

*The Obligation for Patriotism:
Why Congress Passed the Tonkin Gulf Resolution*

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“The Resolution will pass, and the Senators who vote for it will live to regret it.”
- Senator Wayne Morse

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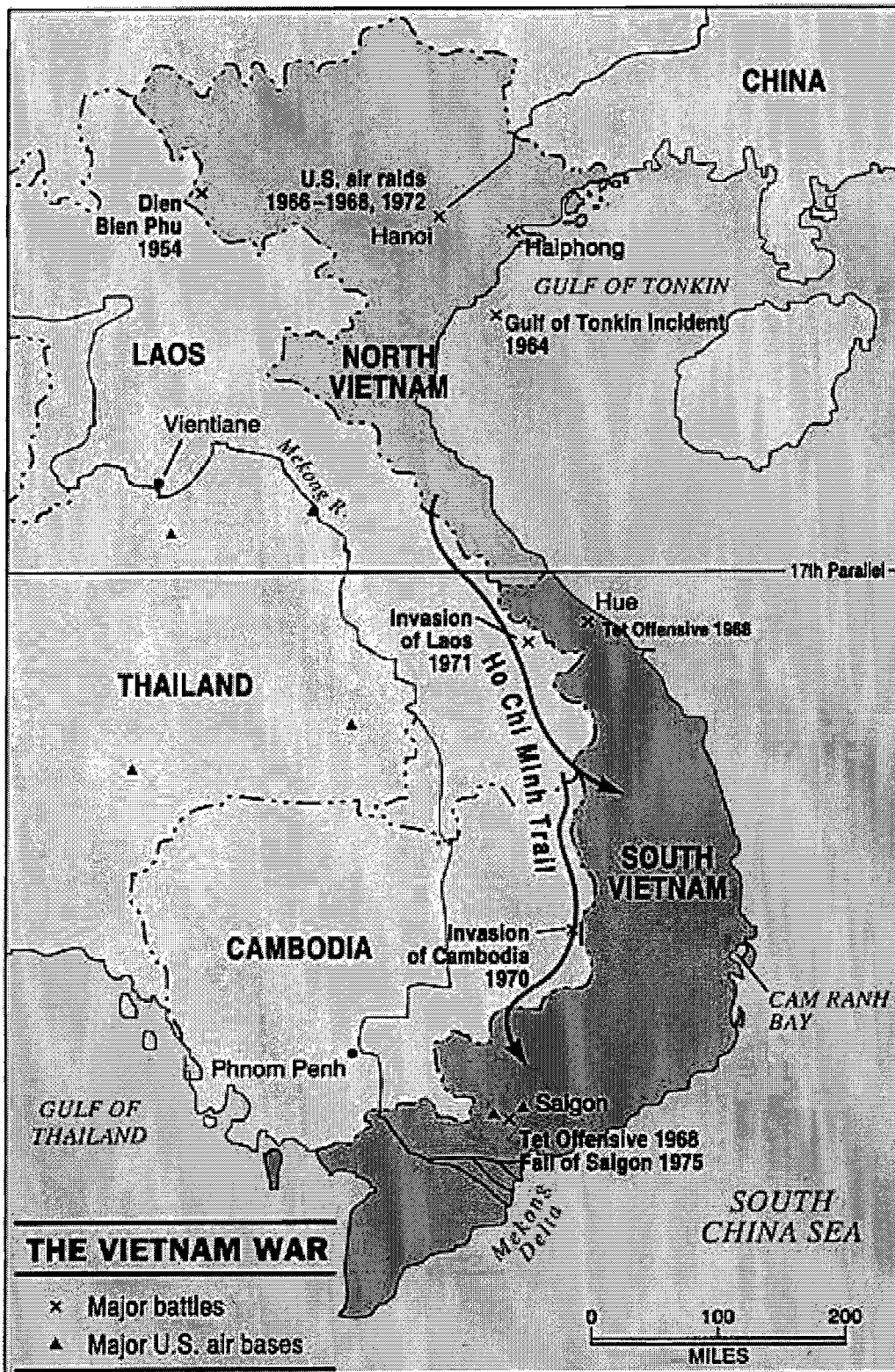
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Timeline

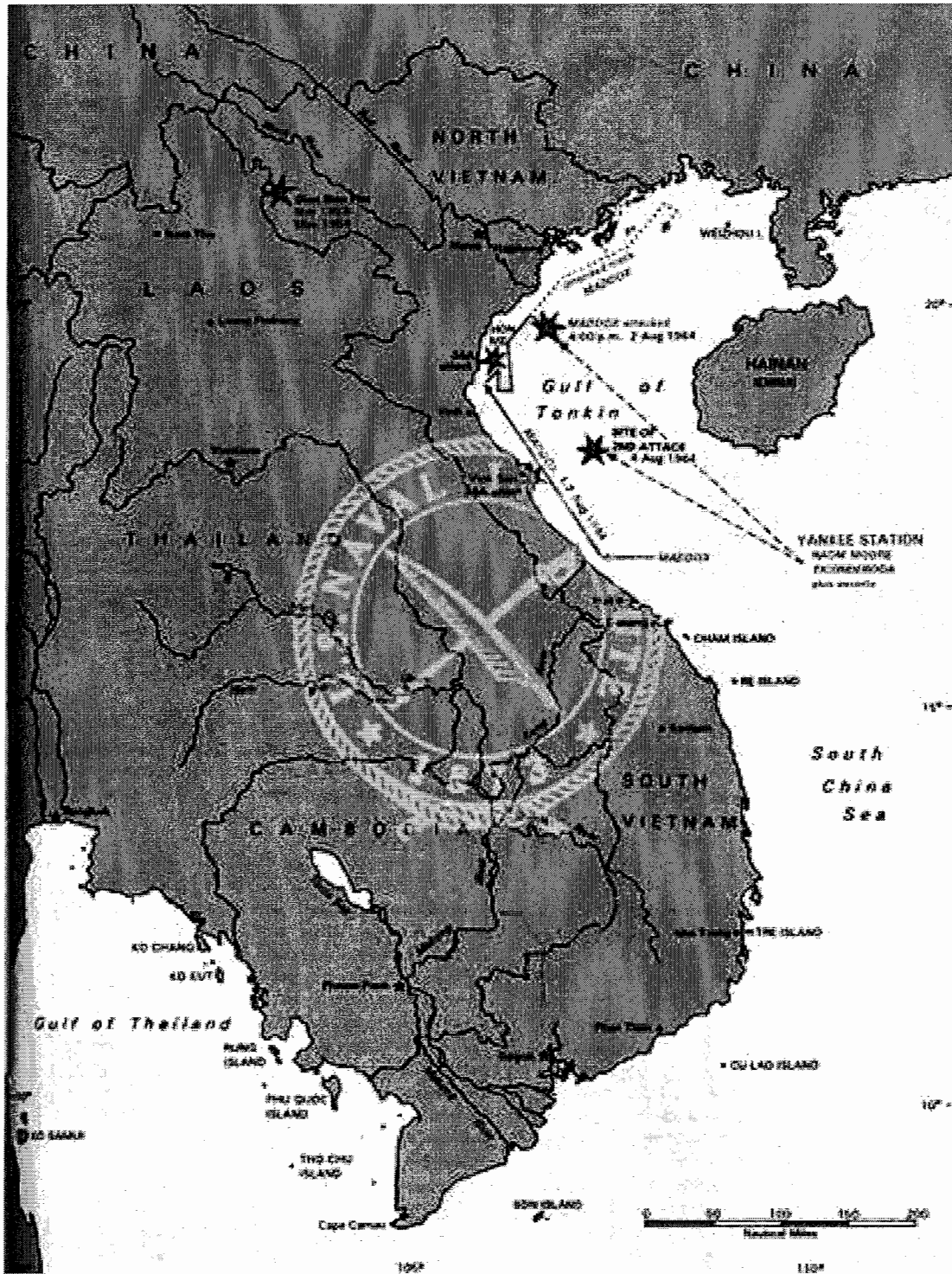
1. **1945:**
 - a. Following the surrender of Japan, Ho Chi Minh creates the National Liberation Committee of Vietnam and the Provisional Government
2. **1946:**
 - a. Indochinese War Begins: Democratic Republic of Vietnam launches first attack against the French
3. **1949:**
 - a. Mao's communist forces defeat Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Army in China's civil war. Leads to the formation of the People's Republic of China
4. **1950:**
 - a. July 26: U.S. aid to Vietnam begins under Harry Truman, who authorizes \$15 million in military aid
5. **1954:**
 - a. Battle of Dien Bien Phu that leads to the French loss in Vietnam
 - b. Geneva Accords: Provisional demarcation line is drawn at the 17th parallel, *temporarily* dividing Vietnam into separate North and South regions; elections to be held in 1956
6. **1955:**
 - a. October: Ngo Dinh Diem (Unpopular Catholic minority leader supported by the U.S.) proclaims himself the President of the Republic of South Vietnam
7. **1961:**
 - a. January: Nikita Khrushchev declares support for "wars of national liberation" throughout the world
 - b. John F. Kennedy becomes President
 - c. For the first time, aid to the South Vietnamese government includes 1,000 combat troops and Special Forces
8. **1962:**
 - a. U.S. troops increase to 13,000 in South Vietnam
9. **1963:**
 - a. May: Buddhist Crisis begins as Buddhist monks protest the denied right to display religious flags during a celebration
 - i. June – August: Buddhist Monks publicly burn themselves in protest of the Diem Government
 - b. November 1: C.I.A. sponsored coup d' etat against Ngo Dinh Diem, President of the Democratic Republic of South Vietnam; Diem is replaced by "Big Minh"
 - c. November 22: Assassination of President Kennedy
 - i. Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson becomes the President of the United States
 - d. November 24: Lyndon Johnson declares he will "not lose" in Vietnam during a meeting with Ambassador Lodge in Washington
 - e. U.S. troops increase to 16,000 by the end of the year
10. **1964:**
 - a. January: "Big Minh" replaced in a bloodless coup by Nguyen Khanh

- b. March: U.S. National Security Council and Johnson's closest advisors begin to recommend bombing in North Vietnam
 - c. May: Johnson's advisors begin to construct a congressional resolution to support the President's policy in Vietnam
 - d. June: President approves OPLAN-34A operations (using South Vietnamese commandos, supported by U.S. Navy warships to attack islands in the Gulf of Tonkin)
 - e. July 16: Barry Goldwater is nominated as the Republican candidate for the presidential election
 - f. July 31: South Vietnamese commandos raid two North Vietnamese military bases in the Gulf of Tonkin—*USS Maddox* is waiting nearby
 - g. August 2: First attacks on the *USS Maddox*. U.S. Navy fighters from the *Ticonderoga*, led by Commander James Stockdale, attack the North Vietnamese patrol boats, sinking one and damaging the other two
 - i. That night, Johnson decides against retaliation but threatens Hanoi with “grave consequences” for any further unprovoked attacks
 - h. August 4: The alleged second attacks on the *USS Maddox* and the authorization for retaliatory strikes in North Vietnam
 - i. Top Secret Leadership Meeting with the President, McNamara, Rusk, Senator Dirksen, Fulbright, Hickenlooper, McCone, Bolton, Saltonstall, Aiken, Congressman Halleck
 - ii. President's speech to the nation declaring that the U.S. still “seeks no wider war,” Also announces the decision to ask Congress for their support in passing the resolution
 - i. August 5: President's message to Congress asking them to pass the resolution
 - j. August 6: Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara engages Congress in a “question and answer” style discussion. Debates in Congress begin over the resolution—Wayne Morse voices the primary opposition to the resolution
 - k. August 7: House passes HJR 1145 416-0 and Senate passes SJR 189 88-2. These joint resolutions are known as the Tonkin Gulf Resolution
 - l. End of 1964: 23,000 U.S. troops in Vietnam
11. **1965**:
- a. End of 1965: 180,000 troops in Vietnam
12. **1968**:
- a. End of 1968: over 550,000 U.S. troops in Vietnam
 - b. November 1968: Senators Morse and Gruening both lose their seats in the Senate



The Vietnam War

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The Truth of Tonkin:
A Historical Account of the Five Days Prior the Tonkin Gulf Resolution

Events Leading Up To the Tonkin Gulf Incidents

By the end of 1963, it was apparent to the Johnson administration that the situation in Vietnam was not improving. In actuality, it was deteriorating rather quickly. 1963 stood as a red-letter year in Vietnam as the already unpopular President of South Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem, lost nearly all support. With the exception of a few rich nationalists, the self-elected Catholic president (in a predominantly Buddhist country) struggled with his immense unpopularity, thanks in large part to Diem's notorious corruption and the ongoing Buddhist Crisis that sent images of monks burning themselves to death in protest of the unpopular president to the front covers of Newspapers all around the world. South Vietnam was further thrown into peril after the C.I.A led coup against President Diem that enhanced the general instability of the country. Joseph Mendenhall, a U.S. State Department official reported that, "the war is going badly... and the situation in Long An Province is rapidly deteriorating."¹ Reports from the Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy, and Director of Defense Intelligence Agency Joseph Carroll described the situation in South Vietnam as disturbing and gloomy.² Carroll continued in an attachment to his original memorandum that stated, "In recent weeks, there has been a slight but noticeable rise in the number of Viet Cong daylight attacks indicating perhaps a growing confidence in their ability to meet and defeat government forces in open combat."³ Since the administration knew that Viet Cong (VC)

¹ Joseph Mendenhall to President Kennedy, 12 December, 1963, U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1963 4:704 (hereafter, *FRUS*.)

² Joseph Carroll during a Meeting of the Special Group for Counterinsurgency, 2 p.m., 12 December, 1963, U.S. Department of State, *FRUS*, 1963 4:704.

³ *Ibid.* See also Reports from Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and James Forrestal to President Johnson, 12 December, 1963, *FRUS*, 4:704.

strength and confidence were rapidly increasing, McNamara instructed the President to “watch the situation very carefully... hoping for the best, but preparing for more forceful moves if the situation does not show early signs of improvement.”⁴ This preparation for more forceful moves would take the form of covert activities along the North Vietnamese coast in the Gulf of Tonkin in early August 1964.

OPLAN 34-A

Because the advisors in Vietnam recognized the increased level of VC strength, mobility, and growing confidence in open combat during the day, the Johnson administration saw the first opportunity towards escalation in Vietnam.⁵ These observations set the precedent for joint U.S. and South Vietnamese covert activities in the Gulf of Tonkin, aimed at provoking the North into attacking United States ships that were supposedly “not involved” in any offensive action. This operation was called OPLAN 34-A, and planning for the engagement began early in 1964.⁶ A Memorandum on the Southeast Asia situation from William Bundy, the National Security Advisor for Southeast Affairs, told the President “there are military moves that we can take that would contribute to a continuing impression of firmness... [But that] timing must be considered.”⁷ According to the memorandum produced by Bundy, the start of OPLAN operations in July was difficult because of the approaching Republican convention where presidential hopeful Barry Goldwater would express his obdurate opinion for increased firmness against the Communists in Vietnam. Likewise, August posed a possible problem because of the

⁴ Memorandum From the Secretary of Defense (Robert McNamara) to the President, *FRUS*, 1961-1963 4:732.

⁵ Reports from Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and James Forrestal to President Johnson, 12 December, 1963, *FRUS*, 4:704.

⁶ Bundy, William P. “[Memorandum on the Southeast Asia Situation, Probable Developments and the Case for a Congressional Resolution] Secret, June 12, 1964, 8 pp.” National Security Digital Archive: U.S. Policy in the Vietnam War, 1954-1968. Hereafter, National Security Digital Archives (NSDA).

⁷ *Ibid.*

Democratic convention. According to Bundy's notes, the only feasible time to begin operations would be during the week of June 22.⁸ Once the operations had officially begun, memos from the Department of Defense were sent to the U.S. destroyers, advising them to "be extremely watchful for any possible action including possible submarine activity either against the DESOTO patrol or the *Ticonderoga* task force."⁹ While it is certain that the *USS Ticonderoga* conducted intelligence operations along the North Vietnamese coastline, there is speculation that the ship ventured out of international waters and into North Vietnamese territory despite instructions to respect the Democratic Republic of Vietnam's (DRV) boundaries. The *Ticonderoga* was also instructed to avoid close approaches to the North Vietnam coast during the period when maritime activities related to OPLAN 34-A were underway.¹⁰

On July 31, 1964, an incoming "flash" message to the *USS Constellation* from the Commander In Chief Pacific Command (CINCPAC) in Washington instructed the OPLAN 34-A group to "make all preparations to get task group 77.6 underway but take no action, which would cause public speculation."¹¹ OPLAN 34-A was intended to be kept secret not just from the North Vietnamese, but from the US public, as well. If the North responded with aggressive action in response to US provocation (under OPLAN 34-A) as the advisers hoped they would, Johnson's administration would have the justification it needed to introduce the resolution they so badly wanted. Although the administration had been putting pressure on Johnson since June to ask Congress for a resolution that would give him the power to escalate the war, Johnson had

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ U.S. Department of Defense, National Military Command Center, NSDA: U.S. Policy in the Vietnam War, 1954-1968.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ The Joint Chiefs of Staff, "[Incoming Message to ctg. 77.6, USS Constellation from CINCPAC] Secret, Flash Message, August 1964, 1 p." NSDA: U.S. Policy in the Vietnam War, 1954-1968.

remained ambivalent. He did not understand the situation in the South, nor how escalating U.S. involvement and “bombing the North to save the South” would produce a favorable outcome. Furthermore, Johnson did not feel that Vietnam was worth fighting for.¹² Thus, on June 15, when Johnson met with his team of “the best and the brightest,” he instructed his advisors to limit their discussion to measures the administration could take without major military operations against North Vietnam and without the empowerment of a congressional resolution.¹³ Johnson knew that once he asked Congress for a resolution, the war would become political, and as a result, more complicated. The situation in Southeast Asia consumed much of the President’s time that Johnson undoubtedly would have rather spent on the upcoming election or his ambitious domestic agenda commonly referred to as his “Great Society.”¹⁴ Therefore, politicizing or escalating the war (and further complicating the already convoluted situation) were two things the President desperately wanted to avoid. However, when the August 2nd incident occurred, it “appeared to LBJ as a heaven-sent opportunity to try for the authority his advisors wanted without committing himself to the responsibility for the initiative.”¹⁵ Johnson’s advisors had convinced him that because of the increased VC aggressions and the deteriorating situation in the south, “there [(was)] a very strong argument for a continuing demonstration of US firmness and

¹² President Johnson made this point explicitly and unequivocally clear in a phone conversation on May 27, 1974 with McGeorge Bundy prior to the Tonkin Gulf incidents. See Goldstein, *Lessons In Disaster*, p. 113, who cites Michael Beschloss, *Taking Charge: The Johnson White House Tapes, 1963-1964*, pp. 370-73. See also the Digital National Security Archives (NSDA): U.S. Policy in the Vietnam War, 1954-1968.

¹³ Reference to “The Pentagon Papers”, quoted in George Kahin, *Intervention: How America Became Involved in Vietnam*. Alfred A Knopf, Inc., New York, 1986, p. 218.

¹⁴ See Gordon M. Goldstein, *Lessons in Disaster: McGeorge Bundy and the Path to War in Vietnam*, pp. 132, 133. Goldstein states that winning the presidential election was Johnson’s “overarching goal.” Because of this, Johnson could not escalate nor permit the situation in Vietnam to deteriorate to a “deeper level of crisis” than had already occurred. See also, Robert Dallek, *Lyndon B. Johnson: Portrait of a President*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK, 2004.

¹⁵ John Prados, *The Hidden History of the Vietnam War*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1995, p. 57.

for complete flexibility in the hands of the Executive in the coming political months.”¹⁶ In other words, the advisers once again called for “an immediate Congressional Resolution... that would endure rapid passage without extended and divisive debate”¹⁷ that would give the President the authority to take whatever action was necessary for the security of the United States and the preservation of peace. The difference was that this time, President Johnson listened.

THE TONKIN GULF INCIDENTS

On August 2nd, 1964, while conducting intelligence gathering operations along the North Vietnamese coast in the Tonkin Gulf, North Vietnamese gunboats attacked the American Destroyer, the *USS Maddox*. The gunboats, mistaking the *Maddox* (that, at this time, was within ten miles or less of the Vietnamese coast)¹⁸ as having participated in recent bombings of islands in the Gulf, engaged in hostile actions they believed were justified. North Vietnam claimed a band of territorial waters twelve miles from the coastline (although this information wasn’t made public until about a month after the incident).¹⁹ Still, upon receiving reports from the destroyer, President Johnson authorized the destroyer *Turner Joy* to support the *Maddox* in its continuing operations. According to records and personal accounts of various military personnel present in the Tonkin Gulf, August 3rd passed with little excitement.²⁰ Then, in the midst of the late evening hour and poor weather conditions, the *Maddox* and *Turner Joy* reported radar soundings of enemy warships and detection of torpedoes being fired at the destroyers. While reports of apparent sightings of wakes created from the approaching torpedoes were sent to CINCPAC,

¹⁶ Bundy, William P. “[Memorandum on the Southeast Asia Situation, Probable Developments and the Case for a Congressional Resolution] Secret, June 12, 1964, 8 pp.” NSDA: U.S. Policy in the Vietnam War, 1954-1968.

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ John Prados, *The Hidden History of the Vietnam War*. p. 49

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ Pat Paterson, “The Truth About Tonkin,” *Naval History; Military and Government Collection*, (February, 2008): Volume 22, Issue 1, pp. 52-59.

there is little evidence to support these claims. To this day there is no evidence that the ships had been attacked on August 4th, or that torpedoes were ever fired. Days after the event, a journalist asked James Stockdale, the Navy Commander in charge of the fight from the carrier *Ticonderoga*, “Did you see any boats?” and he replied “Not a one. No boats, no wakes, no ricochets off boats, no boat impacts, no torpedo wakes—nothing but black sea and American firepower.”²¹ There are also no photos of attacking boats, shells hitting destroyers, or prolonged observation of the enemy by sailors.²² Even President Johnson, a few months after the event, is recorded as having said, “For all I know, our Navy was shooting at whales out there.”²³

AFTERMATH

Regardless of whether or not the events on August 4th actually occurred, they set the stage for the next phase of US involvement in Vietnam. The attacks opened new political doors for Johnson that led to the “blank check” resolution that would authorize the president to escalate the war. The night following the attacks, the President’s advisers and high-ranking members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee gathered at a leadership meeting to discuss the next course of action with North Vietnam. The irony of this meeting was that it was conducted as if Johnson’s advisors hadn’t already created a plan. On June 12, 1964,²⁴ in an official memorandum, William Bundy stated that:

“The resolution must support any action required but must at the same time place maximum stress on our peaceful objectives and

²¹ George Kahin, *Intervention*. p. 223.

²² John Prados, *The Hidden History of the Vietnam War*. p. 52.

²³ *Ibid.* p. 53

²⁴ [Congressional Resolution] Secret, June 12, 1964, 8 pp.” National Security Digital Archive: U.S. Policy in the Vietnam War, 1954-1968. Hereafter, National Security Digital Archives (NSDA).

our willingness to accept eventual negotiated solutions, so that we might hope to have the full support of the school of thought headed by Senator Mansfield and Senator Aiken and leave ourselves with the die-hard opposition only from Senator Morse and his very few cohorts.”²⁵

Not surprisingly, the proposed resolution received the support of two of the most influential people in Congress—the Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (D-Montana) and the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senator J. William Fulbright (D-Arkansas). Senator Wayne Morse (D-Oregon) was the only voice of dissent during committee hearings and one of two voices of opposition on the Senate floor, just as Bundy had foreseen. As for everyone else, it seemed that “there should be no doubt as to whether the President should have the right to order the armed forces into action... and that Congress has the responsibility and should show a united front to the world.”²⁶

These events culminated in the passing of HJR 1145 and SJR 189 that would later be known as *The Tonkin Gulf Resolution*.

²⁵ Bundy, William P. “[Memorandum on the Southeast Asia Situation, Probable Developments and the Case for a Congressional Resolution] Secret, June 12, 1964, 8 pp.” NSDA: U.S. Policy in the Vietnam War, 1954-1968.

²⁶ McNamara, Robert and Rusk, Dean, “[Notes Taken At Leadership Meeting on August 4, 1964 (McNamara’s and Rusk’s statements not included)] Notes, August 4 1964, 5 pp.” NSDA: U.S. Policy in the Vietnam War, 1954-1968.

The Obligation for Patriotism: Why Congress Passed the Tonkin Gulf Resolution

KAREN ELISE SCHWINDT

Many scholars assert that Congress was tricked into voting in favor of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution.²⁷ However, upon close examination of previously overlooked information, I will explain that Congress was not tricked into voting for the resolution but passed the legislation for political reasons. The three types of evidence I examine will prove that Congress was obligated to support the resolution for their own political reasons as well as the political ambitions of the president. First, I will individually discuss the three principle people that could have tricked Congress—President Lyndon B. Johnson, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, and the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senator J. William Fulbright. Second, I will examine personal accounts of individuals present during the alleged attacks in the Tonkin Gulf and explain how Congress was not tricked by the falsification of the events on August 4th. Third, I will conclude with an explanation of how the falsification of events and blatant lies told to Congress actually served as a justification, rather than a legitimate reason, for democrats in Congress to pass a resolution that members viewed as a political necessity for the president. In doing so, I explain that Congress was not tricked, but rather voted in favor of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution because of a recurrent political theme that I define as “the obligation for patriotism.”

²⁷ For authors who argue this theory, see J. William Fulbright, *The Arrogance of Power*. Senator Fulbright initially argued that Congress would not have passed the Resolution had they not been tricked. Fulbright, who not only voted for but also sponsored the resolution, stated, “Many senators who accepted the Gulf of Tonkin resolution without question might not well have done so had they foreseen that it would subsequently be interpreted as a sweeping Congressional endorsement for the conduct of a large-scale war in Asia.” See also and J. William Fulbright, *The Price of Empire* where Senator Fulbright claims that Congress did not know it was being lied to in spite of the fact that Senator Morse (D-Oregon) and Senator Gruening (D-Alaska) accused the Johnson administration of falsifying the August 4th events. See also Randall Woods, *Vietnam and the American Political Tradition* who states that Senator Church and Senator Fulbright, like many others in Congress, believed the administration’s claims regarding the two attacks, and were therefore tricked into passing the resolution.

The escalation of America's longest and most controversial war began on August 7th, 1964 with the passage of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. The near unanimous support for the resolution not only equipped President Lyndon B. Johnson and his advisory team of "the best and the brightest" with the blank check they needed to widen the war, it also demonstrated the overwhelming support for the president and his policy in Vietnam.²⁸ Nevertheless, the expansion of the war that left 180,000 U.S. soldiers in Vietnam by the end of 1965 corresponded with increasing opposition in Congress.²⁹ As many senators became outspoken critics of the war in Vietnam, they argued that their initial support for the Tonkin Gulf Resolution was either misinterpreted or that they had been tricked into providing the president with the means to escalate the war.³⁰ However, these claims fail to explain how the entire United States Congress was simultaneously tricked while two Senators from Oregon and Alaska were able to avoid the alleged ruse. What better explains the political context behind the passing of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution is the hypothesis I propose, "the obligation for patriotism." This hypothesis argues that members of the U.S. Congress were not tricked at all, but instead rallied behind the president's political agenda out of patriotism.

There were three principle reasons why Congressional leaders suppressed their apprehensions about the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. First, the recent passing of the former president John F. Kennedy created a ubiquitous feeling of patriotism among U.S. citizens that left the country in an exceptionally sensitive state. Similarly, the alleged unprovoked attacks on U.S. ships in the Gulf of Tonkin ignited a united sentiment to "rally-round-the-flag" at home and

²⁸ "Congress and Vietnam," *New York Times*, 8 August 1964, p. 18.

²⁹ Felix Belair Jr., "Senators Challenge Rusk on Vietnam Policy Legality," *New York Times*, 29 January 1966. Also cited in *The Encyclopedia of the United States Congress* by Bacon, Davidson, Keller. Saba-Youn Index, volume 2, p. 1036.

³⁰ *The Encyclopedia of the United States Congress*, s.v. "The Tonkin Gulf Resolution," by Bacon, Davidson, Keller, volume 4, p. 1967.

reassert America's power and prowess abroad.³¹ Finally, the approaching presidential election in November 1964 that would normally ignite partisanship instead fueled an obligation for bipartisanship and support for the president in this time of perceived crisis.³² The obligation to appear united in patriotic support of the president and the United States left Congress with no viable alternative than to defer to the Executive Branch and vote in favor of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution.

Two Competing Theories— Congress Was Tricked Hypothesis

While there are people who assert that Congress passed the Tonkin Gulf Resolution because its members were tricked, this study will demonstrate that Congress was in fact not deceived but voted for the resolution for political reasons. I examine three types of evidence that prove that Congress was not tricked. First, I discuss the three key figures in Washington that appeared to deceive Congressional members—President Lyndon B. Johnson, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, and the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senator J. William Fulbright. Second, I examine personal accounts of military personnel present in the Gulf of Tonkin during the alleged attacks—The Deputy Assistant for Vietnam Al Friedman, Navy Commander James Stockdale, and Captain John J. Herrick of the USS Maddox. I also address two sources that made public the extreme lack of evidence of the August 4th

³¹ John E. Mueller, *War Presidents and Public Opinion* (John Wiley and Sons, Inc. New York, NY, 1973), p. 209.

³² See *The Encyclopedia of the United States Congress*, s.v. "The Vietnam War," by Bacon, David, and Keller, volume 3, p. 1182 regarding the "landslide victory of Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater in the presidential election of 1964" and the subsequent Democratic majorities in the House and the Senate that were essential components of Johnson's success. Also, "America at the Polls: 1960-2000" by Alice V. McGillivray, Richard M. Scammon, Rhodes Cook, Congressional Quarterly Inc, Washington D.C, 2001, under, "1964 Presidential Elections: 43,129,566 for Democratic candidates Lyndon B. Johnson and Humphrey to 27,178,188 for Republican candidates Barry Goldwater and Miller.

attacks as well as the possibility of U.S. provocation. Third, I explain that these lies tricked no one but instead served as a justification for congressional members to pass the resolution they knew existed for primarily political purposes.

Out of context, individual quotes and statements of Johnson's principle advisors could generate the impression that Congress was in fact fooled by at least one of these parties.³³ However, in any examined case of deception, it is evident that while deception may have occurred, it was not a decisive factor in the passage of the resolution. For example, while Robert McNamara may have sought to deceive Congress to ensure the rapid passing of the resolution, the apparent lies were not aimed at deceiving Congress but rather were intended to act as political disclaimers with which senators and congressman could later justify their votes. Similarly, Congress was neither deceived by President Johnson nor Senator Fulbright and was therefore not tricked at all. In fact, it is clear that Congress knew exactly what it was voting for and that perhaps it shouldn't have voted for the resolution at all.

The Three Key Figures

LYNDON B. JOHNSON

It is unlikely that President Johnson sought to deceive Congress by providing Congressional members with false information of the August 4th attacks. It was commonly understood that the humble president from rural Texas was primarily concerned with his ambitious domestic agenda more than anything pertaining to Southeast Asia.³⁴ Therefore,

³³ My argument regarding individual statements of the Johnson administration that appear to have "tricked" Congress is based off of the general evidence fabrication, threat inflation, and lies told with the intent of deceiving Congress. However, as I discuss below, the statements of members of the Johnson administration have been taken out of context and used to validate the argument that Congress was "tricked" when Congress was not tricked at all.

³⁴ This theory regarding Lyndon Johnson's primary focus during his presidency is commonplace. See Robert Dallek, *LBJ*. Also, David M. Barrett, *Uncertain Warriors: Lyndon Johnson and His Vietnam Advisors*. Also cited in *The*

Johnson was unlikely to make any rash or extreme decisions regarding foreign policy, which included the escalation of U.S. troops in a place that most Americans could not point to on a map. Because of this, Congress placed a certain amount of trust in their “peace candidate” President³⁵ who, throughout the year of 1964, made clear statements that “the United States sought no wider war.”³⁶ Referencing the escalation of U.S. troops, Johnson stated, “We are not about to send American boys 9,000 or 10,000 miles away from home to do what Asian boys ought to be doing themselves.”³⁷ These public statements demonstrated that Lyndon Johnson had no desire to escalate U.S. involvement, which placed the trust of Congress in the President who truly sought no wider war.

The theory that Congress was *tricked* into voting for the resolution stems from the fact that many in Congress felt betrayed and taken advantage of after Johnson (with the resolution in hand) began to escalate the war in Vietnam the following year. While it may be true that members of Congress felt “tricked” as they watched the war quickly expand, this theory overlooks two essential facts. First, Congress did not pass the resolution because they trusted that the President wouldn’t use it; they passed it for political reasons. Second, Congress was not blind to the fact that while the president was making statements of his desire for continued peace, he was also covering his political bases by appealing to the more aggressive right with statements like, “aggression unchallenged is aggression unleashed,”³⁸ and “firmness in the right is

Encyclopedia of the United States Congress, s.v. “The Vietnam War,” by Bacon, David, and Keller, volume 4, p. 1182, and Fred Logevall’s, *Choosing War*, (University of California Publishing Press, Berkeley, 1999, p. 98.

³⁵ *Encyclopedia of American Foreign Policy*, 2nd ed., s.v. “The Vietnam War,” by Alexander DeConde, Richard Dean Burns, volume 3, p. 599. See also Fredrick Logevall, *Choosing War*, p. 98.

³⁶ President Lyndon B. Johnson, “United States Takes Measures to Repel Attack Against U.S. Forces in Southeast Asia” (Address to the Nation, 4 August 1964, *U.S. Department of State*, volume L1, p. 259.)

³⁷ Lee Riley Powell foreword by J. William Fulbright, *J. William Fulbright and America’s Lost Crusade: Fulbright’s Opposition to the Vietnam War*, (Little Rock, Arkansas: Rose Publishing Company, 1984), p. 92.

³⁸ President Lyndon B. Johnson (Address at Syracuse University, 5 August 1964, *U.S. Department of State*, p. 260.) Also quoted in *Senate Congressional Record*, 6 August 1964, p. 18400.

indispensable today for peace...”³⁹ While the assurance that the president would not widen the war may have been comforting to many “doves” in Congress, the primary purpose for supporting the resolution was political. If Congress did not want a war, and they believed the President did not want a war, why would they vote in support of a resolution that authorized the President to make war?

Simply put, Congress voted for the resolution because they had to. Democrats not only had a partisan obligation to the president of their own party, they were also more generally opposed to the war in Vietnam and the escalation thereof. Although they may have hoped that the President wouldn’t actually use the resolution to widen the war, they also knew the text and general ambiguity of the resolution and therefore could not argue that they were *tricked* into voting for it. Also, it was commonly understood that the resolution was as much a response to the incidents in the Tonkin Gulf as it was a testament to the president’s firm stance in Vietnam—a necessary image to maintain for the approaching presidential election. Johnson’s “hard to communism” statements were clearly targeted toward the conservative right and support the theory that the resolution primarily existed for the election. If the Tonkin Gulf Resolution was purely about the war in Vietnam, those in Congress who were against a wider war would not have voted for the resolution. However, as a near unanimous vote of 416-0 in the House and 88-2 in the Senate⁴⁰ illustrates, almost everyone—many of who did not want the war to escalate—supported the resolution, and not because they were *tricked*.

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE ROBERT MCNAMARA

³⁹ President Lyndon B. Johnson, “United States Takes Measures to Repel Attack Against U.S. Forces in Southeast Asia” (Address to the Nation, 4 August 1964) *U.S. Department of State*, p. 259. Also quoted in a Recording of Telephone Conversation between McNamara and President Johnson, 3 August 1964.

⁴⁰ U.S. Congress, *The Tonkin Gulf Resolution*, 1964. 88th Congress., 2nd sess., H.R. 1441 and S.R. 189.

While it is unquestionably true that Robert McNamara blatantly lied to Congress to ensure the swift passage of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, it is debatable as to who (if anyone) actually believed him. In his video memoirs *The Fog of War* (2003), McNamara exudes an unwavering, unapologetic behavior while bragging of his ability to deceive and his conformity to a self-proclaimed rule to “never answer the question that is asked of you.”⁴¹ During the six hours and thirty minutes of total debate on the resolution in the Senate,⁴² there are multiple examples of doubtful senators questioning McNamara’s statements that illustrates that there was distrust in the President’s advisor and the provided *facts*. For example, Senator Morse (D-Oregon) insinuated that the “American naval vessels *conveniently* standing by” (while South Vietnamese naval boats attacked North Vietnamese islands) were actually strategically placed in that position.⁴³ Utilizing his own rule, McNamara avoided the Senator from Oregon’s implication by simply responding, “There is no connection between this patrol [(Intelligence gathering operations conducted by the *USS Maddox*)] and any action by South Vietnam.”⁴⁴ The subtle use of the word *conveniently* illustrates Senator Morse’s sarcasm in his statement, as he more than likely knew that McNamara would either lie or circumvent the question. This also demonstrates that Morse not only doubted the Secretary of Defense but also that he understood the provocation and fabrication of the August 4th incidents, therefore creating the possibility that other Senators may have known, as well.

⁴¹ *The Fog of War*, DVD, directed by Errol Morris, (2003; USA; Sony Pictures Classics, February 2004).

⁴² Congress, Senate, Senator Morse of Oregon speaking against the Tonkin Gulf Resolution to the Senate, S.R. 189, 88th Cong., 2nd sess., *Congressional Record*, 5 August 1964.

⁴³ Congress, Senate, Senator Morse of Oregon speaking against the Tonkin Gulf Resolution to the Committee on Foreign Relations and the Senate Armed Services Committee, S.R. 189, 88th Cong., 2nd sess., *Congressional Record*, 5 August 1964, 88:17871. Also Pat Paterson, “The Truth About Tonkin,” *Naval History; Military and Government Collection*, (February, 2008): Volume 22, Issue 1, pp. 52-59.
web.ebscohost.com/ehost/delivery?vid=6&hid=102&sid=214b...

⁴⁴ Congress, Senate, Senator Morse of Oregon speaking against the Tonkin Gulf Resolution to the Committee on Foreign Relations and the Senate Armed Services Committee, S.R. 189, 88th Cong., 2nd sess., *Congressional Record*, 5 August 1964, 88:17871.

Senator Aiken (R-Vermont) seconded Morse's skepticism as he further questioned the integrity of McNamara's evidence by asking, "Don't the South Vietnamese keep you informed as to their plans?"⁴⁵ The manner in which Senator Aiken formulated this question reveals that he didn't actually need to ask the question to know what the answer was (or at least should be). The question itself was rhetorical, as it was reasonable to assume that the South Vietnamese (who maintained a close relationship with the Department of Defense) would consult with the department's leader regarding operations and possible attacks. The question was targeted not toward an answer, but to see how McNamara would respond—with the truth, or with a lie. While McNamara responded that neither the U.S. destroyers, nor himself, were informed of any planned attacks from the South Vietnamese, Senator Aiken, seeing no point to continue the conversation, ended with a doubtful, "I see." Even with Senator Aiken's openly expressed fears, he suppressed his doubts and anxiety about the present situation forced upon Congress as he stated, "I believe that our country will be in greater jeopardy if we do not now support [the president's] decision."⁴⁶ Clearly, Senator Aiken was not *tricked* but was merely obligated—a precarious situation in which all other members of Congress found themselves, as well.

Although he was the dominant voice of deception, Robert McNamara was not alone in his pursuit to provide Congress with evidence that justified overt military attacks on North Vietnam. In an interview with *Voice of America* regarding the developments in Southeast Asia, a reporter by the name of Mr. Lambert questioned William P. Bundy, the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, regarding the proximity of U.S. destroyers to North Vietnamese islands. Lambert asked, "You don't think the North Vietnamese might have interpreted the

⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 295.

⁴⁶ Congress, Senate, Senator Aiken of Vermont speaking for the Tonkin Gulf Resolution to the Committee on Foreign Relations and the Senate Armed Services Committee, S.R. 189, 88th Cong., 2nd sess., *Congressional Record*, 5 August 1964, 88:17871.

Maddox's presence there as a sort of convoy escort for another attack?"⁴⁷ Bundy responded, "it is very hard to suppose that could have been the case..."⁴⁸ Contrary to Bundy's response, it was not only a likely but a rather obvious connection that the North Vietnamese undoubtedly made when seeing an enemy destroyer either in or very near their designated territorial boundaries. Lambert clearly made the same connection, as he was careful not to ask a question but rather imply the obvious answer. The common nuances of these discussions between the Senators and Johnson's advisors reveal a level of doubt and distrust in the advisors' statements that reverberated throughout Capitol Hill. This evident doubt in the honesty of the principle figures of U.S. foreign policy demonstrates that Congress, in spite of being lied to, had not been tricked at all. Whether or not other members of Congress initially noticed the lack of evidence of the August 4th attacks as Senator Aiken and Senator Morse did, the public debate between these Senators and Robert McNamara effectively removed any possibility that other Senators failed to draw the same conclusion.

SENATOR J. WILLIAM FULBRIGHT: CHAIRMAN OF THE SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE

The most fundamental aspect of understanding Senator Fulbright's role in convincing Congress to vote for the resolution is to understand the Senate's role in foreign policy. While the Senate and the House share the constitutional role of declaring war, the Senate experiences extra privilege because of the important relationship between the Foreign Relations Committee, on one hand, and the White House and the State Department, on the other.⁴⁹ This relationship is of cardinal importance in the process of making foreign policy, and Senator Fulbright as Chairman

⁴⁷ Assistant Secretary William Bundy (Comments on Southeast Asia Developments, *Voice for America* Interview, *U.S. Department of State*, 7 September 1964, volume 1, p. 335.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *The Encyclopedia of the United States Congress*, s.v. "The Vietnam War," by Bacon, David, and Keller, volume 2, p. 876.

of the Foreign Relations Committee, held one of the most important and trusted voices in Congress. Because of this, Congress confidently accepted Fulbright's assurances that his longtime friend, Lyndon Johnson, would not use the resolution to widen the war. In fact, an anonymous source later quoted Fulbright as having remarked in the Democratic cloakroom that, "This resolution doesn't mean a thing. Lyndon wants this to show he can be decisive and firm with the communists, too."⁵⁰ While Fulbright was correct in this statement, the theory that Congress was tricked as a result of Senator Fulbright's reassurances rests on the assumption that no one in Congress noticed the ambiguity in the resolution or the president's firm public statements. This theory falls short for two reasons. First, at least two people clearly understood the "blank check" nature of the resolution—opinions they openly shared with Congress as they voted against the resolution. Second, while Fulbright may have offered his private reassurance to members of Congress, he also plainly stated that "the resolution further express[ed] the approval and support of the Congress for the determination of the President to take such action as may be necessary, now and in the future, to restrain or repeal Communist aggression in Southeast Asia."⁵¹ Neither the resolution nor Senator Fulbright defined what action would be necessary, leaving the possibility that the Johnson administration could escalate. Furthermore, the possibility that the other 88 members of Congress who ended up voting in favor of the resolution did not realize the ambiguity of the text or understand that the resolution was, in a sense, a "blank check" is refuted by Senator Fulbright's response to an inquiring fellow Senator during a floor debate on August 5. Senator Brewster (D-Maryland) asked, "Is there anything in the resolution which would authorize or recommend or approve the landing of large American

⁵⁰ Lee Riley Powell, *J. William Fulbright and America's Lost Crusade*, 92. See also J. William Fulbright, *The Arrogance of Power*. Fulbright, in his personal memoirs, recounts his own decisions regarding the Tonkin Gulf Resolution and the role he played in facilitating its rapid passage.

⁵¹ Congress, Senate, Senator Fulbright (Arkansas) speaking for the Tonkin Gulf Resolution to the Senate, S.R. 189, 88th Cong., 2nd sess., *Congressional Record*, 5 August 1964, 88:17815.

armies in Vietnam...?”⁵² Here, Senator Fulbright removed all possibility of any misunderstandings regarding the text of the resolution as he replied, “...the language of the resolution would not prevent it. It would authorize whatever the commander in chief feels necessary. It does not restrain the executive branch from doing it.”⁵³

Personal Accounts of Military Personnel

DEPUTY ASSISTANT FOR VIETNAM AL FRIEDMAN

There is strong evidence suggesting that several members of Congress knew that Lyndon Johnson and his advisors had lied. If true, this fact is further damaging to the theory that Congress was “tricked.” First of all, the fact that the August 4th incident may or may not have occurred allows for the possibility that, if it didn’t, there were a number of people outside of Johnson’s administration who knew there was no second attack. This fact is illustrated by the resignation of Al Friedman, the Deputy Assistant for Vietnam. Mr. Friedman was instructed to fly to the two destroyers immediately following the reported attacks to investigate the situation.⁵⁴ Upon realizing there was very minimal evidence (if any) to support claims of the alleged attacks, Friedman quickly found himself in a precarious situation to either disregard the fact that the Johnson administration would base their foreign policy off of a lie, or face the inevitable

⁵² George C. Wilson, “Congress Repeating Tonkin Gulf Gamble,” *National Journal* 34, no. 43:3150. Academic Search Premier, EBSCO host. Section: Talking About Defense. p. 2.

⁵³ *Ibid.* See also Logevall, *Choosing War*, p. 204, which states that while most in Congress did not expect the resolution to become a declaration of war, they all understood its language that could allow the landing of more American troops in Vietnam. This theory is corroborated by the above statement by Senator Fulbright’s statement.

⁵⁴ Barber, Arthur. “[The Bay of Tonkin Investigation] Letter, August 5, 1964, 1 p.” /NSDA: U.S. Policy in the Vietnam War, 1954-1968. A letter from Arthur Barber during the Bay of Tonkin Investigation, discussing the resignation of Al Friedman while expressing the sense of “insiders” at the time that were unsure whether there were any torpedoes fired or not. For other sources that cite these exact and similar documents can be found in Logevall, *Choosing War*, George Kahin, *Intervention*, John Prados, *The Hidden History of the Vietnam War*,

consequences of stating the truth. Seeing no alternative, Friedman resigned from his position within 24-48 hours of his talks with McNamara, and instructed his friends to do the same.⁵⁵

U.S. NAVY COMMANDER JAMES STOCKDALE

Similarly, Commander Stockdale, A U.S. Navy pilot who led aerial attacks from the *USS Ticonderoga*, witnessed the events in the Tonkin Gulf and had, as he describes, “the best seat in the house.”⁵⁶ Unlike the clear skies of the August 2nd attacks, the events on August 4th occurred not only at night, but also during thunderstorms and intense rain that reduced visibility and increased wave heights to six feet.⁵⁷ While the ships reported more than 20 torpedo attacks, sightings of torpedo wakes, and unidentified vessels tracking the *USS Maddox*, Commander Stockdale flew overhead to get a better view of the attacks. According to Stockdale, “...our destroyers were just shooting at phantom targets—there were no PT boats... there was nothing there but black water and American firepower.”⁵⁸

U.S. NAVAL TASK GROUP COMMANDER CAPTAIN HERRICK

Commander Stockdale was not alone in his enlightenment. In fact, Captain Herrick, a U.S. Naval task group commander on the *USS Maddox*, reported that “review of action makes many reported contacts and torpedoes fired appear doubtful. Freak weather effects on radar and overeager sonar-men may have accounted for the reports. No actual visual [sightings] by

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Pat Paterson, “The Truth About Tonkin,” *Naval History; Military and Government Collection*, (February, 2008): Volume 22, Issue 1, p. 52-59. web.ebscohost.com/ehost/delivery?vid=6&hid=102&sid=214b...

⁵⁷ Ibid. For Commander Jim Stockdale’s personal account, see Stockdale, Jim and Sybil. *In Love and War*. Revised ed. Annapolis: U.S. Naval Institute, 1990.

⁵⁸ Jim and Sybil Stockdale, *In Love and War*, New York: Harper and Row, 1984, p. 23, quoted in Pat Paterson, “The Truth About Tonkin,” pp. 52-59. web.ebscohost.com/ehost/delivery?vid=6&hid=102&sid=214b...

Maddox.”⁵⁹ Herrick’s observation was written in a flash message to Honolulu and received by the Commander-in-Chief Pacific Fleet Admiral Grant Sharp. When Robert McNamara confronted Sharp regarding the possibility that there had been no attack, Sharp admitted that, “there was a slight possibility because of freak radar echoes, inexperienced sonar-men, and no visual sightings of torpedo wakes.”⁶⁰ Even with these and other reports that expressed a legitimate amount of doubt regarding the events in the Tonkin Gulf on August 4th, Robert McNamara took the small amount of evidence supporting actual attacks as conclusive proof. Even though McNamara chose to view the inconclusive evidence of the August 4th events as facts, others who witnessed the attacks neither believed McNamara’s reports nor went along with his statements.

The truth of August 4th was that no attacks had occurred. Although McNamara defended his subsequent retaliatory actions and statements with the small amount of inconclusive evidence presented to him on the 4th, it is extremely unlikely that McNamara ever believed the attacks actually occurred, either. Regardless of whether McNamara believed the questionable evidence or not, he saw enough evidence to corroborate the claims of attack against U.S. ships that would justify the presentation of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution to Congress. Since McNamara viewed obtaining the resolution as a political necessity for the president, he justified doing whatever was necessary to provide members of Congress with a legitimate reason to pass the Tonkin Gulf Resolution.

Although the many statements made by the Secretary of Defense were completely prevarications, the lies presented every member of Congress with the obligation to demonstrate their patriotic support for the president and their country. Not only that, but the lies also offered a

⁵⁹ Pat Paterson, “The Truth About Tonkin,” pp. 52-59.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

political disclaimer for any member of Congress to claim he or she had been tricked into voting for the resolution. Therefore, it was highly unlikely that any member of Congress actually believed the statements presented by McNamara or Rusk. Rather, they understood that the blatant lies told to the public and to Congress left each member with no other option than to pass the Tonkin Gulf Resolution.

DOUBT OF AUGUST 4TH ATTACKS MADE PUBLIC

Furthermore, a *New York Times* article dated August 5th referenced the administration's lies regarding the actual position and proximity of U.S. destroyers to the North Vietnamese coastline while also stating that, "There has been mounting evidence for months that the Pentagon and State Department were preparing to escalate the war into North Vietnam."⁶¹ Morse, who was not present at the top secret Leadership Meetings, still knew of U.S. attempts to provoke the North Vietnamese that would provide the administration with a legitimate excuse to widen the war. It is believable, then, that if Senator Morse and the *New York Times* made the connection, then other Senators were able to do so, as well. If this is so, Congress was most certainly not *tricked* into voting for the resolution. Rather, they viewed it as a political necessity for the President.

In an address to Congress, Senator Morse openly stated his unpopular opinion that the incidents in the Gulf of Tonkin were "as much the doing of the United States as it [was] the doing of North Vietnam."⁶² According to Morse, the strategic placement of the ships close to the

⁶¹ Senator Morse, quoted in the *New York Times*, "President Seeks Resolution By Congress Assuring Full Support for His Actions," 5 August 1964.

⁶² Congress, Senate, Senator Morse (Oregon) speaking against the Tonkin Gulf Resolution to the Senate, S.R. 189, 88th Cong., 2nd sess., *Congressional Record*, 5 August 1964, 88:17549.

location where the bombings took place was “bound to be misinterpreted as provocation.”⁶³ Not surprisingly, McNamara made the same connection, as he revealed in a telephone conversation between the President and himself by stating, “...the combination of the OPLAN 34-A incidents and the location of the Maddox undoubtedly led [the north Vietnamese] to connect the two events.”⁶⁴ If this wasn’t reason enough to inspire doubt in the other “trusting” minds in the Senate, Senator Morse goes on to reference the claim originally published by the *New York Times* by stating, “evidence [had] been mounting that both the Pentagon and the State Department were preparing to escalate the war into North Vietnam.”⁶⁵ The mere fact that no questions arose surrounding Morse’s lofty claim against the Pentagon demonstrates that there was an intense fear, inability, or apathy toward revealing the truth of the August 4th events.

One Senator from Ohio even went to the extent of publicly refuting Morse’s claim on the Senate floor. Senator Lausche (D-Ohio) declared that, “there is not a syllable of such testimony in the record which has been taken in the several days we have been listening to eye witnesses supporting the declaration made by the Senator from Oregon.”⁶⁶ Morse’s assertion was clearly heard by every person in the Senate that morning, as he fearlessly claimed that “[the U.S.] not only had full knowledge of [the South Vietnamese raids on North Vietnamese islands], but [the provocation] was being done with our tactic approval.”⁶⁷ Bold statements like those from Senator

⁶³ Congress, Senate, Senator Morse (Oregon) speaking against the Tonkin Gulf Resolution to the Senate, S.R. 189, 88th Cong., 2nd sess., *Congressional Record*, 5 August 1964, 88:17840.

⁶⁴ President Johnson and Robert McNamara, 10:20AM 3 Aug, 1964, Tape WH6408.03, Citation #4633, Recordings of Telephone Conversations—White House Series, Recordings of Transcripts of Conversations and Meetings, Lyndon B. Johnson Library.

⁶⁵ Senator Morse, quoted in the *New York Times*, “President Seeks Resolution By Congress Assuring Full Support for His Actions,” 5 August 1964.

⁶⁶ Congress, Senate, Senator Lausche (Ohio) in debate with Senator Morse (Oregon) regarding the Tonkin Gulf Resolution to the Senate, S.R. 189, 88th Cong., 2nd sess., *Congressional Record*, 5 August 1964, 88:17841.

⁶⁷ Congress, Senate, Senator Morse (Oregon) responds to Senator Lausche (Ohio), S.R. 189, 88th Cong., 2nd sess., *Congressional Record*, 5 August 1964, 88:17841.

Morse left no room for any misinterpretation or deception to occur and effectively removed the possibility that Congress had been *tricked*.

Political Disclaimers

After the 1964 election and the escalation of U.S. troops, it became seemingly quotidian for members of Congress to claim they had been tricked into voting in favor of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. Because this justification was used only after each member of Congress had provided their unanimous and patriotic support of the president during an election year, it is now apparent that this argument of deception served as a “political disclaimer” for those in Congress who understood the ambiguity of the resolution, did not want to vote for it, but knew that they were politically obligated to do so.

While the mendacious Robert McNamara undoubtedly lied to Congress regarding the validity of the second attacks in the Tonkin Gulf, these prevarications did not successfully deceive anyone. Since the North Vietnamese connected the dates of OPLAN 34-A attacks on their islands to the presence of U.S. ships in the gulf, it is not unreasonable to believe that members of Congress made the same connection.

Furthermore, since it was well known that President Johnson was primarily concerned with the 1964 election, it is also reasonable that Congress connected the “coincidental” timing of the alleged attacks to the quickly approaching election. Johnson knew that he had to appear firm with the communists because his presidential opponent had been advocating escalation since the Republican National Convention earlier that summer. The fact that the Tonkin Gulf attacks provided Johnson with a legitimate reason to “act tough” made the connection of the August 4th incident to possible U.S. provocation practically inevitable.

Even as Senator Morse (D-Oregon) boldly criticized the complete lack of evidence to support the administration's claims, as well as the government's provocation of North Vietnam, the reticent Congress remained silent,⁶⁸ therefore tacitly expressing the irrelevance of whether the events in the Tonkin Gulf actually happened or not. Either way, each member was obligated to vote for the resolution. And, with the administration's fabrications, they were able to do so with a comparably convenient political disclaimer that maintained that they had been tricked.

The Obligation for Patriotism Hypothesis

A more logical interpretation of Congress's passage of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution concludes that Congress passed the resolution not because its members were tricked, but because of the obligation for patriotism. While others claim that the expeditious passage of the resolution was either due to partisan calculations or lawmakers' unwillingness to exercise their constitutional powers, these theories, alone, are incomplete.⁶⁹ It is true that partisanship, or more correctly, the obligation to appear *bipartisan*, influenced members of Congress during these five crucial days. Similarly, it is also true that there was a general unwillingness or inability of the lawmakers to exercise their power to check and balance the executive branch. However, both of these theories (although partially true) fail to answer why partisanship was an issue and why Congress was either unwilling or unable to execute their obligation to check and balance the executive branch of government. This section will explain that Congress's constitutional obligation was held in abeyance during a presidential election year and temporarily replaced with an obligation for patriotism.

⁶⁸ Goldstein argues that all of Johnson's energy during 1964 was solely focused around the election—every aspect of his presidency was subordinated to his campaign.

⁶⁹ Louis Fisher and Ryan C. Hendrickson, "Congress At War," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 87, issue. 3, pp. 167-169. Military and Government Collection, EBSCO host, May/June 2008.

Why was partisanship an issue? Why were members of Congress unwilling to carry out their obligation as elected members of the U.S. government to uphold the Constitution and exercise their war powers? Contrary to previously existing theories, it is naive to claim that Congress did not realize or understand the authorization it ultimately gave President Johnson. Senator Morse (D-Oregon), at the beginning of his lengthy speech in the Senate, referred to Article 1, section 8 of the United States Constitution that does not permit the President to make war at his discretion, instead requiring Congress to declare war, as the justified reason for voting against the resolution. Also, Senator Javitz (R-New York) further removed the possibility of misunderstanding among congressional members by saying, “We who support the joint resolution do so with full knowledge of its seriousness and with the understanding that we are voting for a resolution which means life and the loss of it for who knows how many hundreds or thousands.”⁷⁰

While Senators had the word of the trusted Senator Fulbright that the resolution would not be used to escalate the war, they still understood the text of the resolution as well as the president’s obligation to favor a “firm position” in Vietnam for political and campaign reasons.⁷¹

⁷² More importantly, the Senators knew that because of the hypersensitive situation in the United States caused by the approaching election and the alleged “unprovoked attack” on U.S. ships, that to not pass the resolution would hold grave consequences for themselves and for the nation. Therefore, Congress was not tricked into voting for the resolution but was simply obligated to do

⁷⁰ Congress, Senate, Senator Javitz (New York) and Senator Morse (Oregon) regarding the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, S.R. 189, 88th Cong., 2nd sess., *Congressional Record*, 5 August 1964, 88:17834.

⁷¹ Senator Fulbright is quoted discussing President Johnson’s need to demonstrate that he [(the President)] can be firm “with the communists, too,” speaking in reference to the Republican Presidential candidate, Barry Goldwater’s own “hard to communism” position. Fulbright ensures his fellow democratic Senators that Johnson’s firm statements are targeted toward the approaching election and not his own foreign policy agenda. Fulbright is quoted in, Lee Riley Powell, *J. William Fulbright and America’s Lost Crusade*, p. 92. See also Senator J. William Fulbright, *The Arrogance of Power* (New York: Vintage Books: A Division of Random House, 1966), p.15, also p. 51.

so. This section will discuss the theory of the obligation for patriotism and how it applied to the week surrounding August 7th, 1964.

There are five main sections throughout the obligation for patriotism hypothesis: *The Perceived National Crisis*, *The 1964 Election*, *Consequences of Not Being Patriotic*, *The Limits of Congress*, and lastly, *the Irony of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution*. Each subsection will be broken down into smaller categories that reveal the obligation of Congress to demonstrate its unanimity, patriotism, and support of the President by passing the Tonkin Gulf Resolution.

The Obligation for Patriotism

The Perceived National Crisis

APPEARING UNANIMOUS

During a time of perceived crisis in the U.S., it was vital that Congress appeared united in its support for the country and the president. While many members had their own personal apprehensions toward the resolution, Congress voiced its near unanimous support to demonstrate their unanimity, as well as their patriotism. In reality, Congress more than likely knew better than to pass the resolution, but also knew that a vote against it would seem unpatriotic and could be misinterpreted as weakness abroad.⁷³ According to Senator Humphrey (D-Minnesota), this fear in Congress also quelled debate surrounding the resolution since “the aggressor may feel that because of our discussions, we are disunited, and then he could launch an attack.”⁷⁴ Since the attacks in the Gulf were provoked, it was highly unlikely that any debate in Congress would have

⁷³ J. William Fulbright, *The Arrogance of Power*, p. 54. See also Jane Kellest Cramer, *Militarized Patriotism: Why the U.S. Marketplace of Ideas Failed During the Iraq War*, p. 492, in reference to the obligation of Congressional members to “avoid being labeled unpatriotic; thus they could not espouse policies that could have been construed as weak on national security or as unsupportive of the executive branch in a time of crisis.”

⁷⁴ Congress, Senate, Senator Humphrey (Minnesota) regarding the incidents in the Tonkin Gulf, S.R. 189, 88th Cong., 2nd sess., *Congressional Record*, 5 August 1964, 88:17837.

actually been misinterpreted as weakness abroad. Debate could, however, stall or prevent the rapid passing of the resolution that President Johnson and other proponents sincerely wanted for political purposes. Whether proponents or opponents of the resolution, nearly every member of Congress fell victim to the Johnson administration's argument that any "display of disunity would only encourage further North Vietnamese aggression... and few were willing to take the political risk of opposing the President."⁷⁵

The precipitous passage of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution demonstrated the obligation of Congress to at least *publicly* appear to endorse their unanimous support for the president. According to proponents of the resolution, like the Senate Majority leader Mike Mansfield (D-Montana), victory in Southeast Asia would only "be done by an entire Nation united in their trust and in their support of the President of the United States."⁷⁶ Still, there existed a private sympathy in Congress to the cause expressed by Senators Morse (D-Oregon) and Gruening (D-Alaska) that is illustrated by the little to no rebuttal or debate against their rather extreme claims made on the Senate floor.⁷⁷ The fact that Congress still generated near unanimous support for the resolution reveals that the unanimity and support of Congress was unquestionably mandatory.

RALLY-ROUND-THE-FLAG

While the support for President Johnson in Congress was partially attributed to the repressed fears of opposing the president, this backing was also engendered by the fact that most people in America impulsively rallied in patriotic support behind President Johnson. This unusual phenomenon is typified by John Mueller's theory of the "rally-round-the-flag" effect.

⁷⁵ Andrew Rotter, *Light at the End of the Tunnel: A Vietnam War Anthology*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), p. 516.

⁷⁶ Congress, Senate, Senator Mansfield (Montana) regarding the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, S.R. 189, 88th Cong., 2nd sess., *Congressional Record*, 5 August 1964, 88:17815.

⁷⁷ Robert David Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 108.

Mueller looks specifically at the correlation between international events and the president's popularity rating. Others such as Kenneth Waltz, a prominent scholar of international relations, have also observed that "in the face of such an event, the people rally behind their chief executive,"⁷⁸ and approval ratings usually rise during, or immediately after, an international crisis.⁷⁹ According to Mueller, a rally point "must be associated with an event which 1) is international, 2) involves the United States and the President directly, and 3) it must be specific, dramatic and sharply focused."⁸⁰ The incidents in the Tonkin Gulf were just this, as is illustrated by Johnson's increasing approval rating that soared from 42% to 72%⁸¹ after the August 2nd and alleged August 4th attacks. Mueller goes on to state that the Johnson administration "came in under circumstances that can justifiably be classified under the rally-round-the-flag rubric, although the crisis was a domestic one"⁸² (in reference to the pervasive nostalgia that gripped the nation after President Kennedy's death). It is not surprising that the president saw it as politically expedient that these events occur in the few months prior to his paramount reelection.

While the factual evidence of the second alleged attacks is minimal (and at times practically non-existent),⁸³ it still appeared to much of the public in the United States that "unprovoked attacks" had occurred. As U.S. citizens quickly rallied behind their commander in chief, the government's elected officials found themselves in the precarious situation of having to do the same, lest they appear unpatriotic. In this sense, the obligation for patriotism was expressed through the unanimous (or near unanimous) support of the president and the Tonkin

⁷⁸ Kenneth Waltz, quoted in John E. Mueller, *War, Presidents, and Public Opinion* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1973), p. 203.

⁷⁹ Roper Burns, quoted in John E. Mueller, *War, Presidents, and Public Opinion*, 203.

⁸⁰ John E. Mueller, *War Presidents and Public Opinion*, p. 209.

⁸¹ A Louis Harris Poll quoted in Lee Riley Powell, *J. William Fulbright and America's Lost Crusade: Fulbright's Opposition to the Vietnam War*, p. 92. Also in "Louis Harris." Encyclopedia Britannica. 2009. Encyclopedia Britannica Online 27 May 2009, <http://www.Britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/255920/Louis-Harris>.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid. p.14 (Senator Morse's assertion that the Secretary of State or the Pentagon have not been able to produce "a scintilla of evidence" that the second attacks on August 4th ever occurred).

Gulf Resolution, as is illustrated by Senator Church's (D-Idaho) comment on the Senate floor. While not only expressing his knowledge of Congress's obligation to question issues presented to the legislative branch of government, he also articulates the obligation to unify around the flag by stating, "There is a time to question the route of the flag, and there is a time to rally around it... This is the time for the latter course, and in our pursuit of it, a time for all of us to unify."⁸⁴ Despite personal concerns about the resolution, Senator Fulbright stated, "What we must do... is swallow our doubts about the wisdom of the policy. We must rally to the Executive in a great show of national unity."⁸⁵ Although the obligation to rally to the Executive Branch was blatantly endorsed by Senator Fulbright, Congress did not need his recommendation to know that their patriotism and unified support for the resolution was required.

The 1964 Election

THE PERCEIVED NATIONAL CRISIS

While election time in the United States traditionally ignites passionate partisanship, a perceived national crisis does the opposite. It is therefore most interesting that in the three days surrounding the incidents in the Tonkin Gulf, there existed the simultaneous obligation to be partisan, as well as the obligation to be bipartisan in Congress. Due to the sensitive state of the country as a result of the assassination of President Kennedy and the unquestioned attacks on U.S. ships in international waters, it would have been detrimental to one's career and public image to appear as anything except fiercely patriotic. The fact that the U.S. provoked the August 2nd and alleged August 4th attacks was irrelevant, because the overwhelming majority of

⁸⁴ Congress, Senate, Senator Church (Idaho) regarding the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, S.R. 189, 88th Cong., 2nd sess., *Congressional Record*, 6 August 1964, 88:17837.

⁸⁵ Senator Fulbright, quoted in a *New York Times* article by E. W. Kenworthy, "Debate over Vietnam Policy and views of Key Senators", *New York Times*, June 6, 1965. Although the article is dated June, 1965, the quote from Mr. Fulbright was documented during the Tonkin Gulf Crisis.

Americans thought the incidents were “unprovoked and unwarranted attacks,”⁸⁶ just as Johnson said they were. Senator Keating (R-New York) states, “In my judgment, the members of the Republican Party have a particularly heavy responsibility to make clear at this time their full support and bipartisan backing for the action undertaken by the President of the United States...”⁸⁷ This bipartisan obligation is also illustrated as members of Congress from both parties voted in favor of a resolution they knew had the potential to become a “blank check.” Senator Simpson (R-Wyoming) also believed that “party lines cease to exist on issues affecting the national security of the United States.” Because of this, Senator Cooper (R-Kentucky) stated that he intended to vote for the resolution “not merely because [they were] required to do so because of recent events... but [also] because it express[ed] the unity of one purpose to defend our country.”⁸⁸ Senator Cooper and Senator Simpson both demonstrate that republicans in Congress were obligated to do multiple things: act bipartisan, display their unanimity, and vote in favor of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution.

THE UPCOMING ELECTION

On the other hand, democrats had their own reasons for passing the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. Although they were just as obligated as the republicans to demonstrate their support for the president because of the perceived national crisis, they were also obligated to act partisan because of the election. Just as extensive debate or the failure to vote in favor of the resolution could be misinterpreted as weakness abroad, it could also be interpreted as division in the party that would inadvertently undermine the president. This risky move would not only place the

⁸⁶ President Lyndon B. Johnson, “United States Takes Measures to Repel Attack Against U.S. Forces in Southeast Asia” (Address to the Nation, 4 August 1964, *U.S. Department of State*, volume L1, p. 259.)

⁸⁷ Congress, Senate, Senator Keating (New York) regarding politics and the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, S.R. 189, 88th Cong., 2nd sess., *Congressional Record*, 5 August 1964, 88:17870

⁸⁸ Congress, Senate, Senator Cooper (Kentucky) regarding the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, S.R. 189, 88th Cong., 2nd sess., *Congressional Record*, 5 August 1964, 88:17833. *Congressional Record—Senate*, 1964, 88:17833

president in a precarious situation, but the rest of the democratic world, as well. The republican presidential candidate was particularly disliked by the democrats and had already begun promising a “more firm” policy in Vietnam.⁸⁹ The possibility of a victory from the “war hawk” Barry Goldwater that could result from disunity within the democratic party was most certainly worth the risk of uniting to pass the “blank check” resolution for their fellow democratic president who, thus far, had “acted with a cool head and a steady hand... in the hope of restraining the dogs of war.”⁹⁰ It became their partisan obligation to demonstrate their patriotism, unanimity and support for the president not only because of the perceived national crisis but also to ensure the reelection of the “peace candidate” Johnson.

WHAT NATIONAL CRISES AND U.S. ELECTIONS HAVE IN COMMON

It was no coincidence that the Johnson administration had managed to tie both the republican and democratic parties to an obligation to support the president. The perceived national crisis did not allow any member to vote or speak out against the president, as they would appear unpatriotic. The elections in November also required that democrats in Congress subordinate their doubts and apprehensions to the greater cause of reelecting Lyndon Johnson, and therefore ensuring the loss of the Republican candidate Barry Goldwater.

In fact, President Johnson had successfully unlocked each individual key to victory. A circumspect Senator Keating (R-New York) in a nuanced address to Congress supporting the resolution, carefully confronted the administration on these peculiar events as he stated, “It is

⁸⁹ See Bruce E. Altschuler, *LBJ and the Polls*, University of Florida Press, 1990. Altschuler explains that the resolution did in fact defuse Goldwater’s assertions that Johnson’s foreign policy had not been tough enough. Certain polls suggested that Goldwater’s assertions were hurting the President’s popularity; the combination of Johnson’s response to the incidents in the Tonkin Gulf, combined with the overwhelming congressional approval of the resolution, effectively muted Goldwater’s charges against the President.

⁹⁰ Congress, Senate, Senator Mansfield (D-Montana) speaking for the Tonkin Gulf Resolution to the Senate, S.R. 189, 88th Cong., 2nd sess., *Congressional Record*, 6 August 1964, 88:17815

curious, and perhaps something more than a coincidence, that in recent years the greatest cold war crises have come in months immediately preceding an American election.”⁹¹

Consequences of Not Being Patriotic

PERSONAL REPERCUSSIONS

While Congress understood their obligation to demonstrate their unanimous support and patriotism, Congress was further motivated to support the resolution by the understanding of the inevitable consequences of doing otherwise. Whereas the cost of “the obligation for patriotism” is illustrated in the consequences of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution and the devastating outcome of the Vietnam War, the repercussion of *not* being patriotic is illustrated by the losses of Senator Morse and Senator Gruening in the 1968 Congressional Elections.⁹² While it is possible that one or both of these Senators who provided Congress with the only two dissenting votes against the resolution had no desire to be reelected and therefore viewed their truthful opposition to the resolution as appropriate and necessary, it is safe to say that the majority of the other members in Congress were not in this position. According to Ron McGee in his article *Ernest Gruening: Alaska, the West, and Vietnam*, “[Gruening] was destined for inglorious defeat in his 1968 reelection bid.”⁹³ If this was so, Gruening had nothing to lose by speaking out against the president or the resolution because the loss of his Senate seat was inevitable. For others, however, the fear of the unavoidable consequences that would ultimately ensue if someone in

⁹¹ Congress, Senate, Senator Keating (New York) speaking for the Tonkin Gulf Resolution to the Senate, S.R. 189, 88th Cong., 2nd sess., *Congressional Record*, 6 August 1964, 88:17870

⁹² *The Encyclopedia of the United States Congress*, s.v. “The Tonkin Gulf Resolution,” by Bacon, Davidson, Keller, volume 3, p. 1419.

⁹³ Ron McGee, “Ernest Gruening: Alaska, the West, and Vietnam,” *JOW*, Spring 2008, Vol. 47, No. 2, p. 55.

Congress did not demonstrate their patriotism and support for the president was another driving force behind the subordination of personal beliefs and apprehensions and the near unanimous support for the Tonkin Gulf Resolution.

Just as a Democrat could not speak out against the President as this would undermine the President's authority and demonstrate dissent among a party that was obligated to appear united, neither could a Republican disapprove of either the President or the Resolution. If either a Republican or a Democrat were to disapprove of the President, they would more than likely experience a public backlash for not appearing patriotic during the nation's crisis. At the time, emotions of outrage and patriotism "were running high in the country, and in Congress," and to not appeal to these national sentiments would be (in the most extreme sense) political suicide.⁹⁴ As Frank Church aide Bryce Nelson recalled, other dissenting senators "did not want to be lumped in with people like Morse and Gruening...lest they, too, be deemed extremists."⁹⁵ Not only that, but most members of Congress (with the exception of Morse and Gruening) did not want to stand in opposition to the super-heated rhetoric of the Cold War that demanded American politicians to speak and act tough.⁹⁶ Along with not wanting to appear "extreme," no elected official dared allow the accusation that "he was soft on Communism."⁹⁷ Therefore, it is likely that the vast majority of members of Congress sought to protect their political careers while deferring to their obligation for patriotism and voting in favor of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution.

⁹⁴ The War Powers Resolution, Chapter 1: "Congress Awakens to War Powers, 1964-1970." The Tonkin Gulf Resolution, using point C: The House Passes the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, and point D: The Senate Passes the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. pp. 4-5.

⁹⁵ Robert David Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 108.

⁹⁶ Ron McGee, "Ernest Gruening: Alaska, the West, and Vietnam," 56.

⁹⁷ Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, quoted in Ron McGee, "Ernest Gruening: Alaska, the West, and Vietnam," p. 56.

NATIONAL CONSEQUENCES

The other possible consequence of a failure to demonstrate one's support for the president and one's patriotism in a time of perceived national crisis was the election of Republican candidate Barry Goldwater over the incumbent President Johnson in the 1964 presidential elections.⁹⁸ Partisanship was (and still is) a large part of domestic politics, as is illustrated by Senator Fulbright's assurance to his fellow democrats that, "This resolution doesn't mean a thing. Lyndon wants this to show he can be decisive and firm with the communists, too."⁹⁹ Believing this to be true, Fulbright also said that he had not wished to make any difficulties for the President in his race against a Republican candidate whose election would be a disaster for the country.¹⁰⁰ It is reasonable to assume that other Democrats in Congress felt they were in the same position as Senator Fulbright—obligated to show their support for the President not only because the President requested it, but also because the alternative was worse than endorsing a resolution with which they did not necessarily agree. In this, the democrats in Congress justified their actions as necessary for the protection and security of their nation. If the democrats did not want a war in Vietnam that would greatly damage U.S. interests at home and prestige throughout the world, the more likely path to avoiding war was through the endorsement and support of the "peace candidate" Johnson (and his resolution) as opposed to speaking out against the president and risking the election of the "war hawk," Barry Goldwater.¹⁰¹ The

⁹⁸ See J. William Fulbright, *The Price of Empire*, where Fulbright explains that he, and other democrats, saw Johnson as "peacemaker" and Goldwater as the person who "threatened to drop an atomic bomb." Because of this, Fulbright realized that "to hesitate on the resolution would give the appearance of undermining the president" and allowing the Goldwater's victory in the 1964 election, pp. 104-106.

⁹⁹ Lee Riley Powell, *J. William Fulbright and America's Lost Crusade*, p. 92.

¹⁰⁰ J. William Fulbright, *The Arrogance of Power*, p. 51.

¹⁰¹ *Encyclopedia of American Foreign Policy*, 2nd ed., s.v. "The Vietnam War," by Alexander DeConde, Richard Dean Burns, and Fredrik Logevall, volume 3, p. 599.

obligation to appear patriotic and to demonstrate unanimous support for the President is illustrated by the dominant, albeit apprehensive view in Congress that, for the second day in a row, had favored a firm position on Vietnam.¹⁰²

The Limits of Congress and Powers of the President

A strange paradox exists in Congress's constitutional authority and power to declare war. Traditionally, in order for the President to exercise any means of war, the president must first obtain authorization from Congress. Ironically, during the time in U.S. history when more interventions and "war-like" activities were waged, Congress was hardly involved in the process of authorizing these overt military actions. This was due to three factors. First, Congress had accepted the idea that foreign assistance was a necessary, albeit politically unpopular instrument in the global struggle for influence between East and West.¹⁰³ Second, the fact that Cold War Presidents sought to make their mark on history during what is commonly referred to as "the Era of the Imperial Presidency," and third, the ability for the Executive branch to engage in clandestine "war-like" activities due to the formation of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

As the Cold War continued to escalate, presidents no longer felt the obligation to seek a declaration of war before committing American troops abroad.¹⁰⁴ And, with the use of the CIA, the president was able to conduct covert operations abroad without involving Congress, therefore preserving the secrecy (and debatable success) of the operations. Because of these developments, Congress could do very little in a situation so delicate, complex, and dangerous as that in

¹⁰²Max Frankel, "U.S. Admits Shift in Vietnam Stand: Advising and Assisting Role for Americans Omitted in Report on Air Raid." *New York Times*, 25 February 1965.

¹⁰³*The Encyclopedia of the United States Congress*, s.v. "The Vietnam War," by Bacon, David, and Keller, volume 1, p. 393.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.* pp. 391-392.

Vietnam.¹⁰⁵ More so, the power of Congress to influence foreign policy rested in its unanimity. Thus, when there was not likely to be sufficient Congressional unanimity to put substantial pressure on the President, the role of Congress became even more inconsequential.

RUSHING THE RESOLUTION TO CONGRESS

Also debilitating to Congress and its members was the speed at which the resolution was introduced. The resolution was rushed to Capitol Hill the day after the “unprovoked” attacks in the Gulf of Tonkin, leaving Congress with little choice but to adopt it—to do otherwise would be to appear incredibly unpatriotic at the apex of the “rally-round-the-flag” effect and would result in a negative consequence of one form or another. Therefore, the portrayal of the resolution’s passage as exigent and the general inability of Congress to influence the President or foreign policy left the Senators and Congressmen with no choice but to pass the resolution. The crucial timing of the events in aiding the “rapid passage [(of the resolution)] without extended and divisive debate”¹⁰⁶ is illustrated through Senator Aiken’s statement in the August 4th Leadership Meeting that, “By the time you send it up, there won’t be anything for us to do but support you.”¹⁰⁷ While Senator Aiken may have felt powerless in a room full of overwhelming and unquestioning support for the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, he still expressed his reluctant support for the resolution due to his obligation to at least appear patriotic.

To ensure the rapid passage of the resolution, proponents of the “blank check” attempted to expire the designated one hour of debate time on the Senate floor with the use of dilatory

¹⁰⁵ Tom Wicker, “Congress and Vietnam: Despite Spirited Debate, Capitol Hill Has Had Little Effect on U.S. Policy,” *New York Times*, 25 February 1964.

¹⁰⁶ Bundy, William P. “[Memorandum on the Southeast Asia Situation, Probable Developments and the Case for a Congressional Resolution] Secret, June 12, 1964, 8 pp.” NSDA: U.S. Policy in the Vietnam War, 1954-1968.

¹⁰⁷ McNamara, Robert and Rusk, Dean, “[Notes Taken At Leadership Meeting on August 4, 1964 (McNamara’s and Rusk’s statements not included)] Notes, August 4 1964, 5 pp.” NSDA: U.S. Policy in the Vietnam War, 1954-1968.

strategies, like calling for quorum calls that occupied valuable minutes of the Senate's time.¹⁰⁸ Not surprisingly or coincidentally, the two senators who, on more than one occasion, requested the absence of the quorum were the two principle proponents of the resolution—Senator Mike Mansfield (D-Idaho) and Senator William Fulbright (D-Arkansas). While some may argue that Congress was tricked because of actions such as these from two very trusted senators, it is clear that Congress wholly understood the true intentions of the two main supporters. Senator Wayne Morse (D-Oregon) once again stood up against the deafening silence in Congress as he made every senator present perfectly aware of why Senator Mansfield and Senator Fulbright seemed to be wasting minutes of debate. In response to one senator's question regarding where the minutes allocated for his discussion during the debate went, Senator Morse responded, "The proponents [(of the resolution)] did not have any speakers for the resolution. That is why they suggested the absence of a quorum."¹⁰⁹ Because the proponents knew that time remained for Senator Morse and Senator Gruening to openly oppose the resolution on the Senate floor, they strategically attempted to occupy as many minutes of debate time as possible in order to ensure the rapid passage of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution.

The reluctant support for the president and the resolution was by far the most popular form of *the obligation for patriotism* among senators and congressmen on August 7th, 1964. A New York Times spot survey of Senate opinion regarding the administration's policy toward Vietnam indicated that, "most members reluctantly support the present Administration policy for lack of acceptable alternatives."¹¹⁰ Therefore, even if there had been more elected officials who

¹⁰⁸ A *quorum* is the minimum number of legislative members that must be present for a vote to occur. Each time the absence of a quorum is suggested, the Speaker must call roll to ensure the minimum number of Senators or Congressman are present for voting. Any member may suggest the absence of a quorum, or request a quorum call.

¹⁰⁹ Congress, Senate, Senator Morse (Oregon) regarding the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, S.R. 189, 88th Cong., 2nd sess., *Congressional Record*, 7 August, 1964, 88:17873.

¹¹⁰ John D. Morris, "Policy In Vietnam Divides Senators," *New York Times*, 20 March 1964.

were willing to renounce their House or Senate seat, it was highly unlikely that they would willingly stand alone in opposition if they thought their dissent would be irrelevant.

*The Irony of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution—
Intended To Keep the Peace but Caused the Escalation of the War*

The most interesting and quite possibly one of the most devastating factors of August 7th, 1964 was not that Congress unconstitutionally abandoned its obligation to check the powers of the Executive branch, but that President Johnson set an unavoidable trap for himself that slowly but surely led to the downfall of what he hoped would be a great presidency. For the year of 1964 through the presidential election, Johnson may have strategically wanted to appear to be “hard to communists” to gain the upper hand over his political rival and opposing presidential candidate Barry Goldwater. However, Johnson sought this image strictly for political reasons, not because of an actual desire to be firm with communists or to widen the war in Vietnam. Unfortunately for President Johnson, this “firm image” he felt compelled to display came in the form of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, that, while intended strictly for appearance during the election, inadvertently led to the escalation of the war.¹¹¹ Johnson’s request for the passage of the resolution was also a tacit request for the unanimity of the Democratic Party. As the Democratic Party acted on their partisan obligation to support the president, their overwhelming unanimity inadvertently sent an explicit signal that expressed the sense of Congress that the President should act on the resolution. Since the text of the resolution

¹¹¹See also McGeorge Bundy, “American Policy and Politics: Examples from Southeast Asia,” speech at Council on Foreign Relations, New York, 1971, pp. 1, 5. Quoted in Gordon M. Goldstein, *Lessons in Disaster: McGeorge Bundy and the Vietnam War*. Bundy made a similar connection as he stated that, “the administration was almost forced to rely on the resolution and to make it carry a weight for which it was not designed.” In this, Bundy implies that the Tonkin Gulf Resolution was never intended for use, but rather for the President’s political needs.

was firm with the communists, President Johnson became obligated to act on the resolution he never really wanted, thereby leading to the escalation of U.S. troops and the expansion of the Vietnam War.

To this day, Johnson continues to receive much of the blame for the Vietnam War. While it would be inane to remove all blame for one of the most costly U.S. interventions from the chief executive's shoulders, the former president was not entirely responsible. Arguably, Congress should bear an equal, if not greater burden for the Vietnam debacle as its members failed to execute their primary responsibility of checking the Executive branch. This unsettling reality is illustrated through many Senators' later assertions that they had been tricked into passing the resolution—a justification that quietly reveals the personal acknowledgement of Congress's lamentable mistake.¹¹² As senators and congressmen incredulously watched the expansion of the Vietnam War that resulted from a resolution they viewed as a strictly political tool for the president, it is understandable that certain individuals quickly defended their vote by claiming to have been tricked. At the time, no one in Congress thought Johnson would actually use the resolution to escalate the war in Vietnam. So when he did, many members felt betrayed and tricked. However, a distinction must be made between the feeling of betrayal after the expansion of the war and being tricked into voting in favor of the resolution. While many senators and congressman may have felt tricked by the use of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution for something other than a campaign tool, they were most certainly not tricked into voting for it.

¹¹² See J. William Fulbright, *The Arrogance of Power*.

Conclusion

The combination of the perceived national crisis, the subsequent “rally-round-the-flag” effect, the approaching presidential election, and Congress’s apparent impotence toward a situation with no viable alternative, created an intransigent obligation to support the president and pass the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. The consequences of appearing divided in support of the president and a patriotic country were enough for every senator and congressman (with the exception of two) to set aside their apprehensions and vote in favor of the resolution. The realistic and pragmatic actions of the democrats, as well as their own partisan obligation for patriotism, were illustrated as they suppressed their own reservations towards the resolution for the protection and security of their beloved nation from the alternative presidential candidate who would without doubt or hesitation escalate the war in Vietnam. Similarly, the republicans were just as bound to an obligation for patriotism since their seat in Congress depended on the unanimous support and expression of patriotism for the president and their nation.

In reality, the resolution was presented to Congress for purely political reasons. The assertion that those in Congress were not aware of the purpose the resolution served is refuted by the evident apprehensions and doubts of senators and congressmen alike. No one in Congress was tricked into voting for a resolution that was quite clearly worded with blatant ambiguity that served as a political tool for the president. The theory that Congress was either unaware of the ambiguous text in the document that it supported or was tricked into voting for a resolution it did not understand is merely an excuse for those in Congress who handed the president a “blank check” to escalate the war and, as Senator Morse stated, who lived to regret it. Claiming that members of Congress were tricked simply covered their political bases and provided a justification for passing a resolution that eventually sent over 550,000 U.S. soldiers to fight in the

jungles of Vietnam. Thorough review of the evidence of the days surrounding the Tonkin Gulf Resolution clearly demonstrates that Congress passed the resolution not because they were tricked, but because of the obligation for patriotism.

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