 03, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 01 - Assessment and Strategy, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. Accessed September 4, 2017, <https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2120308014>.

would be regarding by Peiping as vindication for China's views in the worldwide ideological struggle.”⁴⁰² The sentiments conveyed by McNamara showed the administration’s constant awareness of China’s role in regional politics.

Around mid-1964, the Gulf of Tonkin incident resulted in the need for immediate action on Vietnam. This military attack on American forces served as one of the primary motivations for more involvement in the Vietnam War. Despite two reported attacks in the Gulf of Tonkin area, only the August 2 attack happened with the second incident later being confirmed as never occurring.⁴⁰³ However, Johnson collaborated with his advisers on the necessary action to this unprovoked military strike. In an August 4 meeting, Johnson expressed that he wanted the North Vietnamese to “know we are not going to take it lying down, but we are not going to destroy their cities.”⁴⁰⁴ Furthermore, he stressed that the American response would be limited to avoid any unintentional circumstances arising. At the same time, the incident strengthened the PRC’s decision in supporting the DRV.⁴⁰⁵ In the discussion process, Johnson reassured the Prime Minister of South Vietnam, Nguyen Khanh, of the continued support of the United States. He asserted that the nation’s response would be “limited in the hope that the Hanoi regime will recognize the dangers which flow from increasing violence in Southeast Asia.”⁴⁰⁶ Following this communication with the South Vietnamese prime minister, the outcome of the incident involved the application of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. After congressional approval of the resolution,

⁴⁰² Ibid.

⁴⁰³ McNamara and VanDeMark, 133.

⁴⁰⁴ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume I, Vietnam, 1964*, eds. Edward C. Keefer and Charles S. Sampson (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1992), Document 280. Notes of the Leadership Meeting, White House, August 4, 1964. Accessed March 28, 2017, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v01/d280>.

⁴⁰⁵ Lüthi, 306.

⁴⁰⁶ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume I, Vietnam, 1964*, eds. Edward C. Keefer and Charles S. Sampson (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1992), Document 283. Message from President Johnson to Prime Minister Khanh, August 4, 1964. Accessed March 28, 2017, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v01/d283>.

it allowed Johnson to use military forces in Southeast Asia. While this significant legislation acted as the foundation for increased American involvement in the war, the president believed that it served as a sensible option given the increased concern for security within Vietnam.⁴⁰⁷ Due to the initiation of this prominent legislation, Johnson possessed the capability to exhibit his assertive leadership in Vietnam when circumstances called for it.

Following the passage of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, the president shifted his attention back to the PRC's growing nuclear program. In mid-October, the Chinese successfully executed their first nuclear test requiring Johnson to express his intention in confronting them. Their development of nuclear capability contributed in the aspiration to reach some form of accommodation with the growing communist power.⁴⁰⁸ As a result, Johnson presented his attitude on the Chinese nuclear capability and the nation's reaction to this development. He stated that it would not hinder "the readiness of the United States to respond to requests from Asian nations for help in dealing with Communist Chinese aggression."⁴⁰⁹ He maintained his confidence that the nuclear proficiency of the PRC would not prohibit the country's duty in protecting threatened nations in East Asia. Also, Johnson said that he intended to follow a foreign policy approach "away from nuclear armaments and war and toward a world of cooperation, development, and peace."⁴¹⁰ In spite of this vital change in the power of the PRC, the opportunity for improved relations between them needed to be considered by Johnson to lessen anxiety over China. In a late October memorandum, National Security Council adviser James C. Thomson Jr. conveyed an intriguing opinion on how to improve these relations. He

⁴⁰⁷ Colman, 27.

⁴⁰⁸ Michael Lumbers, "The Irony of Vietnam: The Johnson Administration's Tentative Bridge Building to China, 1965-1966," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 6, no.3 (Summer 2004): 70.

⁴⁰⁹ Statement by the President, 10/16/64, "10/16/64, Statement by the President on Chinese Communist Detonation of Nuclear Devices," Statements of Lyndon Baines Johnson: October 14, 1964-October 21, 1964, Box 127, LBJ Library.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

stressed that the president should consider diplomatic alternatives toward the PRC following the presidential election. Due to this opening to establish Sino-American relations, it proved essential for the administration to convey treatment to China similar to the Soviet Union with “an appropriately tough response wherever or whenever they seriously cause us harm; but otherwise, a grouping toward coexistence on the basis of mutual self-interest.”⁴¹¹ Thomson expressed a viable perspective on their relationship with China being beneficial if Johnson acted upon this approach. While the successful nuclear capability of the Chinese concerned Johnson, any consideration on this policy would assist to establish smoother relations with them upon victory in the 1964 presidential election.

Towards the end of 1964, the main emphasis for the president revolved around his desire to be victorious in the election. For example, the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 earlier in the year assisted in strengthening his reputation and relieving domestic tension. Since his elevation to the presidency from Kennedy’s death, he tended to express his intention in conducting policies that continued his predecessor’s objectives. Johnson hoped to gain approval of Kennedy supporters to strengthen his reputation but this also fueled the mentality that he would remain in Kennedy’s shadow.⁴¹² Besides this notion, the president campaigned on the premise that he would not intensify American involvement in Vietnam. While the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution gave him the authority to increase U.S. presence in the war, he intended to act appropriately with expanded participation only being implemented if the necessary circumstances arose.⁴¹³ Furthermore, he aimed to maintain a firm stance on China as well as to appear strong against communism in response to Barry Goldwater’s aggressive approach on

⁴¹¹ Memo, James C. Thomson, Jr. to McGeorge Bundy, 10/28/64, “China Memos Folder Vol. II: 9/64-2/65,” Country File, Asia and the Pacific, China, NSF, Box 238, LBJ Library.

⁴¹² Paul R. Henggeler, *In His Steps: Lyndon Johnson and the Kennedy Mystique* (Chicago: I.R. Dee, 1991), 121.

⁴¹³ Freedman, 412-413.

foreign policy.⁴¹⁴ Nevertheless, the outcome of the election reflected the support of the American people for him to continue as their leader. His election with 61 percent of the popular vote motivated Johnson to use this support for his Great Society programs and to sustain a strong assertive stance on Vietnam.⁴¹⁵ In spite of the circumstances of his initial rise to the position, Johnson's victory showed the American public approved of his leadership and reinforced his conviction that he earned the presidency.

The shift of power from Kennedy to Johnson possessed extensive implications on the execution of American foreign policy toward East Asia. As Kennedy faced various developments in the region, he responded accordingly to avoid any unintended consequences. As a result, he executed a strategic and flexible approach in facing the geopolitics of the region. He confronted the growing influence of the People's Republic of China on the surrounding nations like India, Laos, and Vietnam. In relation to India, he balanced his attention with the Sino-Indian border dispute with the more intense deliberations of the Cuban Missile Crisis. While he focused more on the Cuban crisis, he still continued to be informed on its progress and allowed his advisers like Galbraith to assist him on the dispute. Following the outcome of both crises, he perceived the complexity of the Sino-Soviet relationship. Kennedy needed to take into consideration these tense relations in his conduct of foreign policy. He accommodated these relations in their respective involvement in the border dispute and discussions on the limitation of nuclear testing. Due to the progress of the PRC as an influential communist nation, he remained aware of the possibility of their involvement in the Vietnam conflict. Furthermore, the development of their nuclear capability contributed to his desire for the implementation of the Limited Test Ban Treaty. However, he sustained his previous stance exhibited as a senator that

⁴¹⁴ Lumbers, "The Irony of Vietnam," 77.

⁴¹⁵ Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, 184.

he would remain open to possible rapprochement given the opportunity. In relation to the Vietnam War, he maintained his stance on limiting American involvement with his desire to capitalize on positive developments for their gradual withdrawal. More importantly, it seemed likely that he would follow through on this proposal if he successfully attained a second term. His assassination triggered a sudden change in foreign policy with Johnson becoming president.

While Johnson aimed to preserve Kennedy's policies, Johnson wanted to assert similar tactics from his senatorial career like persuasion in conducting foreign policy. His attitude on the PRC tended to differ from Kennedy with his lack of openness to improved relations. At this point, their successful nuclear test in October 1964 hindered Johnson pursuing this policy. In terms of the Vietnamese conflict, the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution became the avenue for the president to escalate American involvement. In comparing both Democratic leaders, Kennedy exhibited more reasonable approaches than Johnson on executing foreign relations. He tended to be flexible in conducting foreign affairs in responding to the varying geopolitics of the region. During this transition period, Johnson focused more on asserting a strong stance than producing significant changes. While his advisers presented some diplomatic alternatives toward China, he decided to maintain a firm approach and remained unfavorable to rapprochement unlike Kennedy. Despite the differing perceptions between the liberal leaders, Lyndon Johnson continued to endure the increasing discord in East Asia throughout the rest of his presidency.

CHAPTER V

THE JOHNSON ADMINISTRATION'S CHANGING PERCEPTION OF EAST ASIA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE VIETNAM WAR: DECEMBER 1964-NOVEMBER 1968

The first year of Johnson's presidency involved extensive deliberations on the continuous warfare in Vietnam and the immense influence of the People's Republic of China in East Asia. Following the Gulf of Tonkin incident in August 1964, Johnson exhibited a firmer stance on foreign policy with the possibility of escalated American involvement in the war. The 1964 presidential victory presented Johnson with opportunity to strengthen his approach on diplomatic issues like Vietnam as the majority of the nation supported his leadership. While he wanted to balance his foreign concerns with domestic reform like the Great Society, the uncertainty of the Vietnam War and the assistance of the PRC to the Viet Cong resulted in the president mainly focusing on the war. As the 1960s progressed, the internal conditions of China played a considerable role in their involvement. As a result, Johnson needed to take into account the PRC's domestic pressure in his foreign policy. In the progression of his presidency, the pursuit for improved Sino-American relations served as a possible option for his administration. More importantly, Johnson's conduct of foreign affairs within East Asia depended on his changing perception to accommodate the impact of China and Laos within the context of the war.

Following the 1964 presidential election, Johnson intended to exhibit a more assertive stance in considering increased involvement for his Vietnamese foreign policy. In this process,

he continued to conceal his actions on executing his policies in the war to prevent any national criticism.⁴¹⁶ In retrospect, this approach assisted in understanding Johnson's perception in his overall decision-making. Nevertheless, the influence of his advisers, like Bundy, Rusk, and McNamara, continued to be informative in his Asian policy. As he dealt with the persistent tension in Vietnam, he remained concerned with the impact of the People's Republic of China on the conflict. For example, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) formulated a detailed memorandum in December 1964 on comprehending the Chinese mindset in Vietnam. This memo stressed the importance of revolutionary violence in Chinese foreign policy. More explicitly, they believed that the PRC viewed its significance as "the most effective means of tying down and eliminating U.S. influence in the emergent countries; they are also the best way to ensure the consolidation of power after a Communist takeover."⁴¹⁷ This aggressive stance of the Chinese shaped the administration's views of the nation and their conduct toward Vietnam. Also, the PRC's outlook on courage and willingness to make sacrifices served as another crucial aspect of their influence in the conflict. Furthermore, American intelligence understood the Chinese attitude on Vietnam but they could not fully determine the PRC leadership's course of action or the likelihood for direct Chinese involvement.⁴¹⁸

In spite of this uncertainty, foreign policy advisers perceived the stronger stance of China in the execution of their foreign policy. This firmer approach of the PRC on their increased presence in the region stemmed from "the conviction that China's nuclear test and the removal of

⁴¹⁶ Doris Kearns, "Lyndon Johnson's Political Personality," *Political Science Quarterly* 91, no. 3 (Autumn 1976): 402-403.

⁴¹⁷ Memo, "Peiping's Views on Revolutionary War," Ray Cline to McGeorge Bundy, 12/14/64, "China Memos Folder Vol. II: 9/64-2/65," Country File, Asia and the Pacific, China, NSF, Box 238, LBJ Library.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Khrushchev have fundamentally improved Peiping's prospect."⁴¹⁹ The PRC's successful nuclear test in October 1964 and Khrushchev's removal as Soviet Premier in the same month enhanced the prestige of Communist China. In their approach to the war, the Chinese leadership under Mao Zedong would likely view any direct military attack on North Vietnam as an attack on China with any negotiation effort being unlikely.⁴²⁰ Due to these various developments in East Asia, Johnson became convinced on the necessity for a firmer approach to the PRC in light of their increasing power and policy on Vietnam.

After the changed dynamics of the region with an increased Chinese authority, the beginning of 1965 marked Johnson's attempt to develop a more effective response to the war. While he desired a strong foreign stance, Johnson did not want to be pressed by right-wing critics into a deeper involvement in Indochina and wanted to avoid the risks of conflict with the PRC and the Soviet Union.⁴²¹ The president wanted to remain in control of his decisions and not be coerced into implementing risky policies. For example, he did not want to expend substantial political authority on precarious foreign policies that hindered domestic reform like his Great Society programs.⁴²² As a result, Johnson acted cautiously in his approach to Asian affairs like Vietnam, but he comprehended the importance of enforcing a reasonably strong position. Around this time, members of his administration began to possess doubts about the current policy on the war. Secretary McNamara and Ambassador to South Vietnam Maxwell Taylor believed the situation in Vietnam required a change of American policy due to the increased success of the Viet Cong against South Vietnamese forces. For example, McNamara and Bundy informed the

⁴¹⁹ Memo, "Signs of Increasing Toughness in Peiping's Foreign Politics," Thomas L. Hughes to Dean Rusk, 11/27/64, "China Memos Folder Vol. II: 9/64-2/65," Country File, Asia and the Pacific, China, NSF, Box 238, LBJ Library.

⁴²⁰ Ibid.

⁴²¹ Robert S. McNamara and Brian VanDeMark, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Vintage, 1996), 147.

⁴²² Michael Lumbers, "The Irony of Vietnam: The Johnson Administration's Tentative Bridge Building to China, 1965-1966," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 6, no. 3 (Summer 2004): 77.

president of their lessened optimism for a stable government in South Vietnam and that the existing policy would most likely lead to devastating defeat.⁴²³ In early January, Johnson and Taylor constantly communicated about the military conditions in Vietnam to determine their response. In a cable drafted by Bundy, the president told Ambassador Taylor that a policy of timely and clear reprisal tied with a willingness to begin planning future military involvement seemed to be a reasonable course of action.⁴²⁴ Johnson began considering the possibility for a stronger military presence, but he continued to be skeptical of implementing this policy. In response, Taylor approved of the president's suggestion for prompt action to strengthen the public morale of South Vietnam. However, he stressed that the weakened government would not contribute "in the coming months much measurable progress toward real political stability and strength."⁴²⁵ Due to the lack of opposition from the United Nations, Johnson perceived these conditions to require further American intervention.

In late January, he met with congressional leaders to learn their attitude on foreign affairs and inform them of his policies. Johnson wanted to attain feedback from them and explain the deteriorating conditions within Vietnam. For example, he laid out the administration's objective on the significance of establishing a stable government in Saigon.⁴²⁶ Also, he believed that his conduct of foreign relations needed to be done without political division, allowing for input from both Democrats and Republicans. This outlook stemmed from his tenure as a senator and his constant desire for bipartisanship in foreign policy. The president told them that their opinions

⁴²³ McNamara and VanDeMark, 167.

⁴²⁴ Cable, President Johnson to Maxwell Taylor, 1/7/65, "Deployment of Major U.S. Forces to Vietnam, July 1965, Vol. 1, Tab 4," National Security Council History, NSF, Box 40, LBJ Library.

⁴²⁵ Telegram, Maxwell Taylor to President Johnson, 1/11/65, 8 p.m., "Deployment of Major U.S. Forces to Vietnam, July 1965, Vol. 1, Tab 5," National Security Council History, NSF, Box 40, LBJ Library.

⁴²⁶ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume II, Vietnam, January-June 1965*, eds. David C. Humphrey, Ronald D. Landa, and Louis J. Smith (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1996), Document 30. Notes of President Johnson's Meeting With Congressional Leaders, January 21, 1965. Accessed May 3, 2017, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v02/d30>.

would be considered in diplomatic relations and the nation's defensive approach.⁴²⁷ In spite of this desire for unity on national interest, it seemed probable that Johnson used this meeting as a tactical measure to lessen conservative pressure toward his Vietnam policy and to ensure congressional approval of his Great Society programs. While he focused on gaining support from Congress, Johnson started to become concerned about the increased pressure on Saigon and the discouraging feedback from his advisers convinced him to take a more decisive stance on Vietnam.

Due to the deterioration of the war effort, the president began devising policy solutions that could stabilize South Vietnam. Initially, Johnson maintained his position for a gradual increase in support for the South Vietnamese in the conflict that would avoid the possibility for an enlarged war. According to Secretary Rusk, he stated that this attitude stemmed from consideration of North Vietnamese relations with the PRC and the Soviet Union and his desire to avoid their active participation in the war.⁴²⁸ This initial assessment seemed credible given that the Chinese already provided aid to North Vietnam. Also, Johnson wanted to preserve the underlying principle of his predecessor that the South Vietnamese needed to be the contributing factor in ending the intense military clash. However, his shift to a stronger policy contradicted this principle with the eventual full-scale American involvement. For example, the president believed that exerting extensive pressure on Hanoi could elevate the public morale in Saigon and assist in forming a steady government.⁴²⁹ However, this mindset seemed questionable and Johnson tended to be too optimistic about the probability of its success. Furthermore, this changed mindset stemmed from his concern that South Vietnam would progress from its pro-

⁴²⁷ Ibid.

⁴²⁸ Transcript, Dean Rusk Oral Interview II, September 26, 1969, by Paige E. Mulhollan, 5-6, LBJ Library. Accessed February 15, 2016, http://www.lbjlibrary.net/assets/documents/archives/oral_histories/rusk/rusk02.pdf.

⁴²⁹ Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1961-1973* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 247.

Western stance to a neutralized country before succumbing to communism.⁴³⁰ Despite the dubious reasoning behind this change in his Vietnam policy, the president would face a pressing military attack that served as the foundation for American escalation.

As the Democratic leader started to develop his firmer approach to the war, he confronted the North Vietnamese military attack at an American base in Pleiku. In early February, the Viet Cong forces attacked this base in South Vietnam resulting in Johnson's decision to order a retaliatory attack. Interestingly, the Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin visited Hanoi around the same time to restore Soviet-Vietnamese relations.⁴³¹ Around this time, the Soviet Union competed with the PRC to attain support from the North Vietnamese. Nevertheless, Johnson used his executive authority expressed in the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution to respond to the communist threat resulting in the execution of various air strikes known as "Operation Flaming Dart". In explaining the importance of the American response to the Pleiku attack, Secretary of Defense McNamara later recollected that this incident and the administration's reaction heavily intensified the escalation that followed.⁴³²

Afterwards, military involvement began to grow but Johnson limited the coverage of the expanded air war to circumvent public disapproval. In relation to military operations, Undersecretary of State George W. Ball explained the risks of the American military program to the president. For example, he stated that the objective of the program focused on increasing the United States' "bargaining power, vis-à-vis Hanoi and Peiping, to the point where a satisfactory political solution becomes possible."⁴³³ Also, he stressed that the military attacks would

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

⁴³¹ Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 149.

⁴³² McNamara and VanDeMark, 170.

⁴³³ Memo, George W. Ball to the President, 2/13/65, 12:30 p.m., "Deployment of Major U.S. Forces to Vietnam, July 1965, Vol. 1, Tab 44," National Security Council History, NSF, Box 40, LBJ Library.

hopefully “improve morale and increase stability in Saigon while impairing the infiltration effort of the North Vietnamese.”⁴³⁴ He exhibited optimism on the usage of regulated military involvement to instill confidence in the South Vietnamese and reach a stable outcome. While Ball exhibited a restrained military approach to avoid further escalation, President Johnson probably took his input under consideration but remained firm on his intent for additional military involvement.

For the next several months, Johnson maintained this policy of an increasing American intervention. By early March, the American ground war began with the increase of American forces in Vietnam. At this point, public opinion tended to be supportive of deployment. In retrospect, it seemed probable that Johnson used his persuasion and indirection in concealing the limited success of the war to gain national support. Also, he consulted with his predecessors Eisenhower and Truman, who expressed their approval of this increased participation.⁴³⁵ More explicitly, the military response to the Pleiku incident and the intensified North Vietnamese aggression validated Johnson’s decision for an intensified war effort.⁴³⁶ Furthermore, this attack reinforced his approval of Operation Rolling Thunder for this modified commitment.

This military operation started in early March and consisted of gradually increased air attacks on North Vietnam. The operation would last for several years with the aim of increasing the diminished morale of the South Vietnamese and weakening the communist forces. In their reaction to these attacks, Johnson became aware of the outlook of the North Vietnamese on these aerial campaigns. For example, CIA Director John A. McCone told the president that the initial response focused on threatening retaliation if the United States did not cease their operations. He

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

⁴³⁵ Paul R. Henggeler, *In His Steps: Lyndon Johnson and the Kennedy Mystique* (Chicago: I.R. Dee, 1991), 174.

⁴³⁶ George C. Herring, *America’s Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1986), 133.

further stated that they conveyed these threats through “propaganda, and diplomatic pressure, plus a continuation of Viet Cong attacks in South Vietnam.”⁴³⁷ These actions by the communists in the North showed Johnson that they would not be deterred by these air campaigns. Furthermore, McCone stressed the importance of strategic planning in the progression of this operation to reduce unintended consequences. He explained the threat of more radical communist reactions increasing “as more vital parts of North Vietnam are damaged and as attacks come nearer the border of Communist China.”⁴³⁸ Johnson needed to take these possibilities into consideration in his military decisions to limit further PRC intervention within the war.

The administration also remained aware of the regional implications of the situation in Laos. Around this time, Johnson focused on the importance of the country for the Vietnamese conflict. By this point, the North Vietnamese forces used access to Laos extensively for transportation of military personnel and supplies. For example, they maintained control of the panhandle allowing its supply routes to be accessed by the Viet Cong.⁴³⁹ Johnson needed to find a sensible approach to reduce their constant usage of the Ho Chi Minh trail. Moreover, the United States attempted to strengthen their relations with the Soviet Union through their handling of the Laotian problem. Due to Sino-Soviet tensions, it would be crucial to improve this relationship in order to attain peaceful coexistence and decrease Soviet support of the North Vietnamese. For example, Secretary Rusk expressed to Soviet Ambassador Anatoliy F. Dobrynin difficulty of overcoming the tension in Laos. He believed that another conference might be

⁴³⁷ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume II, Vietnam, January-June 1965*, eds. David C. Humphrey, Ronald D. Landa, and Louis J. Smith (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1996), Document 196. Memorandum from Director of Central Intelligence McCone to President Johnson, March 13, 1965. Accessed May 3, 2017, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v02/d196>.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁹ Larry Berman, *Lyndon Johnson's War: The Road to Stalemate in Vietnam* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989), 47.

successful, but there seemed to be no evidence that the Pathet Lao followed the provisions from the previous Geneva conference.⁴⁴⁰ While there would be uncertainty over this prospect, the possible united effort of both nations could alleviate the strain in Laos. In relation to Vietnam, Rusk stressed that the U.S. would withdraw American support if South Vietnam became free of threatening forces.⁴⁴¹ This deliberation between American and Soviet officials proved crucial in attempting to improve Soviet-American relations and enlightened Johnson on possible alternatives in dealing with the conflict.

While implementing this policy, some national criticism of his handling of the Vietnamese situation began to develop. Around March 1965, about 60 percent of the American public believed that only American troops would be able to overcome the communist threat while 31 percent preferred negotiations to resolve it.⁴⁴² As a result, the national mindset for the war showed to be evenly divided on whether to send a substantial amount of U.S. troops. In terms of the congressional standpoint, several leaders viewed the U.S. approach critically in the desire for extensive deployment. For example, the Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield expressed his concern regarding American policy toward Vietnam. Initially, he said he believed that the interests for national security would be “best served in Southeast Asia by severely limiting our military involvement and, confining ourselves at most, to a very judicious use of air and sea power.”⁴⁴³ Thus, Mansfield’s approach directly contradicted Johnson’s new policy of military escalation. While Mansfield provided a reasonable alternative for the regulated usage of

⁴⁴⁰ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume XXVIII, Laos*, ed. Edward C. Keefer (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1998), Document 170. Memorandum of Conversation, March 2, 1965. Accessed May 3, 2017, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v28/d170>.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴² Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, 260.

⁴⁴³ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume II, Vietnam, January-June 1965*, eds. David C. Humphrey, Ronald D. Landa, and Louis J. Smith (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1996), Document 215. Letter from Senator Mike Mansfield to President Johnson, March 24, 1965. Accessed May 3, 2017, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v02/d215>.

aerial forces, the resilience of the North Vietnamese forces would remain problematic for the South Vietnamese in the progression of the war. Nevertheless, the Majority Leader believed that the administration's current policy would eventually discourage diplomatic endeavors by reinforcing South Vietnamese reliance on continuous American aid, which seemed likely to increase as the United States began direct military operations.⁴⁴⁴ In terms of the Chinese influence in the region, Mansfield urged the president to remain attentive to the possibility of their presence growing in response to deepening U.S. involvement in the conflict. He noted that the strained Sino-Soviet relations might divert some of Chinese attention, but "not in the event of a deepening military confrontation in that area."⁴⁴⁵ More importantly, Mansfield expressed his concern that the president's foreign policy would "win us only more widespread difficulties which will play havoc with the domestic program of the Administration...and with our interests and constructive influence elsewhere in the world."⁴⁴⁶ Despite this early criticism on his conduct of foreign affairs, Johnson maintained his policy of American military escalation in Vietnam. Due to the immense authority of China, Johnson grasped the significance of the PRC's role within the region in spite of their rift with the Soviet Union.

In early April, the president exhibited his confident and assertive foreign policy stance in an extensively publicized speech at Johns Hopkins University. This speech would be instrumental in addressing the Vietnam crisis and responded to the criticism of American escalation. Johnson conveyed his reasoning in strengthening the U.S. military presence against the communist forces. He stated that any attempt to leave the country to an uncertain fate would

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid.

result in “increased unrest and instability, and even wider war.”⁴⁴⁷ He believed that stronger military presence proved essential to avoid an enlarged war. However, the actual progress of the war directly contradicted Johnson’s expectations as his decision to substantially increase American involvement led to a more expanded conflict. Nevertheless, he used strong rhetoric to reinforce his active position stating that the nation “must be prepared for a long continued conflict. It will require patience as well as bravery, the will to endure as well as the will to resist.”⁴⁴⁸ Therefore, Johnson emphasized the possibility for a prolonged war, but remained optimistic that a strong will would allow the United States to persevere. Furthermore, he claimed that the administration intended to use their “power with restraint and with all the wisdom that we can command.”⁴⁴⁹ Despite this early declaration, Johnson and his advisers were unable to fully adhere to their own rhetoric as the war progressed. The speech assisted in easing opposition to his foreign policy and improved the public morale regarding a suitable resolution to the crisis. More importantly, it reassured Johnson of his leadership and to be hopeful on the nation’s objective in protecting Vietnam from communist aggression.⁴⁵⁰

In addition, the implications of Johnson’s speech for possible negotiations with the North Vietnamese proved crucial to his foreign policy. An April *New York Times* article stated, while the president stressed his openness to unconditional peace talks, deliberations depended on “an independent South Vietnam – securely guaranteed and able to shape its own relationship to all others.”⁴⁵¹ Johnson maintained the outlook that the South Vietnamese needed to be allowed to

⁴⁴⁷ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Address at Johns Hopkins University: “Peace Without Conquest”, April 7, 1965,” in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1965, Book I* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1966), 395.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 396.

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁰ Dror Yuravlivker, ““Peace without Conquest”: Lyndon Johnson’s Speech of April 7, 1965,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 3 (September 2006): 480.

⁴⁵¹ Charles Mohr, “Fight Will Go On: President Says Saigon Must Be Enabled to Shape Own Future,” *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Apr 8, 1965. Accessed April 10, 2017, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/116713047/>.

carry out their own policy without any outside pressure. Also, the executive leader wanted these talks to be practical and he became willingly for opened negotiations with communist nations like the PRC and North Vietnam.⁴⁵² Johnson's openness to some form of dialogue reflected the president's desire for lessening of tensions in the region despite the constant fighting between the Viet Cong and South Vietnam.

In terms of the North Vietnamese reaction, they expressed some openness to Johnson's stance in favor of unconditional discussions. Due to this new receptivity from North Vietnam, the president became encouraged that these discussions could lead to decreased tension in the war. Responding to this change in policy, an intelligence memorandum sent to Secretary Rusk analyzed this sudden shift in North Vietnamese mindset. For example, this memo asserted that the North Vietnamese possibly wanted "to test Washington's response in order to establish if there is any basis for negotiations in light of the President's speech."⁴⁵³ Nevertheless, North Vietnamese Premier Pham Van Dong expressed four conditions needing to be recognized for any possible deliberations. Some of these provisions included the withdrawal of American forces and the ceasing of its aerial campaigns, a proposal on South Vietnamese affairs according to the National Liberation Front (NLF), and both Vietnams being neutralized with subsequent unification.⁴⁵⁴ Finally, he stressed that the government of a reunified Vietnam be determined by its people without any foreign influence.⁴⁵⁵ One of these conditions proved unacceptable to the Johnson administration. According to Secretary McNamara, the condition that the domestic affairs of South Vietnam be structured by the NLF proved unacceptable as accepting this notion

⁴⁵² Ibid.

⁴⁵³ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume II, Vietnam, January-June 1965*, eds. David C. Humphrey, Ronald D. Landa, and Louis J. Smith (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1996), Document 255. Intelligence Memorandum From the Deputy Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (Denney) to Secretary of State Rusk, April 15, 1965. Accessed May 3, 2017, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v02/d255>.

⁴⁵⁴ Zhai, 159.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., 160.

would allow communist influence in the country.⁴⁵⁶ While the other provisions appeared feasible, Johnson and his advisers opposed this provision because its implementation would greatly undermine the United States' anti-communist objective. While internal debate on these four conditions persisted, efforts to establish talks continued.

Due to the diplomatic atmosphere created by the positive worldwide response to President Johnson's speech, several officials, like Deputy Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) George C. Denney Jr., believed that North Vietnamese leaders "apparently felt compelled to appear more forthcoming toward negotiations."⁴⁵⁷ Denney's analysis appeared reasonable in light of the international repercussions from Johnson's speech. In spite of the address at Johns Hopkins, the president knew he needed to make additional military concessions like suspending aerial bombing in North Vietnam. He understood that this suspension would assist in uncovering whether Hanoi's interest in negotiations remained genuine as well as in alleviating criticism of his foreign policy.⁴⁵⁸

As the president continued to use the momentum from his speech, the importance of Sino-Vietnamese relations in the negotiation process persisted. The PRC perceived the bombing pause as merely a tactical measure meant to persuade the North Vietnamese to negotiate with the United States.⁴⁵⁹ This attitude reflected Chinese opposition to the North Vietnamese entering any form of peace talks with the Johnson administration, a position China maintained for the next three years, until the end of 1968. Faced with this Chinese opposition, in early May, Johnson stated that peace would be achieved in "the face of diplomacy and politics, of the ambitions, and

⁴⁵⁶ McNamara and VanDeMark, 181-182.

⁴⁵⁷ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume II, Vietnam, January-June 1965*, eds. David C. Humphrey, Ronald D. Landa, and Louis J. Smith (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1996), Document 255.

⁴⁵⁸ Zhai, 160.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

the interests of other nations.”⁴⁶⁰ He believed that the combined effort of various countries and strong diplomatic relations would assist in settling this regional conflict.

China also figured prominently in renewed discussion of another attempt to convene a conference on Laos that would make it a neutralized country again. While the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) and the Soviet Union remained open to the formation of a conference, the Chinese strongly opposed. Despite Chinese opposition, Secretary Rusk believed that there would be nothing to lose and something substantial to gain if successful. He stressed that a communist refusal to participate in a conference would serve as American propaganda based on their unreasonable rejection of this viable option. Furthermore, he stated that if it did occur, the United States would be in “sound position to push for implementation of 1962 Accords and to profit by any Communist interest in corridor talks on Vietnam which might develop.”⁴⁶¹ The creation of an international conference on Laos would alleviate tension in the region and further open the likelihood for negotiated peace in Vietnam. Therefore, the PRC remained a decisive factor in East Asian foreign affairs. Johnson presented his opinion on their role in the handling of geopolitics of the region. He perceived their influence in the war aimed “to erode and to discredit America’s ability to help prevent Chinese domination over all of Asia.”⁴⁶² The president viewed their growing interference in Vietnam as an attempt to impede American influence and further strengthen their own authority. In retrospect, this mindset seemed realistic, but, as his presidency progressed, it became clear that the administration did not fully comprehend the varying international and domestic concerns of the Chinese leadership.

⁴⁶⁰ “Transcript of Address by President on Vietnam War and China’s Role,” *New York Times (1923-Present)*, May 14, 1965. Accessed April 10, 2017, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/116843475/>.

⁴⁶¹ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume XXVIII, Laos*, ed. Edward C. Keefer (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1998), Document 181. Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Laos, May 10, 1965. Accessed May 3, 2017, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v28/d181>.

⁴⁶² “Transcript of Address by President on Vietnam War and China’s Role,” *New York Times (1923-Present)*, May 14, 1965.

Due to the prominence of the PRC, Johnson focused extensively on the Chinese involvement in the Vietnamese crisis. From 1965 to 1968, he became regularly concerned about the enlarged participation of the PRC. As a result, he wanted to become fully aware on the scenarios for possible confrontation with China if circumstances arose. In a February 1965 memo, Undersecretary of State Ball informed Johnson on the risks of war with the communist nation. He stressed that the introduction of Chinese ground forces in Southeast Asia would require extensive American military forces to combat them. Furthermore, Ball believed that the PRC would be pressured to engage with the U.S. if Hanoi suffered unconditional surrender “since it would mean the collapse of the basic Chinese ideological position which they have been disputing with the Soviets.”⁴⁶³ Ball’s perspective stressed the significance of ideology in Chinese foreign policy. For example, Chinese insistence that their ideals served as the archetype for communism caused the strain on Sino-Soviet relations. More importantly, Ball conveyed the adverse effects of using nuclear weapons against the Chinese. He stated that it would generate immense political problems like international criticism and anxiety over a more active Soviet presence.⁴⁶⁴ From these recommendations from Ball, Johnson grasped the severity of Chinese involvement and the necessity in taking any future developments under consideration.

Interestingly, the possible usage of nuclear weapons became a pressing issue in Johnson’s political thinking. For instance, Johnson became concerned that Republicans would criticize him for not being militarily strong, unlike Eisenhower who risked nuclear war in the 1950s.⁴⁶⁵ Due to the president’s interaction with his conservative predecessor, Johnson understood the political ramifications on his leadership if he exhibited a somewhat weakened

⁴⁶³ Memo, George W. Ball to the President, 2/13/65, 12:30 p.m., “Deployment of Major U.S. Forces to Vietnam, July 1965, Vol. 1, Tab 44,” National Security Council History, NSF, Box 40, LBJ Library

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁵ Richard M. Filipink Jr., *Dwight Eisenhower and American Foreign Policy During the 1960s: An American Lion in Winter* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015), 76.

approach on nuclear capability. While Eisenhower advised Johnson to use nuclear weaponry to deter Chinese intervention and weaken North Vietnamese morale, the president did not follow this recommendation, but he still anticipated some American resentment from his actions.⁴⁶⁶ Johnson comprehended the undesirable consequences of using nuclear weapons in his implementation of foreign policy.

The administration remained aware of the importance of China in East Asia. Around early 1965, the Chinese government responded to a Soviet proposal for an international conference discussing Indochina. The PRC heavily criticized the Soviet proposal as appeasement to American imperialism. Furthermore, they argued that the United States adhering to the Geneva agreements and American military withdrawal would be “according to the Chinese government, the only correct path of solving the question of Indochina.”⁴⁶⁷ According to the Chinese, this proposal encouraged the United States and greatly weakened communist authority.⁴⁶⁸ However, Mao Zedong expressed different sentiments than the Chinese government on the creation of a diplomatic summit. In an interview with American journalist Edgar Snow, Mao stated various possibilities for Chinese inclusion like “a conference might be held but United States troops might stay around Saigon, as in the case of South Korea.”⁴⁶⁹ This declaration contradicted the PRC government’s position with their strict opposition to any form of compromise with the United States. If Johnson became aware of Mao’s openness to this alternative for two Vietnam countries, it would be instrumental in devising a peaceful solution to

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ “Oral Statement of the PRC Government, Transmitted by PRC Vice Foreign Minister Liu Xiao to the Chargé d’Affaires of the USSR in the PRC, Cde. F. V. Mochulski,” February 27, 1965, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Arkhiv Veshnei Politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii (Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation; AVP RF), Moscow, Russia, fond 0100, opis 58, delo 1, papka 516, 1-2. Translated from Russian by Lorenz Lüthi. Accessed March 6, 2017, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117712>.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁹ Edgar Snow, “A Reporter Got This Rare Interview with Chairman Mao in 1965, Even Though China Was Entirely Closed to the West,” *New Republic*, February 26, 1965. Accessed May 31, 2017, <https://newrepublic.com/article/119916/edgar-snow-interview-china-chairman-mao-zedong>.

the conflict. However, the administration probably did not fully discuss the implications of Snow's interview with Mao, for they still believed China to be a viable threat to the nation's security. Furthermore, prominent diplomat Henry Kissinger believed that Mao did not transfer this ideological shift into official Chinese policy because it would reverse the nation's communist foundation as well as be perceived as hypocritical given his previous criticism of Khrushchev's desire for peaceful coexistence.⁴⁷⁰ Also, Kissinger asserted that Johnson and his advisers desired more tangible evidence of a modified Chinese policy because they viewed Snow as an advocate for the PRC, tarnishing his credibility.⁴⁷¹ Nevertheless, this incident likely served as a missed opportunity for the Johnson administration to improve Sino-American relations.

Around mid-1965, the president started initiating more extensive military operations in Vietnam. Following Johnson's May speech on China's role in the Vietnam War, the Chinese deliberated on their foreign policy agenda in response to American escalation. For instance, Premier Zhou Enlai asserted that the PRC would not enter the war against the U.S. unless it needed to fulfill its moral obligations to Vietnam or American military forces expanded into Chinese territory.⁴⁷² This outlook from Zhou showed the reluctance of the Chinese to become directly involved in the war unless provoked. Also, Vice Chairman of the Communist Party Liu Shaoqi presented his thoughts on the preparations for war with the United States if impelled. He stated that the U.S. lacked any reason that would justify an attack on China if "the enemy invades us without attacking it first, the enemy's morale cannot be high. This will decide the difference between a just and an unjust war."⁴⁷³ Liu expressed the Chinese mindset that

⁴⁷⁰ Henry Kissinger, *On China* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012), 206.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷² "Discussion between Zhou Enlai, Nguyen Van Hieu, and Nguyen Thi Binh," May 16, 1965, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CWIHP Working Paper 22, "77 Conversations." Accessed March 6, 2017, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113060>.

⁴⁷³ Liu Shaoqi, "Speech at the Reception of the Comrades of the Central Military Commission War Planning Meeting," May 19, 1965, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Dang de wenxian (Party Historical

validating their active involvement in the Vietnamese conflict if provoked. While Johnson approved more armed forces after July 1965, he still wanted to regulate the intensity of military actions to avoid any unintended response from the PRC. For example, he did not want to make the same mistake as Truman during the Korean War when he failed to adhere to Beijing's threat that China would retaliate if U.S. forces crossed the thirty-eighth parallel.⁴⁷⁴

Chinese reluctance to become directly involved in the fighting did not mean an end to Chinese support to North Vietnam. From 1965 to 1969, China aided North Vietnam through immense military support adding another pressing issue for Johnson's foreign policy. For example, the PRC transferred Chinese engineering forces to strengthen and maintain their defenses, the usage of their antiaircraft personnel for strategic protection in northern North Vietnam, and the transfer of substantial military supply for their armed forces.⁴⁷⁵ All this Chinese support to the North Vietnamese displayed the immense desire for China to maintain its authority as the dominant communist nation in Asia. The PRC under Mao's leadership wanted to preserve its security from American interests, perceive itself as a supporter for liberation movements, and increase support for his domestic agenda.⁴⁷⁶ The Johnson administration needed to fully understand the dynamics of East Asia, like the Chinese factor, in their execution of foreign policy toward Vietnam.

In the summer of 1965, Johnson's decision for an increased American presence in Vietnam signified the starting point that launched the United States into a contentious war. In June, Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach talked to the president about whether congressional approval should be pursued for the deployment of troops to South Vietnam. He stated that

Documents) no. 3 (1995): 40. Translated by Qiang Zhai. Accessed March 6, 2017, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110410>.

⁴⁷⁴ Zhai, 139.

⁴⁷⁵ Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 221.

⁴⁷⁶ Zhai, 152.

Johnson did not need their approval if he intended to “take only urgent defensive measures, or that he may take only minor police measures that are not likely to commit the United States to full scale war.”⁴⁷⁷ Katzenbach explained that these circumstances did not necessitate the consent of Congress. He stressed that the proposed operations, being limited to South Vietnam, fell under the previously approved guidelines from Congress.⁴⁷⁸ Johnson likely appreciated this analysis of the situation since it allowed him to undertake his military initiatives in the war. While the president extensively briefed Congress, he tended to exhibit secrecy in the execution of his foreign policy. At this point, he approved the dispatch of armed forces to the war to protect American bases with these troops authorized to initiate tactical measures.⁴⁷⁹ Around this time, immense discussions on the American position in Asian politics persisted. For example, an article from the *Suffolk Almanac*, a conservative publication, conveyed its concern over the United States’ stance on Vietnam. The article stressed that an American defeat in South Vietnam “could easily destroy what little unity of purpose the free world has remaining in the worldwide struggle against communism.”⁴⁸⁰ Johnson understood that political opposition would be a constant trend until he made meaningful progress. Furthermore, a July *New York Times* article explained the president’s approach to the conflict. He wanted to limit the possibility for an expansion of the war that required the introduction of substantial American troops.⁴⁸¹ This aspiration would not be fulfilled and his initiatives in Vietnam would eventually require an extensive military presence. Also, the article stressed that Johnson knew “success will have

⁴⁷⁷ Memo, Nicolas Katzenbach to the President, 6/10/65, “Deployment of Major U.S. Forces to Vietnam, July 1965, Vol. 5, Tab 281,” National Security Council History, NSF, Box 42, LBJ Library.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁹ Herring, 133.

⁴⁸⁰ Vietnam and Asia - Congressional Record, Appendix, 08 June 1965, Folder 12, Box 04, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 01 - Assessment and Strategy, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. Accessed September 4, 2017, <https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2120412004>.

⁴⁸¹ Henry F. Graff, “How Johnson Makes Foreign Policy,” *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Jul 4, 1965. Accessed April 10, 2017, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/116897208/>.

many shareholders, but that failure will be the sole property of the man responsible.”⁴⁸² In relation to the outcome of the conflict, the president fully understood that the implications of success and failure rested on his leadership. Due to his constant fear of failure derived from his tenure in the Senate, Johnson wanted to make sensible and reasonable decisions, but that fear probably hindered his position on Vietnamese policy.

The second half of 1965 saw an enlarged American involvement in the Vietnam conflict. In relation to this instrumental shift in foreign policy, chief domestic adviser Joseph A. Califano Jr. stressed that Johnson acted as a reluctant leader in this major decision arguing that he acted according to how he thought Kennedy might have responded to the war.⁴⁸³ Califano’s view of Johnson seemed appropriate given his desire to avoid expanding the role of the United States and his use of the memory of his predecessor to validate questionable decisions. Nevertheless, Johnson believed that positive outcomes could be attained from increasing participation in the grand scheme of the Cold War. He perceived the Vietnam War as an opportunity to promote worldwide stability as well as attain a reputable image on foreign affairs.⁴⁸⁴ However, Vice President Hubert Humphrey viewed expansion as a greater political liability than possible withdrawal.⁴⁸⁵ In spite of this concern, Johnson probably did not agree with Humphrey because he likely saw that extraction of American personnel would be viewed as weak and he feared it would instigate political criticism of his conduct of international relations in East Asia. In spite of this opposition, Johnson’s decision for escalation might have been more receptive if he received national support instead of his unilateral decision-making allowing withdrawal to

⁴⁸² Ibid.

⁴⁸³ Joseph A. Califano Jr., *The Triumph and Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson: The White House Years* (New York: Touchstone, 2015), xxxvi.

⁴⁸⁴ Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, 279.

⁴⁸⁵ Fredrick Logevall, “Lyndon Johnson and Vietnam,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (March 2004): 112.

become more favorable upon ineffective progress.⁴⁸⁶ If Johnson utilized national support in his application of Vietnamese policy, it seemed feasible to validate the removal of American forces. In retrospect, this scenario would allow the United States to avoid immense anguish from an enlarged war and allow Johnson to focus his attention on domestic issues rather than endure the tragedy of Vietnam. Despite this pipedream, his gradual approach for limited military operations transformed into a more assertive stance with extensive campaigns resulting in the war consuming the rest of his presidency.

Around late 1965, Johnson's attempt to coax the North Vietnamese into peace talks reflected the difficulty in trying to find a negotiated settlement to the fighting. For example, he approved the pause of aerial bombing of North Vietnam to instigate negotiations. This strategy created immense debate within the administration toward its viability. Secretary McNamara believed that this strategic maneuver seemed like a viable option, but he realized that bombing would need to be renewed. He stressed that bombing should be reintroduced to counter criticism that it would lead to "higher levels of infiltration, and to avoid sending the wrong signal to Hanoi, Beijing, and our own people."⁴⁸⁷ Johnson concurred with McNamara's opinion believing that the pause did not contribute to positive results reverting back to bombing. Also, Secretary Rusk recollected in an interview that the president became pessimistic about future attempts for negotiations. He stated that Johnson became "very skeptical from that point onward that anything could be done by way of peace initiatives...and bombing halts, and things of that sort."⁴⁸⁸ More importantly, the Christmas bombing pause revealed the president's miscalculation in his failed attempt to produce meaningful diplomatic negotiation to end the war.

⁴⁸⁶ Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, 292.

⁴⁸⁷ McNamara and VanDeMark, 229.

⁴⁸⁸ Transcript, Dean Rusk Oral History Interview II, 9/26/69, by Paige E. Mulhollan, 23, LBJ Library. Accessed February 15, 2016, http://www.lbjlibrary.net/assets/documents/archives/oral_histories/rusk/rusk02.pdf.

Throughout 1966, Johnson endured the growing burden of the Vietnamese conflict and the American response to the lack of success in resolving it. Limited success in the war effort began to affect public opinion and public perception of Johnson's leadership. In a March *New York Times* article, it expressed that Johnson started to become concerned about the rise of hawkish opposition to his foreign policy. For example, the article stated that a January poll showed that about 63 percent of the American people "endorsed his middle-of-the road Vietnam policy to which both doves and hawks object although for opposite reasons."⁴⁸⁹ However, the outlook of Americans shifted following the bombing pause and Senator J. William Fulbright's televised hearings criticizing the United States' handling of Vietnam. As a result, Johnson's public support faltered with only 49 percent approving his policy.⁴⁹⁰ In spite of this growing disapproval, he maintained his resolve that the nation's military presence would be sustained long enough for negotiations to be reached. Furthermore, he greatly wanted to strengthen national unity on Vietnam to ensure momentum for his legislative agenda. Johnson became worried that further escalation of the war might limit the finances needed for his Great Society programs.⁴⁹¹ Due to this mounting opposition, Johnson tended to use his tactical measures of manipulation and secrecy more extensively to hinder any detriment to his domestic and foreign initiatives. Despite the seeds of discontent against his foreign policy, Johnson still remained aware of the varying developments of East Asia like the internal discord in China.

In the spring of 1966, the PRC's role in the Vietnam crisis and their assistance to the North Vietnamese continued. However, internal tension within the nation created instability in their foreign affairs. In relations with Vietnam, China maintained its moral obligations to its

⁴⁸⁹ C.L. Sulzberger, "Foreign Affairs: A Prevalence of Hawks," *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Mar 6, 1966. Accessed April 10, 2017, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/117330155/>.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁹¹ Henggeler, 175.

communist ally. For example, future Chairman Deng Xiaoping stressed to prominent North Vietnamese leader Le Duan that China would respond to all its needs unlike the Soviet Union's partial support.⁴⁹² The PRC continued to create friction with the Soviet Union by asserting itself as the superior communist nation in light of their dual support of North Vietnam. Interestingly, the relationship between China and North Vietnam would shift in the following year with the Vietnamese coming to prefer Soviet aid.

At about the same time, the Johnson administration started to become open to the idea of possible rapprochement with China. According to Kissinger, the Warsaw ambassadorial talks in March 1966 saw the American representative convey the United States' willingness to develop relations with the PRC.⁴⁹³ Nonetheless, the domestic strain within China associated with the beginning of the Cultural Revolution would limit the chances for diplomatic relations. In May 1966, this movement initiated by Mao focused on preserving the communist ideology in China through the removal of any traditional aspects from its society. Due to the Chairman's desire to expand this internal crusade, the nation's support for Hanoi could be used to motivate increased approval for the movement.⁴⁹⁴ Even as the Cultural Revolution progressed, Johnson remained interested in starting an open dialogue between the U.S. and the PRC. Initially, he exhibited a restrained approach to China intending to contain, rather than confront, the communist nation.⁴⁹⁵ By the summer of 1966, the president altered his perception on the necessity to form relations given Chinese influence in the region. He exhibited a strategic mindset in facing China to lessen

⁴⁹² "Discussion between Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping, Kang Sheng, Le Duan and Nguyen Duy Trinh," April 13, 1966, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CWIHP Working Paper 22, "77 Conversations." Accessed March 6, 2017, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113071>.

⁴⁹³ Kissinger, 198.

⁴⁹⁴ Jian, 236.

⁴⁹⁵ Lumbers, "The Irony of Vietnam," 81.

their role in the Vietnam crisis. Despite China's domestic instability, Johnson responded cautiously to avoid any expanded intervention of the Chinese into the conflict.

Due to the expansion of the Cultural Revolution, the administration needed to become fully aware of the PRC's intentions to feasibly develop Sino-American relations. Around June, the State-Defense Study Group on China completed a report examining the Chinese leadership and the viability of rapprochement with them. Chinese leaders, the report concluded, desired China to become a dominant power in Asia with their long-term objective being to make the PRC equally powerful like the United States and the Soviet Union. Furthermore, the report stated that the motivation of these leaders stemmed from their revolutionary mindset as well as their "ingrained assumptions of cultural, moral, and racial superiority, and an almost pathological need to redress what they feel to be the slights and humiliations of the past century and a quarter."⁴⁹⁶ The Chinese wanted to instill their authority in the region and act as the beacon for communism among their fellow Asian nations. In spite of their fundamentally contradictory ideals, tolerable relations with the PRC could be achieved if the internal discord from the Cultural Revolution became too great. For example, the continued decline of the Chinese economy would drastically affect Mao's regime and it might need economic aid from the Free World possibly from the United States.⁴⁹⁷ Also, it seemed likely that the domestic pressures from the sociopolitical movement could influence the Chinese leadership to be open to discussions with American officials. More importantly, the outcome of the war in Vietnam would dictate the likelihood for discourse between both nations. If the United States attained an early victory, it would strengthen the morale of anti-communist nations and create skepticism regarding the

⁴⁹⁶ Report, "Communist China-Long Range Study," June 1966, #35, "China-Communist China Long Range Study by the Special State Defense Study Group, Vol. 1," Country File, Asia and the Pacific, China, NSF, Box 245, LBJ Library.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid., #95, "China-Communist China Long Range Study by the Special State Defense Study Group, Vol. 1," Country File, Asia and the Pacific, China, NSF, Box 245, LBJ Library.

legitimacy of Maoist ideals among Chinese allies.⁴⁹⁸ As a result, China would lose some control over their regional interests leading them to see relations with the U.S. as a viable alternative to regain them. This informative report on the long-term objectives of China proved instrumental for Johnson and his advisers in thinking about how to appropriately engage them for rapprochement.

As the summer progressed, Johnson's attention remained focused on East Asia. In July 1966, the president expressed the administration's perspective on handling Asian affairs. On the war, Johnson stated that the U.S. would maintain its stance "until the Communists in North Vietnam realize the price of aggression is too high – and either agree to a peaceful settlement or to stop their fighting."⁴⁹⁹ In response to Johnson's Vietnam strategy, Senator Mansfield expressed to Johnson that some Democrats believed that a prompt resolution proved crucial but they became concerned that no viable solution looked to be in sight.⁵⁰⁰ In terms of stability in the region, Johnson insisted that compromise needed to be reached to attain peace in Asia. He stressed that this ambition seemed difficult but essential with "reconciliation between nations that now call themselves enemies."⁵⁰¹ The president understood the importance of relations with communist adversaries like the PRC to relieve regional pressures. For example, he attempted to allow American scholars, doctors, and journalists to travel to China, but the Chinese government rejected these proposals.⁵⁰² While the PRC did not approve this avenue to start a diplomatic

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid., #115, "China-Communist China Long Range Study by the Special State Defense Study Group, Vol. 1," Country File, Asia and the Pacific, China, NSF, Box 245, LBJ Library.

⁴⁹⁹ Lyndon B. Johnson, "Remarks to the American Alumni Council: United States Asian Policy, July 12, 1966," in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1966, Book II* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1967), 720.

⁵⁰⁰ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume IV, Vietnam, 1966*, ed. David C. Humphrey (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1998), Document 166. Memorandum from Senator Mike Mansfield to President Johnson, June 29, 1966. Accessed May 31, 2017, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v04/d166>.

⁵⁰¹ Johnson, "Remarks to the American Alumni Council," 721.

⁵⁰² Garson, 72.

relationship, it showed Johnson's desire to establish a practical relationship with China. Also, he believed that an exchange of ideas served as an outlet for societies to become open-minded. Moreover, he stressed that the United States would persist in its aspirations for East Asia "because we believe that even the most rigid societies will one day awaken to the rich possibilities of a diverse world."⁵⁰³ Johnson's speech on American foreign policy reflected his desire for diplomatic reconciliation to ease the growing turmoil within East Asia.

Around the fall of 1966, the Johnson administration started to become concerned about the lack of positive results in the Vietnamese conflict and the growing opposition to American participation. At this point, Johnson concurred with McNamara's perspective that a negotiated agreement rather than a military victory would end the war.⁵⁰⁴ However, the president perceived the need for a reasonably effective military effort before peace could be achieved. In hindsight, Johnson's mentality regarding the conditions to resolve the crisis stemmed from his reluctance to be perceived as an ineffective leader. According to Secretary McNamara, opponents of Johnson's foreign policy argued that he could not appropriately balance the dual responsibility of pursuing peace and engaging in limited war.⁵⁰⁵ This interpretation of the president's conduct of foreign affairs possessed some merit given the absence of strong diplomatic or military progress.

Also, the Chinese aspect of the war remained a strong factor in military calculations. While Johnson continued to be open to relations with the PRC, he sustained his firm approach due to his concern on their assistance to the North Vietnamese. In a CIA memorandum, he became aware that China maintained their strong influence over them due to their shared ideology. Also, the memo stated that American intelligence believed Vietnamese forces would

⁵⁰³ Johnson, "Remarks to the American Alumni Council," 722.

⁵⁰⁴ Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, 343.

⁵⁰⁵ McNamara and VanDeMark, 247.

maintain its control in the war with the introduction of substantial Chinese forces to the DRV.⁵⁰⁶ Johnson needed to take into account the significance of China's involvement in strengthening the Viet Cong. Furthermore, the administration examined the cost of Chinese commitment to Vietnam and its impact on their overall authority in Asia. For example, they believed that the communist nation's long-term role in the conflict would prove disastrous for China. While their initial support of Hanoi imposed no strain on the Chinese economy or military, it could eventually deepen their domestic crisis and hinder their response to international affairs.⁵⁰⁷ As the war progressed, it seemed likely that China would shift its policy on Vietnam in light of the expanding internal tension from the Cultural Revolution. Also, their persistent stance to be the superior communist nation because of their Maoist ideals resulted in the PRC starting to be isolated from its allies.⁵⁰⁸ Due to the implications of the conflict on China, Johnson became aware of the slowly diminished power of the PRC.

Besides the dynamic involvement of the Chinese within the war, Johnson focused on trying to attempt another opportunity to reduce tension. During this time, the president would travel to various Asian and Pacific nations to attain a better overview of the political environment in the region. White House Press Secretary Bill Moyers explained to the president that the Asian trip would "show our friendship for Asian countries rather than accomplish substantive policy gains."⁵⁰⁹ In October 1966, the Manila Conference looked to be a promising avenue for further deliberations on a solution to the enduring conflict. Secretary Rusk viewed

⁵⁰⁶ Memo, "The Chinese Port in North Vietnam," 8/5/66, "China Memos [1 of 2] Vol. VI: 3/66-9/66," NSF, Box 238, LBJ Library.

⁵⁰⁷ Report, "The Cost of China's Commitment in Vietnam," 9/10/66, #1, "Vietnam: China's Commitment in Vietnam, 9/66," Country File, Vietnam, NSF, Box 212, LBJ Library.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid., #5, "Vietnam: China's Commitment in Vietnam, 9/66," Country File, Vietnam, NSF, Box 212, LBJ Library.

⁵⁰⁹ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume IV, Vietnam, 1966*, ed. David C. Humphrey (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1998), Document 272. Summary Notes of the 565th Meeting of the National Security Council, October 15, 1966. Accessed May 31, 2017, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v04/d272>.

this conference as an opening to collaborate with the leaders of Asian nations like South Korea, Thailand, and the Philippines in responding to the war effort. While Moyers and Rusk regarded the conference as essential for American policy on Vietnam, Johnson conveyed his skepticism that the summit would “probably accomplish little so we must consider now how to keep the initiative in the period ahead.”⁵¹⁰ In spite of his concern, he understood the conference allowed the United States to attain regional support from its allies toward the war. Rusk later stated that the conference assisted in establishing unity “not only on the military measures which were required but also on the approach toward a peaceful settlement.”⁵¹¹ As a result, nations like Australia and New Zealand began sending more military aid. While the main objective involved solidarity in overcoming the Vietnamese conflict, Johnson also used this medium to advance the administration’s agenda to develop Sino-American relations. For example, his comments avoided anti-Chinese sentiments and instead emphasized communist aggression from North Vietnam.⁵¹² While the reasoning for the conference stemmed from North Vietnam possibly becoming open for a settlement, Hanoi still exhibited its reluctance in entering peace negotiations. Despite this setback, the summit assisted in unifying regional allies to supplement American support in the crisis. More importantly, the conference allowed Johnson to use its momentum to stimulate approval of his foreign policy.

In early 1967, the Johnson administration realized that the engagement in Vietnam did not look to be ending anytime soon. Johnson became worried that the lack of progress in negotiations intensified the growing opposition to the war and hindered domestic support needed to sustain the war effort. Around this time, the American people became increasingly restless of the immense devotion to Vietnam with their preference for a negotiated settlement. The antiwar

⁵¹⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹¹ Transcript, Dean Rusk Oral History Interview II, 9/26/69, by Paige E. Mulhollan, 32, LBJ Library.

⁵¹² Lumbers, “The Irony of Vietnam,” 104.

protests represented this developing frustration with the lack of success in the Vietnamese conflict. As a result, Johnson believed this movement hindered support for the war as well as strengthened communist morale, encouraging them to continue the conflict.⁵¹³ While Johnson saw the antiwar movement negatively, its message that the immense American involvement did not seem worth the risk seemed credible given the lack of progress toward an acceptable conclusion. In retrospect, the president likely needed to consider this possibility because the domestic opposition continued to mount and the North Vietnamese did not look to be favorable to a negotiated resolution. Some of his advisers like McNamara expressed similar concerns in their attempts to devise an appropriate strategy that would lead to some form of negotiations.

Around May, McNamara drafted a detailed memorandum to the president elaborating the possible courses of action for the United States. In spite of their moderate stance to avoid a more enlarged war, he stressed that Hanoi most likely would not negotiate with the U.S. until the 1968 election.⁵¹⁴ He further explained that the United States did not need to implement extensive military measures in North Vietnam to deter deeper involvement by the Soviet Union and PRC. Johnson probably concurred with his Defense Secretary on the need to avoid any further escalation to the conflict. McNamara's proposal involved a restriction of the bombing campaign, limited additional military support, and a more flexible stance on negotiation.⁵¹⁵ While these provisions appeared to be reasonable, the expansion of the war required a more decisive military response. Nevertheless, he asserted that this proposal could make negotiations to end the war feasible as well as "improving our image in the eyes of international opinion, of reducing the

⁵¹³ Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, 466.

⁵¹⁴ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume V, Vietnam, 1967*, ed. Kent Sieg (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2002), Document 177. Draft Memorandum from Secretary of Defense McNamara to President Johnson, May 19, 1967. Accessed June 1, 2017, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v05/d177>.

⁵¹⁵ McNamara and VanDeMark, 270.

danger of confrontation with China and with the Soviet Union, and of reducing U.S. losses.”⁵¹⁶

This recommendation from McNamara, however, created immense disagreement within the administration. It contributed to the dissonance between Johnson and McNamara that eventually led to his resignation as Secretary of Defense the following year. In hindsight, McNamara stated that his memorandum validated the notion that, whether through diplomacy or military action, the United States needed to initiate its withdrawal from the war.⁵¹⁷ Most importantly, his proposal reflected the growing desire to find suitable diplomatic and military approaches that furthered a settlement of the war.

As 1967 progressed, Johnson became embroiled in the rising domestic opposition and the military impasse in Vietnam. While he dealt with the national concerns on the war, he continued to remain resilient in formulating a scenario to resolve it. Around this time, the strain of Sino-Vietnamese relations started to become apparent. For example, the DRV appreciated Chinese assistance, but they wanted to limit their influence within the country.⁵¹⁸ The North Vietnamese leadership did not want its people to lose their cultural identity from its interaction with China. However, the deciding factor that complicated these relations revolved around the DRV’s increasing relationship with the Soviet Union, resulting in the emergence of Chinese discontent with Hanoi. Also, this discord between the PRC and the DRV worsened as the North Vietnamese began receiving more military support from Moscow than Beijing.⁵¹⁹ Furthermore, the Sino-Soviet tensions undermined the relationship because both countries continued to fight over North Vietnam. In this turbulent geopolitical atmosphere, Johnson perceived that this disharmony of Sino-Vietnamese relations could be used to his advantage in conducting foreign affairs.

⁵¹⁶ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume V, Vietnam, 1967*, ed. Kent Sieg (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2002), Document 177.

⁵¹⁷ McNamara and VanDeMark, 271.

⁵¹⁸ Jian, 152.

⁵¹⁹ Zhai, 232.

Besides the conflict between the PRC and North Vietnam, the Cultural Revolution created internal pressure in China that impacted their diplomatic endeavors. As a result, Johnson viewed this domestic instability as an opportunity to improve Sino-American relations and possibly take advantage of it in his Vietnamese policy. However, some of his advisers cautioned the president not to expect a major change in the PRC's stance on foreign relations.⁵²⁰ While the executive leader understood the unlikelihood of a more open approach by the PRC, he believed that attempting to form a diplomatic bridge with China could alleviate the hostility in the region. Nonetheless, Johnson realized that forming some type of accommodation with the PRC would concern U.S. regional allies.⁵²¹ Around mid-1967, the growing pains of Vietnam contributed to a reexamination of the political atmosphere in East Asia. Due to the persistent tension of Sino-DRV relations and the domestic turmoil of the Cultural Revolution, Johnson took these regional issues under consideration in his foreign policy. For example, the North Vietnamese started to become more receptive to peace negotiations particularly in light of the internal disarray of China.⁵²² The president grasped the severity of these complex relationships between North Vietnam and its communist allies. More importantly, the Johnson administration perceived the importance of geopolitics in executing diplomatic relations toward the region.

In the fall of 1967, the United States continued to be occupied with its international concerns in Asia and increased domestic opposition. Due to the growing disapproval of the war participation, Johnson conveyed his attitude on American policy in Vietnam in an effort to strengthen national morale. In late September, he argued that the nation needed to maintain its support of South Vietnam to avoid its collapse into communism. More explicitly, he reinforced

⁵²⁰ Michael Lumbers, "'Staying Out of This Chinese Muddle': The Johnson Administration's Response to the Cultural Revolution," *Diplomatic History* 31, no.2 (April 2007): 271.

⁵²¹ Lumbers, "The Irony of Vietnam," 105.

⁵²² Lumbers, "Staying Out of This Chinese Muddle," 277.

the notion to his critics that it would be worth the risk to impede communist influence in other Asian nations.⁵²³ Johnson continued to support the validity of the “Domino theory” expressed by his predecessors. Furthermore, he stressed that withdrawal as not an option, using a previous statement from 1962 that President Kennedy made related to Vietnam. Johnson seemingly wanted to use his predecessor as a political tactic to validate his reasoning for continued involvement. In contrast, Robert Kennedy responded assertively against Johnson’s ineffective leadership as he served as a vocal critic of the president’s foreign policies.⁵²⁴ In relation to Vietnam, he stressed that the United States reached a cross roads in trying to fulfill its objectives being “balanced between the rising prospects of peace and surely rising war, between the promise of negotiations and the perils of spreading conflict.”⁵²⁵ Kennedy grasped the importance in making the appropriate decision on the war in light of this precarious situation. Also, Johnson asserted that the inability to resolve the conflict stemmed from the constant refusal of North Vietnam to negotiate. He utilized this speech as an attempt to lessen domestic strain and to divert the responsibility for ineffective resolution toward the DRV. In the following month, Johnson continued this rhetoric with his affirmation of his Vietnam policies in spite of the constant antiwar protests. Vice President Humphrey agreed with the president’s decision to maintain the present course until Hanoi sought peace negotiations. He stated that the United States would endure a steady struggle in waiting for the North Vietnamese to falter in their resilience.⁵²⁶ The administration realized that they needed to reassure the American people of their continued perseverance in their foreign endeavor. In spite of this public image, the internal disagreement

⁵²³ “Text of Johnson’s Speech in Texas Outlining American Policy in the Vietnam War,” *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Sep 30, 1967. Accessed April 10, 2017, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/117894644/>.

⁵²⁴ Henggeler, 187.

⁵²⁵ Text of Remarks by Senator Robert F. Kennedy on Vietnam, 02 March 1967, Folder 07, Box 06, Larry Berman Collection (Presidential Archives Research), The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. Accessed September 4, 2017, <https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=0240607014>.

⁵²⁶ Max Frankel, “Johnson Affirms Vietnam Policies Despite Protests,” *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Oct 24, 1967. Accessed April 10, 2017, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/117384512/>.

persisted, as did their inability to find an acceptable solution, resulting in Johnson becoming wary of making any major change of policy.

In the beginning of 1968, the United States' participation in Vietnam remained Johnson's primary foreign initiative that consumed his presidency. The constant warfare between the Viet Cong and South Vietnamese, along with the reluctance of North Vietnam to enter peace talks, deepened the mental burden of the war on the president. In January, his State of the Union address reflected this attitude toward the state of domestic and international affairs. He stressed that the nation became challenged, but stated the United States possessed the resilience "to hold the course of decency and compassion at home; and the moral strength to support the cause of peace in the world."⁵²⁷ Johnson conveyed a defensive outlook on the country's world standing based on its limited success in pressing foreign issues. In relation to Vietnam, he voiced his aspiration for a peaceful resolution as he yearned for peace to be reached as soon as possible. Furthermore, he reiterated the nation's stance that they would halt its bombing "immediately if talks would take place promptly and with reasonable hopes that they would be productive."⁵²⁸ Johnson maintained his firm position on not ceasing military campaigns until genuine peace discussions transpired. Also, he hoped to "consult with our allies and with the other side to see if a complete cessation of hostilities – a really true ceasefire – could be made the first order of business."⁵²⁹ This address attempted to strengthen American morale from the seeming lack of resolution in Vietnam, but it did not hinder the momentum of the antiwar movement. Interestingly, his chief domestic adviser, Califano, later became aware that Johnson came close

⁵²⁷ Lyndon B. Johnson, "Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union, January 17, 1968." Accessed June 1, 2017, <http://www.lbjlibrary.net/collections/selected-speeches/1968-january-1969/01-17-1968.html>.

⁵²⁸ Ibid.

⁵²⁹ Ibid.

to sanctioning withdrawal but decided against it to avoid harming his domestic programs.⁵³⁰ Furthermore, the president understood the possible ramifications of approving withdrawal like the negative public response if he failed to effectively validate this decision, especially its probable influence on the 1968 election. While Johnson greatly desired peace to be reached, he still exhibited despair about open deliberations actually being achieved.

Following the State of the Union address, the president responded to various foreign concerns that emerged in the region that impacted his Vietnamese policy. On January 23, the U.S. dealt with a sensitive crisis with North Korea due to their seizure of an American intelligence ship. As a result, Johnson needed to respond to this situation, particularly its crew being taken as prisoners. In a cabinet meeting, Rusk informed Johnson that North Korea expressed their discontent, accusing the United States of espionage and aggression.⁵³¹ Due to the immense dedication to the war, the president did not want to expand military commitments and wanted to avoid further tension. Johnson tried diplomatic means to resolve it through the U.N. and Panmunjom, but no immediate outcome seemed apparent until their negotiated release eleven months later.⁵³² While he faced this delicate situation, he could not respond to the attempted assassination of South Korean President Park Chung-hee in the Blue House raid. This incident concerned Johnson because South Korea assisted the U.S. in the war effort by sending military forces. In an interview, Secretary Rusk recollected that Johnson appreciated Park's dedication based on the two divisions of troops sent to Vietnam.⁵³³ He possessed a strong rapport with the South Korean president, given their common goal of fighting communism in East Asia.

⁵³⁰ Califano, Jr., 270.

⁵³¹ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume XXIX, Part 1, Korea*, ed. Karen L. Gatz (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2000), Document 213. Notes of Meeting, January 23, 1968. Accessed June 1, 2017, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v29p1/d213>.

⁵³² Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, 514.

⁵³³ Transcript, Dean Rusk Oral History Interview III, 1/2/70, by Paige E. Mulhollan, 20, LBJ Library. Accessed February 15, 2016, http://www.lbjlibrary.net/assets/documents/archives/oral_histories/rusk/rusk03.pdf.

However, the Pueblo crisis shifted his attention from focusing on the Blue House incident. In spite of these two issues related to Korea, the instigation of the Tet Offensive by the Viet Cong on January 30 turned his concentration back on the war.

The Tet Offensive possessed vital implications for Johnson's conduct of foreign affairs. According to a CIA intelligence memorandum, the reasoning behind this military campaign stemmed from North Vietnam wanting to exert some psychological influence as well as exhibit their sustained power.⁵³⁴ The North Vietnamese wanted to weaken the morale of the South Vietnamese and assert their authority. More explicitly, the memo stated that their increased offensive derived from the recent desire for Hanoi to open peace talks. The communist regime most likely hoped to use this campaign "to improve their political and military image in the event that any negotiations are initiated in coming months."⁵³⁵ Due to the concurrent North Korean seizure of the USS *Pueblo*, Johnson became suspicious of the emergence of the Tet Offensive as too coincidental. He perceived the timing of these two events as calculative with the North Vietnamese likely wanting to redirect American resources from Vietnam to Korea and pressure South Korea to withdraw its forces.⁵³⁶ Nonetheless, this attitude on the connection between the two incidents contributed Johnson needing to balance multiple foreign issues simultaneously.

In relation to public opinion, the initial outlook on the Tet Offensive looked to be positive with 70 percent supporting the continued bombing of North Vietnam.⁵³⁷ However, Johnson exhibited a restrained approach in not wanting to further escalate tension or intensify domestic opposition. Also, the progression of the warfare at Khe Sanh further concerned the president.

⁵³⁴ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume VI, Vietnam, January-August 1968*, ed. Kent Sieg (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2002), Document 41. Intelligence Memorandum, January 31, 1968. Accessed June 1, 2017, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v06/d41>.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁶ Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, 514.

⁵³⁷ Colman, 64.

Due to this battle starting as the Tet Offensive began, the administration needed to consider its implications on their policy. Around February, Secretary Rusk expressed that peace would be difficult because “while the enemy builds up its forces at Khe Sanh and attacks cities in the south negotiations are not possible.”⁵³⁸ As the offensive operations of the North Vietnamese progressed, the public approval of Johnson’s handling of the war continued to decline. Around this time, only 35 percent of Americans expressed confidence in his Vietnam policy.⁵³⁹ Furthermore, General William Westmoreland conveyed his desire to end the offensive and restore bombing in southern North Vietnam.⁵⁴⁰ Johnson likely disagreed with Westmoreland in increasing military efforts to reduce further tension and allow for feasible peace talks. In March 1968, the outcome of the Tet Offensive resulted in a tactical victory by the United States and South Vietnam, but it also served as a strategic win for North Vietnam. Despite the reduction of Viet Cong forces, it contributed to the North Vietnamese increasing their manpower in the South. Also, its aftermath assisted North Vietnam in using it as a form of propaganda. Due to this hollow victory, Califano stated that the press viewed the offensive as a major military setback for the United States resulting in a further diminished national morale.⁵⁴¹ Despite the reduction of Viet Cong forces from the campaign, Johnson realized that the momentum did not substantially strengthen approval of his leadership. More importantly, it served as one of the contributing factors that led to his decision not to seek reelection.

In late March, the president comprehended the situation in Vietnam and the constant domestic tension; this resulted in his choice not to run for another term. He expressed this

⁵³⁸ U.S. Ties Peace Talk To Khe Sanh Battle, 11 February 1968, Folder 18, Box 05, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 04 - Political Settlement, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. Accessed September 4, 2017, <https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2300518017>.

⁵³⁹ Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, 526.

⁵⁴⁰ Memo Concerning The Tet Offensive, 06 March 1968, Folder 18, Box 10, Larry Berman Collection (Presidential Archives Research), The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. Accessed September 4, 2017, <https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=0241018028>.

⁵⁴¹ Califano, Jr., 257.

sentiment in a speech where he advocated that the United States would take the necessary measures to attain negotiated peace in Vietnam. Johnson stressed that the primary avenue to begin talks included a substantial unilateral reduction of bombing.⁵⁴² He knew that a decrease in military operations proved necessary for opening negotiations. Furthermore, National Security Adviser Walt W. Rostow recollected that Johnson viewed the situation in Vietnam as being reasonably stabilized at this point, allowing for peace talks.⁵⁴³

His decision not to seek a subsequent term stemmed from his personal discontent with the immense downward spiral of ineffective progress in the war throughout his tenure as president. Around the spring of 1968, Johnson conveyed this emotional burden by comparing his immense struggle to the Kennedy assassination. Johnson expressed to reporters that the difference between him and his predecessor involved him still being alive and it being more agonizing.⁵⁴⁴ He likely became tired from the constant criticism of his foreign policies, no matter his reasoning for them. Nevertheless, Americans perceived his speech positively and both parties viewed his decision as honorable.⁵⁴⁵ His March speech proved instrumental in conveying his outlook to continue his quest for negotiated peace in spite not seeking a second term.

While Johnson made this major decision not to pursue another term, he needed to follow through on his agenda for peace in the Vietnamese conflict. However, the authority of the PRC remained prevalent in spite of its conflicting interests with the DRV. In the spring of 1968, Johnson believed that opening Sino-American relations, at this time, seemed to be his final chance before the end of his term. Prior to his March decision, Secretary Rusk suggested to

⁵⁴² Lyndon B. Johnson, "The President's Address to the Nation Announcing Steps To Limit the War in Vietnam and Reporting His Decision Not To Seek Reelection, March 31, 1968." Accessed June 1, 2017, <http://www.lbjlibrary.net/collections/selected-speeches/1968-january-1969/03-31-1968.html>.

⁵⁴³ Transcript, Walt W. Rostow Oral History Interview I, 3/21/69, by Paige E. Mulhollan, 52, LBJ Library. Accessed March 30, 2017, http://www.lbjlibrary.net/assets/documents/archives/oral_histories/rostow/rostow1.pdf.

⁵⁴⁴ Henggeler, 250.

⁵⁴⁵ Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, 530.

Johnson the importance of remaining interested in open dialogue with the PRC. While a change in Chinese policy towards the U.S remained minimal, he stated that Beijing still exhibited some interest in communication as shown by their decision to preserve ambassadorial talks in Warsaw in spite of its political repercussions.⁵⁴⁶ This slim opening from China provided a potential break for Johnson to attempt discussions with them. Due to the instability of their domestic politics from the Cultural Revolution, Rusk advised the president that the United States needed to convey to the “potential or emerging Chinese leadership a variety of options and alternatives to their present policies.”⁵⁴⁷ Rusk’s proposal to Johnson showed their strong relationship in responding to the PRC and trying to find avenues to form relations like removing the travel ban on China. While the political climate remained one of unease, the Chinese regime maintained some order in its main cities where foreigners visited.⁵⁴⁸ As a result, the administration believed that the removal of the travel restriction could contribute to alleviating resistance to improved Sino-American relations. Furthermore, Johnson’s altered policy on Vietnam and the strained Sino-Soviet relationship further increased the possibility for rapprochement.⁵⁴⁹ However, his speech in late March greatly hindered the chances for a diplomatic breakthrough with the PRC. Johnson’s decision to remove himself from presidential contention impeded his political authority in confronting foreign matters. Although he attempted to establish an open rapport with China, it seemed unlikely to happen as Mao did not want to exhibit a relaxed approach to the U.S. that

⁵⁴⁶ *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1964, 1968, Volume XXX, China, ed. Harriet Dashiell Schwar (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1998), Document 302. Memorandum from Secretary of State Rusk to President Johnson, February 22, 1968. Accessed June 1, 2017, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v30/d302>.

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁸ *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1964, 1968, Volume XXX, China, ed. Harriet Dashiell Schwar (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1998), Document 306. Action Memorandum from the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs (Bundy) to Secretary of State Rusk, March 6, 1968. Accessed June 1, 2017, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v30/d306>.

⁵⁴⁹ Michael Schaller, *The United States and China: Into the Twenty-First Century*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 162.

challenged his authority.⁵⁵⁰ Despite the continued effort of Johnson and Rusk, the United States would not reach genuine relations with the PRC due to Mao's lack of accommodation.

In spite of the administration's inability to achieve significant progress in Sino-American relations, the Chinese role in the conflict changed over time. As the PRC-DRV relationship declined, China constantly questioned North Vietnamese diplomatic and military decisions. The North Vietnamese preference for Soviet assistance caused a major rift between China and North Vietnam. Most importantly, Hanoi's decision to become more receptive to peace talks deepened the strains in their alliance. In early May, North Vietnam began negotiations with the U.S. in Paris and it created irreparable damage with China. As a result, the PRC responded to these discussions with the removal of its military forces from Vietnam.⁵⁵¹ Johnson accommodated this interesting development into his decision-making on the war. He realized that the dissension of Sino-Vietnamese relations could assist in reaching a negotiated settlement. Also, the recall of Chinese forces likely served as a sign of relief for Johnson in that he no longer needed to worry about Chinese military intervention. In spite of the PRC's removal of its forces, it remained active in conveying its disapproval of peace talks. Premier Zhou expressed these sentiments to North Vietnamese commissar Pham Hung, advising against negotiating from a position of weakness. He stressed that Johnson's decision for a partial bombing halt and pressure from the Soviet Union were intended to diminish their resolve and force them to negotiate.⁵⁵² Although in late 1968 and early 1969, the Chinese leadership started to exhibit less support for its communist ally in light of its domestic concerns and its relations with the two superpowers.⁵⁵³ Nonetheless,

⁵⁵⁰ Lumbers, "The Irony of Vietnam," 113.

⁵⁵¹ Jian, 230.

⁵⁵² "Discussion between Zhou Enlai and Pham Hung," June 29, 1968, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CWIHP Working Paper 22, "77 Conversations." Accessed March 6, 2017, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112179>.

⁵⁵³ Jian, 233.

their complex relations with the DRV and their constant disapproval of peace talks contributed to the Johnson administration needing to remain attentive on the influence of the PRC.

As 1968 progressed, the end of Johnson's time as executive leader approached with the impending presidential election in November. Besides the selection of the next president, the 1968 election possessed profound implications for the peace talks on Vietnam. Following his decision not to seek reelection back in March, Johnson perceived that Robert Kennedy or Richard Nixon looked to be his likely successor for the presidency. After Kennedy's assassination in June, Johnson became tormented about its impact on his own legacy and the future of the nation. In relation to his legacy, Johnson would remain entangled by the Kennedy mystique with the deaths of two admired leaders signifying the start and end of his presidency.⁵⁵⁴ Due to his death, Vice President Humphrey looked to be the leading Democratic nominee as Johnson endorsed him. In spite of the massive counterculture and antiwar protests at the Democratic National Convention, Humphrey became the liberal candidate for the executive office against Nixon.

As the election neared, Johnson focused on continuing his endeavors to reach a peace settlement to the Vietnam conflict. In late October, he approved the cessation of military bombing in North Vietnam that would occur on November 1 with subsequent negotiations to include South Vietnamese representatives.⁵⁵⁵ However, Johnson became aware of Nixon's tampering with the discussions for his own gain. South Vietnam president Nguyen Van Thieu did not intend to participate in the talks to protest the possible involvement of the Viet Cong.⁵⁵⁶ As a result, Johnson believed that Nixon influenced Thieu in his decision not to participate in

⁵⁵⁴ Henggeler, 250.

⁵⁵⁵ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume VII, Vietnam, September 1968-January 1969*, ed. Kent Sieg (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2003), Document 169. Editorial Note. Accessed June 1, 2017, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v07/d169>.

⁵⁵⁶ Califano, Jr., 329.

these talks. Furthermore, it seemed evident that the conservative candidate tried to politically influence the Paris negotiations to hinder success for Johnson. The president became frustrated with this unsavory manipulation resulting in the exposure of Anna Chennault's interactions with the South Vietnamese to hinder these deliberations. Johnson intended for Humphrey to use this information as leverage to expose Nixon's trickery, but the Vice President decided against it.⁵⁵⁷ More explicitly, a recent *New York Times* article exposed new information that possibly revealed Nixon's interference in spite of his later denial of any involvement. His future Chief of Staff H.R. Haldeman maintained notes of a telephone conversation where Nixon consented for a certain intermediary to persuade South Vietnamese leaders.⁵⁵⁸ This new evidence seemed to reinforce the strong notion of Nixon's connection to the failed peace discussions. Despite his apparent interference, the South Vietnamese likely did not need much convincing because the diplomatic talks would not be favorable to them. Nevertheless, Nixon's election to the presidency signaled the end of liberalism in the White House. Also, it diminished any chance of Johnson reaching any negotiated settlement as South Vietnam likely wanted to wait until Nixon entered office. Johnson's tenure as president ended with his inability to effectively dictate the outcome of the peace talks, leaving Vietnam for his successor.

The Johnson administration faced immense obstacles in confronting the varying dynamics of East Asia. The president responded to the geopolitics of the region strategically through his developing perception in the implications of China and Laos within the war. He dealt with the prominent influence of the PRC, the tactical usage of Laos for warfare, and the turbulent nature of the Vietnam War. Johnson became fully aware of the importance of Sino-Vietnamese

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 330.

⁵⁵⁸ Peter Baker, "Nixon Tried to Spoil Johnson's Vietnam Peace Talks in '68, Notes Show," *New York Times*, Jan. 2, 2017. Accessed March 6, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/02/us/politics/nixon-tried-to-spoil-johnsons-vietnam-peace-talks-in-68-notes-show.html>.

relations to the various aspects of the conflict. Due to the increasingly strained relations with North Vietnam and the Soviet Union, he realized that rapprochement with the PRC seemed possible but the lack of receptivity from China dashed this prospect. Also, Johnson needed to accommodate the continued strategic usage of Laos by North Vietnamese forces into his Vietnamese policy. In terms of the war, he approved military operations like Rolling Thunder and endured the Tet Offensive. Towards the end of his tenure, he made critical decisions that motivated the North Vietnamese to enter peace negotiations, but these did not come to fruition. Lyndon Johnson confronted the growing discord of East Asia with some success, but his failure to resolve the war led to a critical view of his presidency.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The administrations of John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson focused on confronting the pressing domestic and foreign issues of the nation. They both exhibited strong leadership in facing these issues reflecting their authority as resilient leaders. Their exposure to foreign affairs during their tenure in Congress shaped their political philosophies. While Kennedy became more involved in these affairs than Johnson, both Democratic leaders attained experience in dealing with foreign relations that impacted their mindset as presidents. Due to the immense pressure of the Cold War, foreign policy dominated their respective presidencies. Also, their differing approaches in executing foreign policy distinguished them. During their presidencies, both liberal presidents faced the growing discord in East Asia related to the constant threat of the expansion of communism. More importantly, their approach to the region reflected this concern in how they responded toward China, Vietnam, and Laos. The influence of the PRC served as a complicating factor in their execution of foreign affairs. While both responded differently to the PRC, Kennedy tended to be more favorable in forming relations to China to ease regional tension. Nonetheless, the Vietnam War became the focal point of their policy toward the region. Unlike Kennedy's desire to limit American involvement, Johnson contradicted this notion with his escalation of U.S. forces and he became entangled in the constant burden of the war. Furthermore, Kennedy tended to exhibit more flexible approaches than Johnson in responding to the regional discord. In examining the foreign policies of Kennedy and Johnson toward East

Asia, their differing perceptions of the geopolitics of the region proved significant in determining their success as president.

In the midst of the Cold War, the 1960s revolved around the emergence of pressing foreign concerns in the Far East that tended to dominate the attention of the United States. The nation led under Kennedy and Johnson, respectively, faced these concerns strategically in trying to overcome them. Their individual approaches to conduct American foreign policy stemmed heavily from their tenure in the Senate. During this time, Kennedy devoted more time to foreign relations than Johnson as the Senate Majority Leader focused on its daily activities. Besides his introduction of international affairs from his youth, the Massachusetts senator's continued exposure to foreign relations became apparent through his speeches related to East Asia. He vocally conveyed his position on the Indochina conflict and Sino-American relations. Kennedy's open stance in improving these relations served as one of his pressing concerns as president.

On the other hand, while Johnson's time became consumed by his Senate duties, he remained aware of some world issues like the Korean War and he expressed his support for extending the draft age. Also, both liberal leaders expressed their sentiments regarding the Eisenhower administration's foreign policy. In contrast to Kennedy's disapproval of Eisenhower's restricted approach for opened change in foreign affairs, Johnson possessed a complex relationship with Eisenhower because of the necessity for compromise between the Senate and the president. Due to the importance of American morality, they remained informed on the growing desire to improve civil rights with Johnson tending to be more active than Kennedy. However, this mindset shifted when Kennedy started becoming more involved with civil rights towards the end of his presidency. Furthermore, Johnson continued this momentum through the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Nonetheless, Johnson's tenure as senator proved essential in training him to use meaningful political power, which became imperative within his administration. In comparing them, Kennedy became more engaged with foreign relations than Johnson as the Texan senator preferred domestic concerns if the opportunity arose. The aftermath of the 1960 presidential election signaled the beginning of their dual responsibility in confronting the developing turmoil within East Asia.

In examining their respective perceptions of the region, both Kennedy and Johnson struggled to respond to the growing tension related to Laos, Vietnam, and China. In relation to Laos, Kennedy exhibited a cautious approach in conducting foreign policy to avoid escalating the conflict. As previously mentioned, Kennedy believed the "Domino theory" that Eisenhower articulated, particularly that the collapse of Laos to communism would trigger a chain reaction. However, he realized that the disorder in the country became part of the larger Vietnam War. As a result, Kennedy and his advisers debated their military options resulting in the president realizing that direct involvement would be too risky.⁵⁵⁹ As his presidency progressed, the Laotian issue would be resolved through the Neutrality Agreement of 1962 with the emergence of a neutralized Laos. In spite of this positive outcome for his administration, it would only be temporary as the North Vietnamese began using the Ho Chi Minh trail to attain a strategic advantage in the war. Following Kennedy's untimely death, Johnson needed to limit North Vietnam's usage of Laos for their own gain. For the rest of his tenure, he attempted to find a sensible approach in achieving this objective. He tried to create another international conference

⁵⁵⁹ Lawrence Freedman, *Kennedy's Wars: Berlin, Cuba, Laos, and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 304.

to alleviate this tension, but to no avail due to the lack of receptivity from the Pathet Lao.⁵⁶⁰ In comparing their response to Laos, Kennedy attained more success in confronting Laos as a result of his successful conclusion of the Geneva conference. In contrast, international circumstances like the growing escalation of the Vietnamese war hindered Johnson's capability in successfully achieving a meaningful compromise in Laos.

Besides the strategic usage of Laos in the grand scheme of the Vietnam War, both liberal leaders needed to comprehend the influence of China in the geopolitics of the region. The PRC's growing authority increased the dissonance with the Soviet Union, especially their differing interpretations of communism. This tension furthered the rift in Sino-Soviet relations, as did their competition in sending aid to North Vietnam. Both Kennedy and Johnson grasped the implications of these strained relations for their respective foreign policy. For Kennedy, he understood that the growing division between the PRC and the Soviet Union would impact his handling of foreign affairs. Due to the implications of the growing authority of China, he accommodated these relations in their involvement in the Sino-Indian border dispute and discussions on the limitation of nuclear testing. For Johnson, he believed that Sino-Soviet tensions could undermine their respective assistance to North Vietnam. Also, Johnson perceived that their increased disagreement might eventually culminate in reaching peaceful coexistence with the Soviet Union.

In terms of Sino-American relations, Kennedy maintained his initial mindset to remain open to improving them. However, the continued belligerence of the PRC under the leadership of Mao Zedong, like the development of their nuclear program and active presence in the Vietnam War, thwarted any improvement. Nevertheless, he still exhibited more flexibility and willingness

⁵⁶⁰ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume XXVIII, Laos*, ed. Edward C. Keefer (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1998), Document 170. Memorandum of Conversation, March 2, 1965. Accessed May 3, 2017, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v28/d170>.

than Johnson in considering these relations.⁵⁶¹ In relation to Johnson, he endured the growing involvement of the PRC in Vietnam, which impacted his perception on possible rapprochement. From the outset of his presidency, he did not approve of strengthening these relations in light of their growing authority and successful nuclear testing. As his presidency progressed, Johnson's attitude changed in response to the conflicting interests of the PRC and North Vietnam in the war as well as the internal pressure from the Cultural Revolution. In spite of these circumstances, Johnson did not reach any substantial progress in establishing relations with China. In response to the developing geopolitics, both Kennedy and Johnson attempted to form a respectable rapport toward the PRC. They tried to compromise with China through their diplomatic endeavors in their respective presidencies. While Kennedy acted more receptive from the outset than Johnson, the Texan needed to be somewhat compelled by advisers and major shifts in the regional atmosphere to consider these relations. In both instances, the lack of receptiveness from China limited the chances for successful rapprochement, but Johnson's attempt to try to reach out still proved significant.⁵⁶² Despite neither administration establishing Sino-American relations, Johnson likely set the foundation for a more open dialogue with the PRC that culminated in the opening of China by Nixon in 1972.

While both Democratic leaders confronted the Laotian conflict and the active influence of the PRC in the region, the growing turmoil of the Vietnam War became the dominant issue of their Asian foreign policy. Throughout Kennedy's presidency, he responded to the war by maintaining his stance to limit American involvement with gradual withdrawal upon positive changes. Furthermore, the information derived from the McNamara-Taylor report in September

⁵⁶¹ Kevin Quigley, "A Lost Opportunity: A Reappraisal of the Kennedy Administration's China Policy in 1963," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 13, no. 3 (September 2002): 192.

⁵⁶² Jonathan Colman, *The Foreign Policy of Lyndon B. Johnson: The United States and the World, 1963-1969* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 132.

1963 showing the progress of the South Vietnamese forces validated Kennedy's perception that withdrawal seemed appropriate. However, the death of Diem in early November concerned Kennedy on the progression of the war. In spite of his continued ambition and willpower on the American role toward Vietnam, his unforeseen assassination triggered shock waves in the world order. Due to his death, he did not see the war to its conclusion as Johnson took over the reins to implement his own foreign policy. In examining how Kennedy would respond to the conflict if he had attained a second term, he most likely did not desire an increased military effort. Although he disapproved of expanded American involvement, he remained concerned on whether he could determine the outcome of the Vietnam War.⁵⁶³ It seemed likely that Kennedy's proposal for the steady removal of American personnel would be implemented upon a second term. However, Kennedy possibly would face the same regional climate as Johnson with the dynamics of Sino-Vietnamese relations and trying to maintain American commitment. Despite these developments, Kennedy probably would perceive other viable options to allow for withdrawal like negotiations with North Vietnam.⁵⁶⁴

In relation to Johnson's handling of Vietnam, he became embroiled in its constant warfare that consumed his presidency. The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution allowed Johnson to use executive authority in the region to combat communism. However, his immense usage of this power, reflected in his decision for American escalation, became the foundation of his downfall as president. More explicitly, Johnson's willingness for an expanded military presence greatly contradicted his predecessor's inclination for limited counterinsurgency.⁵⁶⁵ As the 1960s progressed, he attempted to use the appeal of Kennedy to gain support for his policy to lessen any political opposition. While he achieved some success in terms of public approval, it did not

⁵⁶³ Robert Dallek, *Camelot's Court: Inside the Kennedy White House* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2014), 418-419.

⁵⁶⁴ Freedman, 413.

⁵⁶⁵ Paul R. Henggeler, *In His Steps: Lyndon Johnson and the Kennedy Mystique* (Chicago: I.R. Dee, 1991), 169.

last as the war effort became lackluster and antiwar protests emerged. Towards the end of his presidency, the hollow victory of the Tet Offensive and immense disapproval of his leadership contributed to his decision to not seek reelection. The final months of his administration involved his attempt to reach peace talks to end the war, but it did not happen. His decision not to seek reelection weakened his authority and hindered any success for a peaceful resolution. In retrospect, the probable obstruction of these talks by his successor seemed ironic given that Johnson used similar manipulation for his own benefit. Nevertheless, Johnson's presidential career ended with his inability to effectively resolve the war.

Throughout the 1960s, the United States faced immense struggle in the Far East with the increasing disorder of the Vietnam conflict and the immense power of the PRC. The strong leadership of Kennedy and Johnson proved essential in confronting this turbulent region. Both leaders needed to respond appropriately to these concerns in the grand scheme of the Cold War. In examining these executive leaders, Kennedy exhibited more flexibility in executing foreign policy to confront the geopolitics of the region. For example, Kennedy accommodated the strain of Sino-Soviet relations and the growing authority of the PRC in his handling of the Sino-Indian border conflict. Also, he exhibited firm leadership in confronting the border dispute and Cuban Missile Crisis simultaneously. His ability to respond to these two international crises showed his resilience to combat pressing diplomatic obstacles. His successful avoidance of nuclear war and establishment of the Limited Test Ban Treaty reinforced his credibility as a stronger defender of the nation than Johnson.⁵⁶⁶ From the creation of the treaty, he started an early attempt for détente in limiting the chances for nuclear fallout as well as improving Soviet-American relations. Furthermore, Johnson's response to the Soviet Union and China seemed to continue this approach. While he failed to develop Sino-American relations, his administration attempted to

⁵⁶⁶ Robert Dallek, *An Unfinished Life: John F. Kennedy, 1917-1963* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2013), 710.

strengthen their rapport with both communist nations. As a result, Johnson likely assisted in the United States' eventual détente toward the Soviet Union and the PRC.⁵⁶⁷ While it seems probable that Kennedy could have handled Vietnam more successfully, Johnson's strong personality and lack of foreign experience also hindered his ability to execute other alternatives until it was too late. The differing perceptions of Kennedy and Johnson in responding to the geopolitics of East Asia proved instrumental in shaping the respective legacies of their administrations.

⁵⁶⁷ Colman, 132.

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