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Patrick Hagopian

1. The Rise of Conservatism and the “Frustrated Hawks”

- 1 Although the 1960s are generally remembered as a decade of leftist protest and demands for radical change, and the year 1968 as a time of rebellion in the streets, this period has also begun to be recognized as a key moment in the emergence of the modern conservative movement, which Bruce and Laurie see as the “central story of American politics since World War II.”¹ Historians of conservatism have noted that the modern American conservative movement was born in the failed Goldwater campaign of 1964 and achieved its first major success in the electoral gains in the mid-term elections of 1966, an advance that was crowned with the widespread vote for conservative candidates in 1968. As Alan Brinkley has written, “however much radical politics seemed to dominate the public face of 1968, the most important political legacy of that critical year was the rise of the Right.”²
- 2 This phenomenon has been perceived and explained largely in relation to U.S. domestic politics, an arena in which the rise of conservatism, largely associated with the electoral success of the Republican party, seems much clearer than in foreign policy.³ According to this perspective, the appeal to the American public of conservatism’s call for limited government, state’s rights, lower taxes, and individual freedoms was accelerated in 1968 by an electoral backlash against riots, protesters and the counter-culture.
- 3 The rise of public support for conservative positions seems at variance, however, with the direction of public opinion in relation to the major foreign policy issue of the day, the Vietnam war. If we examine trends in public opinion, opposition to the war crossed an important threshold in 1968 when the majority of Americans decided that becoming involved in Vietnam had been a mistake. The crossing of this threshold was not a hiccup but part of an upward trend in opposition to the war, starting with the first poll

that asked the "mistake" question in 1965 and continuing steadily thereafter, with one or two fluctuations, up to the withdrawal of American combat troops in 1973. Consequently, foreign policy does not seem to have been a part of the same backlash as one can see in domestic politics; if anything, and apparently paradoxically, opposition to the war in the mid- to late-1960s increased in step with the conservatism of the American electorate.

- 4 This article will argue that a close examination of opinion poll results shows that the two trends in public attitudes to domestic and foreign policy were not as far at variance as they superficially appear. Although the majority of the public became convinced in 1968 that entering the Vietnam war had been a mistake, they were not all "doves" (people who wanted American forces to withdraw from Vietnam more rapidly than the government of the day wished to withdraw them). Part of the majority was made up of disgruntled "hawks": people who wanted American forces to take decisive action such as a stepped-up bombing campaign or an invasion of North Vietnam in order to achieve victory.⁴ These "frustrated hawks" became disenchanted with what they saw as the excessive gradualism and caution of the Johnson administration's Vietnam war policy, and they began to oppose the war for that reason.
- 5 The overall trend in opinion towards the war in the Johnson years—a rising number saying that it was a mistake to send troops to Vietnam, a declining number who supported Johnson's handling of the war—is so clear that scholars have not sufficiently recognized the internal divisions within the majority. These internal divisions can, however, be teased out by comparing the results of polls that asked whether it was a mistake to send troops to Vietnam with polls that asked whether the respondents were "hawks" or "doves" and which of various policy options they favored. This analysis gives us a far clearer picture of the complexity of American public opinion—and a cipher that helps to discern the "hawkish" opinion hidden in the majority who in 1968 and after thought entering the war had been a mistake. In turn, this interpretation helps to account for the latent support in the electorate for a strong military and a renewed cold war that resumed after the period of détente in the mid- to late-1970s.

2. The Presidential Election of 1968

- 6 1968, the year of international protest, did not culminate in revolutionary upheaval in the United States; it ended with the election of the Republican party candidate Richard Nixon, a hardline anticommunist. Both he and the third-party candidate, George Wallace, ran campaigns based on "law and order" and "states' rights," an explicit repudiation of radicalism and a coded rallying cry for conservative white voters angry at the successes of the civil rights movement. Wallace's and Nixon's policies appealed to a public that overwhelmingly believed that "law and order ha[d] broken down" and who thought a "strong president can make a big difference in directly preserving law and order." According to a Harris poll, the majority of the white working class believed that "liberals, long-hairs, and intellectuals have been running the country too long."⁵ Unsurprisingly in the context of this backlash, the combined Nixon and Wallace votes in November 1968 amounted to some 57 percent of the electorate.⁶
- 7 A good deal of the backlash can be understood in domestic political terms: the sense by the white working class that their position in society was being eroded as a result of federal legislation giving African Americans rights that they had long been denied. Here, the issue that made the 1968 civil rights act a tinderbox for white resentment was "open housing": residential desegregation that would have applied equally to places

like Chicago and Cleveland as to the Deep South.⁷ A portion of the white working class was also offended by demonstrations against the war. The historian Melvin Small argues that the antiwar activists at the 1968 Democratic National Convention helped elect Nixon "by alienating conservative and moderate Americans who did not like the rioting they saw on television" (and who overlooked that the violence was in large part a "police riot").⁸ In fact, the protesters alienated even some of those who were opposed to the war.⁹ Analysis of public opinion poll results shows that a majority of Americans "found the antiwar movement, particularly its radical and 'hippie' elements, more obnoxious than the war itself."¹⁰

- 8 The 1968 election can be placed in the wider context of a reaction against the liberalism of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal and Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programs and the unraveling of the electoral coalition that had seen the Democratic party win the presidency for all but eight years between 1932 and 1968 and controlling Congress for much of that period. Some of the core constituents in the liberal coalition, working-class whites in the industrial north and white Southerners, became disaffected by what they saw as the favoritism the Democratic party was showing towards minorities. The election of 1968 was the harbinger of the Republican political strategist Kevin Phillips's "southern strategy," the moment that heralded what he termed the "emerging Republican majority."¹¹ This development made evident the exhaustion of the politics dominated by the liberal consensus born in the New Deal; it also marked a milestone in the progress of the modern conservative movement, which achieved a narrow victory in 1968, flourished with Richard Nixon's re-election in 1972, and reached maturity in Ronald Reagan's election in 1980. The efflorescence of this movement into what the neo-conservative commentator Norman Podhoretz celebrated as the "new American majority" helped Republican party candidates to win seven of the ten presidential elections between 1968 and 2004.¹²
- 9 The electoral reversal that the Democratic party suffered in the presidential election of 1968 was not simply a reaction against urban chaos, civil rights gains, antiwar protests, and liberal failures in the domestic political arena; it was also a mark of the electorate's frustration at the Johnson administration's failure to achieve either peace or victory in Southeast Asia. "Two crises coming at once, Vietnam and violence in the cities, were too much for us," said Kenneth O'Donnell, once an aide to John F. Kennedy and in 1968 a campaigner for Robert Kennedy and Hubert Humphrey.¹³ In 1968, the Vietnam War was Lyndon Johnson's war, and the Democratic party's presidential candidate, Johnson's vice president Hubert Humphrey, was handicapped by his close association with this military campaign. The Democratic party platform on Vietnam passed at the Chicago convention supported Johnson's policy, and Humphrey did not break with Johnson over Vietnam until late September 1968. When he finally distanced himself from Johnson's policy, Humphrey, who had been lagging in the polls, began to close the gap with Nixon, but not enough to overhaul him.
- 10 Despite Humphrey's association with Johnson's unpopular Vietnam policy, the 1968 election was not a referendum about the war because there was little clear difference in the Vietnam policies of the two major candidates. As Small has pointed out, Nixon's Vietnam platform "looked indistinguishable from Humphrey's."¹⁴ There was no "peace" candidate on offer, even though a peace platform would have been attractive to a sizeable chunk of the electorate. Of the identifiable peace candidates, Robert Kennedy was assassinated and Eugene McCarthy failed to win the Democratic party's

nomination, which was still, in 1968, controlled by big city power brokers. Humphrey did not win a single primary election but won the nomination as a result of support by the party's bosses.

- 11 Nixon's policies on the war were deliberately inscrutable. During the campaign he alternated between saying that the government should remove the restraints on the use of armed force in Vietnam and claiming that he had a plan to end the war (similar to how Eisenhower had talked about the Korean War in the 1952 election campaign).¹⁵ He pointed out that he had been vice president in an administration that had kept the nation out of war for eight years. He never said that he had a "secret plan" to end the war but he allowed a reporter's statement that he had one to go uncorrected. The plan he actually announced, training and equipping the forces of America's South Vietnamese ally to take over the fighting from American troops, was electorally popular. (He called it "de-Americanization"; once he was in office it was renamed "Vietnamization.")¹⁶ He had no more intention, though, of being the "first president to lose a war" than Johnson had, but he did not come out clearly and campaign as a pro-war candidate.
- 12 Although the Johnson administration attempted an "October surprise" by announcing a bombing halt and the beginnings of peace negotiations with North Vietnam at the end of that month, the breakthrough was undermined by the South Vietnamese government's refusal to participate in the negotiations and because Nixon announced that he would continue diplomatic efforts if he won the election.¹⁷ If Nixon's plan was deliberately vague and inconsistent, Humphrey's position evolved during the campaign, particularly in the last phase when he distanced himself from Johnson. These circumstances produced an election in which an antiwar vote might have gone to Nixon almost as easily as to Humphrey; this, in turn, is why at first it appears difficult to assimilate the Vietnam war into the narrative of a conservative backlash in November 1968.

3. Tet and Opposition to the Vietnam War

- 13 Nineteen sixty-eight was the year when most Americans turned against the war policies of President Lyndon Johnson and decided that it had been a mistake for the nation to involve itself in a full-scale war in Vietnam. The role of the January 1968 Tet Offensive (named for the lunar New Year holiday) is generally considered decisive for this shift in public opinion, marking a turning point in U.S. politics and for the first time since World War II confronting the United States with the limits to its own power.
- 14 Most observers agree that Tet was probably instrumental in changing U.S. policy precisely because of the government's perception that the offensive had caused a shift in public opinion. "Tet helped push the American public toward a deepening pessimism about the war and America's role in it," according to Anthony Edwards, and this pessimism "was instrumental in causing an alteration in U.S. policy."¹⁸ Zaroulis and Sullivan likewise claim that "nineteen sixty-eight was the fulcrum year, the year the balance scales tipped against the American effort in Vietnam."¹⁹ Olsen and Roberts argue that, although the Communist liberation forces did not achieve any of their tactical goals in the Tet Offensive, it was nevertheless a tactical success because its psychological shock effect undermined domestic support for Lyndon Johnson's policy of gradual escalation. Senator Robert Kennedy said that Tet "finally shattered the mask of official illusion with which we have concealed out true circumstances, even from

ourselves." The *Wall Street Journal* declared that the American people should prepare to accept "the prospect that the whole Vietnam effort may be doomed."²⁰

- 15 Around 80,000 Vietcong guerrillas and North Vietnamese troops launched the nationwide offensive on January 31, 1968, simultaneously attacking 36 of 44 provincial capitals across South Vietnam, 64 district capitals, and five of the six major cities. They penetrated the U.S. embassy in Saigon and held part of its grounds for six hours.²¹ The surprise attack was one of the principal factors that caused Johnson not to run for re-election. Because his administration had launched a public relations exercise in the autumn of 1967 to persuade the public that the war was being won, the fact that the communists were able to launch a coordinated nationwide offensive undermined the government's credibility and "punctured the illusion of progress" in the war. Although some have blamed media reporting of the offensive for the public disillusionment with the war, saying that the media misreported the offensive as a defeat for the United States, it was largely the optimistic administration public relations offensive that set the conditions for the adverse public reaction to Tet. The media campaign itself had been necessitated by the sliding public support for the war, so Tet only reinforced the existing decline in public support for the war.²²
- 16 The public was understandably shocked by footage that showed a Viet Cong sapper unit had penetrated the grounds of the U.S. Embassy. Although commanders on the ground felt that they had inflicted a tactical defeat on their communist enemy when they quickly retook most of the territory, the first shock of the offensive deeply shook the confidence of the public. As Terry Anderson argues, "after hearing national leaders throughout 1967 proclaiming victory, the 'light at the end of the tunnel,' the public felt the enemy's ability to launch a massive attack was surely a defeat for the United States."²³ If the victory the administration was seeking was attainable, it looked like it was years away.
- 17 A "perfect storm" of adverse events worsened the impact of the offensive. The administration had been trying to pay for the war alongside bearing the costs of Johnson's domestic economic programs, at the same time avoiding tax increases to fund these expenditures. There was a limit to how long this set of policies could be sustained, and with a ballooning Vietnam-induced budget and balance of payments deficit, a currency crisis came to a head in March, just as the shocks of Tet were being absorbed.²⁴ Simultaneously, the new Secretary of Defense, Clark Clifford, concluded that military victory could not be guaranteed even with the extra 206,000 troops that the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff Earle Wheeler requested. Clifford, shortly before assuming his Pentagon post, said he did not understand the reason for the requested increase in manpower: "It is neither enough to do the job, nor an indication that our role must change." The United States should, he suggested, send an extra half million troops or none at all—before his questioning of the joint chiefs of staff revealed that even half a million more might be insufficient.²⁵ General William Westmoreland, whose attrition policy was considered to have failed and who had delivered the over-optimistic reports of progress in South Vietnam in late 1967, was replaced as theatre commander of U.S. forces in Vietnam. Senator Joseph Clark returned from a fact-finding visit to South Vietnam and reported that "the war in Vietnam is at a stalemate which neither side can convert into a military victory without leaving the country ... in ruins."²⁶ When Johnson heard a CBS news report in March in which the widely trusted anchor Walter Cronkite repeated that the war appeared to be "mired in stalemate," he

concluded that he had lost the support of middle America. With difficult news on all fronts, on 31 March Johnson announced that he would seek a negotiated settlement of the war and that he was withdrawing as a candidate for re-election to the presidency.

4. The Tet Offensive and Public Opinion

- 18 One of the factors that contributed to Johnson's decision was the unexpectedly strong showing the anti-war candidate Eugene McCarthy (the Democratic Senator for Minnesota) made in the February New Hampshire primary. Johnson was not officially on the ballot but voters were able to write in his name if they favoured his candidacy, and the Democratic party organization had conducted a "vigorous" campaign for him. Despite this effort, McCarthy won over 40 percent of the votes and the vast majority of delegates in the primary. This outcome seemed to suggest a groundswell of support for a peace candidacy. What was not recognized at the time was that the majority of those who voted for McCarthy were Vietnam war hawks who thought that President Johnson was not escalating the war fast enough. This was a repudiation of Johnson's policies, but it was a protest vote by the hawks and not by people who supported McCarthy's antiwar stance.²⁷
- 19 It may be that the results of the public opinion polls showing growing disenchantment with the war and disapproval of Johnson's leadership have been misunderstood in the same way. At first glance, the story that the polls tell seems clear enough: a growing view that entering the war had been a mistake, and growing disenchantment with Johnson's leadership. From August 1965 until January 1973, the Gallup Organization periodically asked samples of the American public: "In view of developments since we entered the fighting in Vietnam, do you think the U.S. made a mistake sending troops to fight in Vietnam?" In August 1965, 24 percent said yes. In May 1966, that number had increased to 36 percent. In October 1967, for the first time a plurality of respondents, 47 percent (against 44 percent who disagreed) thought entering the war had been a mistake. The numbers fluctuated in December 1967 under the influence of the public relations campaign touting progress in the war. After the Tet offensive, in February 1968, a plurality of respondents again said they thought that sending troops to Vietnam had been a mistake. In August 1968, a majority, 53 percent, took this view. The figure crept up to 60 percent in 1971 and remained there until the last combat troops withdrew.²⁸
- 20 This set of figures does not support the view that Tet was decisive in turning public opinion against the war (whatever the perception may have been that public opinion *had* "turned," precipitating a change in administration policy and Johnson's renunciation of the presidency). The number of public opinion poll respondents who thought sending troops to Vietnam was a mistake passed a threshold in February 1968, but this was a threshold that had already been passed before in October 1967. For this reason, Wyatt considers that the result of the offensive was "less of a sudden shift" but rather "a confirmation of characteristics and trends that had been around a long time."²⁹ Although opposition to the war increased in 1968, the rate of increase was actually shallower than it had been in 1967, when positive responses to the "mistake" question had increased from 32 percent in February to 45 percent in December. The figures do not indicate that Tet was a decisive turning point *in public opinion*, in so far as it can be measured by the polls. The February 1968 (plurality) and August 1968 (majority) results may have been milestones, but they were not turning points.

- 21 The trend in opposition to Johnson's handling of the war tells much the same story. Gallup periodically asked national adult samples of the public to say whether they approved or disapproved of the President's "handling of the situation in Vietnam." A majority approved of his handling of the war from June 1965 to March 1966. From April 1966 to June 1967, the plurality of responses shifted back and forth between approval and disapproval. For the first time, a majority disapproved his handling of the war in July 1967. From then until May 1968, the last such poll conducted during Johnson's presidency, the number who disapproved his handling of the war exceeded those who approved it. And, as John Mueller reports, approval of his handling of the war correlated with approval of his presidency overall.³⁰ Again, as with the "mistake" question, the trend before the Tet offensive was consistent with the trend afterward; moreover, in the "approval" series, the majority already disapproved of Johnson's handling of Vietnam in 1967, so Tet was neither turning point nor milestone. As a study of local reactions to the offensive discovered, by the end of February 1968, the offensive—although its repercussions were resonating decisively in Washington—appeared to have largely been forgotten.³¹
- 22 However, this qualification is not the most important one. What the "mistake" and "approval" questions do not disclose is *why* the public increasingly thought the Vietnam War a mistake and disapproved of Johnson's leadership. Some of those who made up the majority disenchanted with Johnson's leadership were not "dovish" opponents of the war as such but were hawks who had grown frustrated by the restrictions on the aerial bombing campaign against North Vietnam and the attrition policy the ground forces were pursuing in South Vietnam. As the Louis Harris polling organization reported in February 1966, "more and more the American people are becoming split between those who favor an all-out military effort to shorten the war and those who prefer negotiations to the risk of escalation."³²
- 23 The majority of Americans identified themselves as "hawks" before the Tet offensive, and their number actually peaked in the immediate aftermath of the offensive, indicating a wish to strike back against the communists.³³ The Tet offensive therefore did not just increase opposition to the war, it intensified the views of hawks who saw the options as "fight or get out." As Mary Brennan summarized, "either the military should be allowed to use its full firepower potential, or the entire war should be abandoned."³⁴ Reporting on the immediate reaction to the offensive by the public in "Middletown" (actually Muncie, Indiana), Anthony Edmonds observed that editorial writers in the local press were extremely militant in their proposals for reprisals, calling for, among other things, a declaration of war against North Vietnam, an invasion, and destruction of "all targets of consequence"; letter writers to the press were, if anything, more militant: "While some cried doom, gloom, and stalemate, others saw a chance to apply maximum force for maximum results."³⁵ The poll results indicate not just a split in opinion, but also a good deal of ambivalence, since the 60 percent who identified themselves as "hawks" in the first post-Tet poll must overlap with the majority who, a few months later, said that entering the war had been a mistake. These figures indicate that among those who decided that entering the war had been a mistake were disgruntled hawks whose opposition to the war grew out of frustration with the Johnson administration's policies. The doves and hawks "could agree on one thing: the Johnson policy, which avoided both extremes [escalation or retreat] was

doomed.”³⁶ As George Herring described Johnson’s predicament, he was “whipsawed between hawk and dove, still clinging desperately to a steadily shrinking center.”³⁷

- 24 The trends in public opinion during the Nixon presidency seem to suggest a persistent division among those who told pollsters they opposed the war. Nixon pursued his “Vietnamization” policy, turning over the fighting to the South Vietnamese troops while withdrawing U.S. forces, but also on occasion escalating the violence, invading Cambodia in 1970, and conducting air raids against North Vietnam’s capital and its principal port Haiphong in 1972. Vietnamization was popular with the public, and Nixon’s approval numbers stayed higher than Johnson’s during Nixon’s first two years in the Oval Office.³⁸ While the slow pace of “Vietnamization” failed to satisfy the “doves,” who wanted a faster withdrawal, the 1972 “Linebacker” bombing raids assuaged the hawkish advocates of unbridled air power. Admiral Sharp, Commander in Chief of U.S. Pacific Forces from 1964 to 1968, said that the air campaign “will go down in history as a testimonial to the efficiency of air power.” Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Thomas Moorer, who had advocated a U.S. invasion of North Vietnam, agreed: “Air power, given its day in court after almost a decade of frustration, confirmed its effectiveness as an instrument of national power.”³⁹
- 25 Although during the Nixon years the number who thought entering the war a mistake continued the upward trend of the Johnson years, a large number nevertheless favored escalating the violence in Southeast Asia. In a 1970 poll, while almost a third of the public favored an immediate withdrawal of American forces from Vietnam, almost a quarter still favored a stronger stand, even if this meant escalating the war by invading North Vietnam. Only when combined did these two groups outnumber those willing to stay the course with the president’s policy. This provides us with a good measure of the split in opinion within the majority. In a series of polls, Americans were asked whether they favored an early withdrawal of troops, sending more troops and stepping up the fighting, or taking as many years to withdraw the troops as necessary to turn the war over to the South Vietnamese. The last option—essentially, Nixon’s Vietnamization program—had the support of 39 percent of the public in December 1969, but this declined to 30 percent in May 1970, with corresponding increases in the number favoring an early withdrawal or escalation.⁴⁰
- 26 In January 1971, 59 percent of respondents to a Harris poll approved the renewed bombing of North Vietnam but 61 percent said they favored the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam by the end of the year.⁴¹ This is one of the most striking results among the polls discussed here, because the fact that majorities supported both options indicates that at least some of the respondents must have wanted *both* renewed bombing *and* an early withdrawal from Vietnam. Renewing the bombing while withdrawing forces from Vietnam was not as illogical a course as it might sound. Aircraft based on aircraft carriers off Vietnam’s shores and in neighboring Thailand, and B-52s based as far away as the island of Guam could continue the aerial campaign in Vietnam without any U.S. forces being based in South Vietnam. The majority’s support for a renewed bombing offensive as late as 1971 demonstrates that, while they wanted an end to casualties among their ground troops, most Americans were not ready to concede defeat.
- 27 The Harris poll’s finding that the public was hawkish on bombing even though they wanted to withdraw the combat troops is consistent with a series of Gallup polls. Gallup offered a number of policy options including a multi-part plan that involved the

withdrawal of all the troops from the mainland of Vietnam, along with the stationing of ships and planes offshore "to be ready to bomb any or all parts of North Vietnam." In a series of polls between 1966 and 1969, substantial majorities favored such a plan. These majorities obviously overlapped with the majorities from August 1968 onward who thought sending troops to Vietnam had been a mistake. Although they were unwilling to meet the continued economic and human costs of the ground war, a large proportion of the U.S. population can nevertheless be identified as "frustrated hawks."

5. Conclusion: The "Frustrated Hawks" in the Post-Vietnam Era

- 28 Understanding the divisions within the majority who began to see the war as a mistake in 1968 helps us understand why no new foreign policy consensus emerged to challenge the cold war assumptions that led the United States into Vietnam, and why the basic orientation of U.S. foreign policy remained so fractious in the post-Vietnam period. The division of public opinion, marked by the three-way split among administration supporters, dovish opponents of the war, and hawkish critics of Johnson's and Nixon's leadership, created lasting fissures in the polity. Within the hawks' posture there was a further ambivalence: a desire for victory but frustration with the conduct of the war such that they concluded that the only option was to cut one's losses and withdraw—without ever having renounced their favored option, an unleashing of more violence. The resentments of the "frustrated hawks" set the stage for postwar recriminations about the reasons for the U.S. defeat and the proper "lessons" of the war.
- 29 Even before the war was over, the recriminations and the attempt to define the "lessons" of the war began. As anyone observing debates about U.S. foreign policy in the last 30 years will have observed, while the "Vietnam Syndrome" encouraged caution on the part of America's presidents and mistrust of military adventures by Congress and the public, presidents from Reagan to George W. Bush have attempted to define the "lessons" of Vietnam in their own ways.
- 30 This article argues that we can see the rise of conservatism not just in the backlash against liberalism and civil rights in U.S. domestic politics, but also in the context of foreign policy. Although supporters of both Johnson's and Nixon's Vietnam war policies declined in number during the course of their presidencies, the U.S. public had not softened their anti-communist commitments as much as the polls superficially suggest that they had. One of the key constituents of the electoral coalition that elected Nixon, Reagan, and George W. Bush were foreign policy conservatives, among them former cold war Democrats who had become disaffected with the party when the Johnson administration failed to achieve a victory in the Vietnam War. This group became further disenchanted when the party nominated George McGovern as its candidate for the presidency in 1972, and when they observed weakness and vacillation in Jimmy Carter's presidency at the end of the 1970s. The seeds of the cold war Democrats' desertion of the party were sown in the sentiments of the "frustrated hawks" who had smarted from the sting of failure in withdrawing forces from Vietnam without achieving victory.
- 31 For Reagan, the Vietnam war was a "noble cause" and the lesson that he asserted in speech after speech was that America must never again send its young men to fight in a war that their government is afraid to let them win—a straightforward assertion of the hawks' line that American forces fought the war with one hand tied behind their back. Then, in 2007 at a military veterans convention, George W. Bush uttered a Reaganesque interpretation of Vietnam, stating that the fate of South Vietnam after the communist

victory should warn against the notion that withdrawal from Iraq would be cost-free—another lamentation for the victory that the hawks wished they had won in Vietnam.⁴² As I have suggested in this article, the roots of the continuing laments and recriminations about America's lost victory stem from the frustrations of the hawks that one can detect in the reaction to the Tet offensive of 1968.

- 32 Nineteen sixty-eight was not just a time of protest but of conservative backlash. This interpretation applies not just to the United States but to many of the places where rebellion and change were in the air. Heavy-handed repression by the authorities in West Germany and Poland had the result, at least at first, of increasing the visibility of protests and rallying support for them, but a transformation of those two societies did not follow.⁴³ In Mexico City in October 1968, soldiers and police opened fire on students protesting against state repression, killing dozens and beating and jailing 2000 more. In Prague, the forces of reaction crushed movements seeking political freedoms, although they never stamped out the hopes of liberty these movements kindled. In Paris, the de Gaulle presidency creaked onwards and the hopes of the rebels for liberation of the imagination were lost in compromise. The rightward shift in American politics was not an exception to the picture of the "year of rebellion"; it matched a pattern around the world. Amidst the tumult of revolt and reaction, and odd though this may appear, one can trace a seed of the conservative revival in the hawkish dissatisfaction with U.S. policies in Vietnam, particularly in 1968, the year of world rebellion.

NOTES

1. Ronald Story and Bruce Laurie, *The Rise of Conservatism in America, 1945–2000* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2008), 1.
2. Alan Brinkley, "1968 and the Unraveling of Liberal America," in *1968: The World Transformed*, eds. Carole Fink, Philipp Gassert, and Detlef Junker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 220. For the importance of the 1966 mid-term elections, see Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America* (New York: Scribner, 2008).
3. See, for example, Story and Laurie, *The Rise of Conservatism* and Allan J. Lichtman, *White Protestant Nation: The Rise of the American Conservative Movement* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2008), which see the rise of conservatism as a phenomenon explicable mainly in relation to American domestic politics. The emphasis on domestic politics is sustained in Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer, ed., *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2008).
4. Beginning in 1967, the Gallup Organization periodically asked people to identify themselves as hawks or doves, defining them as follows: "People are called 'hawks' if they want to step up our military effort in Vietnam. They are called 'doves' if they want to reduce our military effort in Vietnam."
5. 81 percent of the sample surveyed by a Louis Harris and Associates poll thought "law and order has broken down in this country." 84 percent responded positively to the

question about a "strong president." 64 percent of "low income whites" agreed with the statement about liberals, long-hairs and intellectuals. Frederick G. Dutton, *Changing Source of Power: American Politics in the 1970s* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971), 22, cited in Perlstein, *Nixonland*, 340.

6. Mark Kurlansky, *1968: The Year that Rocked the World* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2004), 361; Kevin Phillips, *The Emerging Republican Majority* (New York: Arlington House, 1969), Chart 3, 30.

7. See, e.g., Perlstein, *Nixonland*, 106–7.

8. Melvin Small, "The Doves Ascendant: The American Antiwar Movement in 1968," *South Central Review* 16–17 (Winter 1999–Spring 2000): 48.

9. Adam Garfinkle, *Telltale Hearts: The Origins and Impact of the Antiwar Movement* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1995), 17–18.

10. Herring, *America's Longest War*, 173.

11. Phillips, *Emerging Republican Majority*.

12. Alan Brinkley, "1968 and the Unraveling of Liberal America," in *1968: The World Transformed*, 228; Norman Podhoretz, "The New American Majority," in *Party Coalitions in the 1980s*, ed. Seymour Martin Lipset (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Books), 405–406.

13. "What Now for Democrats and G.O.P.?" *New York Times*, 10 November 1968.

14. Small, "The Doves Ascendant," 50.

15. Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Viking, 1983), 581; Robert B. Simple Jr., "Nixon Withholds His Peace Ideas; Says to Tell Details of Plan Would Sap His Bargaining Position if He's Elected," *New York Times*, 11 March 1968; E. W. Kenworthy, "Nixon Is Found Hard to Fathom on Basis of Public Statements," *New York Times*, 26 October 1968; Perlstein, *Nixonland*, 117.

16. A Gallup Poll found that Americans favored Nixon's policy of withdrawing U.S. troops while training more and more South Vietnamese troops by a 2 to 1 margin over the policies of his Democratic party rivals for the presidency. "Poll Rates Nixon Best at Handling War," *New York Times*, 25 August 1968.

17. George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950–1975* 2nd ed., (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979), 217; Robert B. Semple Jr., "Nixon Willing to Go to Saigon or Paris," *New York Times*, 4 November 1968.

18. Anthony Edmonds, "The Tet Offensive and Middletown: A Study in Contradiction," in *The Tet Offensive*, eds. Marc Jason Gilbert and William Head (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996), 135.

19. Nancy Zaroulis and Gerald Sullivan, *Who Spoke Up? American Protest against the War in Vietnam, 1963–1975* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 149.

20. James S. Olsen and Randy Roberts, *Where the Domino Fell: America and Vietnam, 1945–1990* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 186.

21. George C. Herring, "Tet and the Crisis of Hegemony," in Fink, Gassert, and Junker, *1968: The World Transformed*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 31, 37.

22. Chester J. Pach, Jr., "Tet on TV: U.S. Nightly News Reporting and Presidential Policy Making," in *1968: The World Transformed*, 60, 77. Peter Braestrup, *Big Story: How the American Press and Television Reported the Crisis of Tet 1968 in Vietnam and Washington* (abridged edition; New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978), 508. See also David Culbert, "Television's Vietnam and Historical Revisionism in the United States," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 8, no. 3 (1988): 253–67; Robert Elegant, "How to Lose a War," *Encounter* 57 (August 1981). Others have argued that sceptical media

coverage of the war lagged behind public opinion. It was the increasing toll of casualties in a war with no victory in sight that cost successive administrations public support. See, e.g., Mueller, *War, Presidents and Public Opinion*, 60–62; Daniel C. Hallin, *The "Uncensored War": The Media and Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); William M. Hammond, *Public Affairs: The Military and the Media, 1962–1968* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1988). For a useful summary of the debate about the effects of the media's reporting of Tet, see David F. Scmitz, *The Tet Offensive: Politics, War, and Public Opinion* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield), 157–169.

23. Terry H. Anderson, *The Movement and the Sixties: Protest in America from Greensboro to Wounded Knee* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 184–85. A communist general accepted after the war that the uprising did not meet its principal tactical objective to spur an uprising throughout the south. Its impact in the United States was, he said, a "fortunate result." Cecil Currey, "Giap and Tet Mau Than 1968: The Year of the Monkey," in Gilbert and Head, *The Tet Offensive*, 84.

24. Herring, "Tet and the Crisis of Hegemony," 40; Diane B. Kunz, "The American Economic Consequences of 1968," in 1968: *The World Transformed*, 91, 98–99.

25. Clark Clifford, interview in *Hearts and Minds*, dir. Peter Davis, 1974; Larry Berman, "The Tet Offensive," in Gilbert and Head, *The Tet Offensive*, 41–42; Robert Buzzanco, "The Myth of Tet: American Failure and the Politics of War," in Gilbert and Head, *The Tet Offensive*, 242.

26. Berman, "The Tet Offensive," 31.

27. Richard Scammon and Ben Wattenberg, *The Real Majority: An Extraordinary Examination of the American Electorate* (New York: Coward McCann, 1980), 27–28, 90–91; Herring, *America's Longest War*, 202. Scammon and Wattenberg's study is discussed in Perlstein, *Nixonland*, 232.

28. Gallup Organization poll results provided by Roper.

29. Clarence R. Wyatt, *Paper Soldiers: The American Press and the Vietnam War* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press), 182.

30. Gallup Organization polls from June 1965 to May 1968, results provided by Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, Storrs (hereafter cited as "Roper"). John E. Mueller, *War, Presidents and Public Opinion* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1973), 108.

31. Anthony Edmonds, "The Tet Offensive and Middletown: A Study in Contradiction," in Gilbert and Head, *The Tet Offensive*, 140.

32. Louis Harris quoted in Robert S. McNamara, with Brian VanDeMark, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Times Books, 1995), 252.

33. Between December 1967 and February 1968, between 52 percent and 60 percent of the respondents identified themselves as hawks; in the poll taken between 1 and 6 February 1968, in the immediate aftermath of the Tet offensive, this number peaked at 60 percent, with only 24 percent identifying themselves as doves. In April and October 1968, the public remained evenly split, with 44 percent identifying themselves as hawks and 41 percent as doves. Gallup Polls conducted 7–12 December 1967; 4–9 January 1968; 1–6 February 1968; 22–27 February 1968; 4–9 April 1968; 26 September 1968–1 October 1968, results provided by Roper; see also Dominic Johnson and Dominic Tierney, *Failing to Win: Perception of Victory and Defeat in International Politics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006).

34. Mary C. Brennan, *Turning Right in the Sixties: The Conservative Capture of the GOP* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 129.

35. Edmonds, "The Tet Offensive and Middletown," 139, 140.
 36. Kunz, "The American Economic Consequences of 1968," 90.
 37. Herring, "Tet and the Crisis of Hegemony," 36.
 38. For the first time in March 1971 a Gallup poll found that a plurality (46 percent) disapproved of Nixon's handling of the "Vietnam situation" while 41 percent approved, indicating the rising dissatisfaction with the rate of withdrawal of American forces. "Doubt on Vietnam Reported in Poll," *New York Times*, 7 March 1971.
 39. Sharp, *Strategy for Defeat*, 252. John T. Smith, *The Linebacker Raids: The Bombing of North Vietnam, 1972* (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1988), 174.
 40. John E. Mueller, *War, Presidents and Public Opinion* (New York: Wiley, 1973). 81–98. Gallup Polls of national adult samples conducted 12–15 December 1969 and 21–26 May 1970, data provided by Roper.
 41. Louis Harris and Associates, poll of a national adult sample conducted in January 1971, data provided by Roper.
 42. Jim Rutenberg, Sheryl Gay Stolberg, and Mark Mazzetti, "'Free Iraq' Is Within Reach, Bush Declares," *New York Times*, 23 August 2007.
 43. Kurlansky, 1968, 196.
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