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Just over a decade ago, in the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse and the sudden revelation of new documents from the former communist countries, Cold War scholars were particularly keen to de-center their studies. By this, they meant internationalizing what they did, shifting the focus away from Washington, and not only exploring what went on behind the Iron Curtain in more archival detail but also developing a "pericentric framework" to highlight the importance of smaller powers in the Cold War international system.¹ At the same time, historians working on specifically American topics had already begun to de-center their own work, looking less at the perceptions, motivations, and actions of the leaders in the White House, State Department, and Pentagon, and more at issues of race, class, and gender.

Yet strangely absent from this developing effort to go beyond simply recording what happened at the top of the U.S. executive branch has been any concerted attempt to explore the importance of party politics in the formulation of American foreign policy. This neglect is strange because, at the risk of stating the obvious, decentralization is the hallmark of the American polity. The Founders, of course, deliberately separated power between three co-equal branches. They also established frequent elections, which with the advent of party primaries means that many officials are thinking almost constantly about an upcoming poll. But in recent years few historians have explored the ramifications of these startlingly obvious facts of American political life. Decentering the Cold War has, in short, conspicuously failed to look at many vital aspects of the United States' decentralized system of government.

Seen in this context, Andrew Johns' highly sophisticated and richly documented account of the Republican Party's actions during the Vietnam is enormously welcome. As all the reviewers point out, Johns has made a major contribution to the study not just of the Vietnam War but also of the partisan political context within which U.S. foreign-policy decisions are made. Robert KC Johnson, himself the author of some of the finest recent work on the role of both Congress and electoral politics during the Cold War, is particularly keen to emphasize the book's broader importance, placing it in the context of Thomas Alan Schwartz's recent "plea for recognizing the ongoing importance of politics in our work." As Johnson correctly notes, Johns' book "shows what the field will lose as it redefines itself as a combination of international history and domestic-based works that primarily focus on analysing U.S. foreign policy through the prism of race, gender, identity, and culture." It will clearly lose a lot.

In terms of Johns' coverage of the Vietnam War, the reviewers all praise three specific elements of the book:

¹ See, for example, Tony Smith, "A Pericentric Framework for the Study of the Cold War," *Diplomatic History* 24 (2000): 567-91.

- 1) The enormous amount of research he has undertaken, not just in the oft-used presidential libraries and National Archives' Record Groups but also in smaller archives containing the papers of key congressmen and senators, which, as James M. Carter observes, "put archival teeth" into his challenges to conventional wisdom.
- 2) His careful emphasis on the divisions within the Republican Party, especially between the hawks and doves.
- 3) His "acute" treatment, as Joseph A. Fry terms it, of senior Republican figures, including Richard Nixon, Dwight Eisenhower, George Romney, and Melvin Laird.

The reviewers are particularly keen to commend the originality of Johns' book, despite the enormous literature on the Vietnam War. Take the divisions inside the party: as Johnson points out, Johns has performed a valuable service in establishing that "anti-interventionist sentiment was much stronger than scholars have realized in the mid-1960s GOP congressional caucus." Or take the actions of the individuals listed above: as Fry, who has published an important study of southern Democrats in the Senate during the Vietnam War, points out, Johns has performed an equally valuable service in rescuing someone like Laird from historiographical neglect, and not only demonstrating what a major role he played as an advocate of Vietnamization after 1969 but also revealing the evolution of his thinking when he was an influential congressional critic of Johnson's war.

James M. Carter, who has written an impressive book of his own on American state-building during the Vietnam War, also points to another aspect of Johns' book, which touches upon one of the biggest issues in the historiography of American escalation during 1965. Ever since Frederick Logevall's groundbreaking book, *Choosing War*, historians have vigorously debated the existence of a "right-wing beast." Did it exist? Would it have destroyed Johnson's presidency had he allowed South Vietnam to fall in 1965? Or was LBJ, in the wake of his massive landslide election in November 1964, which had been based on clear promises not to send American boys to fight and die in Asia, in a position to choose freely between withdrawal and escalation?² As Carter points out, Johns' impressive archival research gives credence to those who maintain that such a beast did exist, and that LBJ clearly had good reason to fear opposition from the right, more than the left, in the critical months leading up to July 1965.

Overall, what is perhaps most striking about these three reviews is that, in contrast to most roundtables, there is a marked absence of criticism. Fry and Johnson both have the odd "quibble," mainly with the coverage during the Nixon presidency: Fry wants more on the student protests to the Cambodian incursion; Johnson believes this part of the book is less original. Carter, in addition, thinks that Johns could have explored how the actual conditions in Vietnam impacted Republican Party politics. But all three are

² Frederik Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam* (Berkeley, 1999); "Inside LBJ'S War: A Forum on Francis Bator's "No Good Choices," *Diplomatic History* (2008), 32: 309-70.

overwhelmingly effusive about the way Johns conceptualizes this topic, how he has researched it, and above all how he has demonstrated that the Republican Party clearly mattered, especially during the years it was in opposition. And small wonder: this is indeed an excellent work that deserves the widest possible audience.

Participants:

Andrew L. Johns is assistant professor of history at Brigham Young University and the David M. Kennedy Center for International Studies. He is the author of *Vietnam's Second Front: Domestic Politics, the Republican Party, and the War* (2010), and the co-editor, with Kathryn C. Statler, of *The Eisenhower Administration, the Third World, and the Globalization of the Cold War* (2006). His current projects include a political biography of Senator John Sherman Cooper (R-KY), a reinterpretation of Nixon's "madman theory" using poker as an analytical framework, and an edited volume on the international history of sport and foreign relations since 1945.

James Carter received his PhD in 2004 from the University of Houston and is currently an assistant professor of history at Drew University. He is author of *Inventing Vietnam: The United States and State Building, 1954-1968* (Cambridge University Press, 2008).

Steven Casey is Reader in International History at the London School of Economics. He received his D.Phil. from the University of Oxford in 1999, and is the author of *Cautious Crusade: Franklin D. Roosevelt, American Public Opinion, and the War against Nazi Germany* (2001), and *Selling the Korean War: Propaganda, Politics, and Public Opinion* (2008), which won the 2010 Truman Book Award. His current research explores the relationship between the U.S. military and American war correspondents during the two world wars.

Joseph A. Fry is Distinguished Professor of History at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. His most recent books are *Dixie Looks Abroad: The South and U.S. Foreign Relations, 1789-1973* (2002) and *Debating Vietnam: Fulbright, Stennis, and Their Senate Hearings* (2006). He is the series editor of the Biographies in American Foreign Policy Series (Roman and Littlefield) in which sixteen volumes have appeared since 1999. Fry is currently at work on a history of the American South and the Vietnam War.

KC Johnson is professor of history at Brooklyn College and the CUNY Graduate Center. His most recent books are *All the Way with LBJ* (Cambridge University Press, 2009) and *Until Proven Innocent* (St. Martin's, 2007, co-authored with Stuart Taylor). He is working on a study of U.S.-Israeli relations in the 1960s.

Review by James M. Carter, Drew University

Just when one is fairly convinced there is little new scholarly ground to break regarding the Vietnam War, someone demonstrates otherwise. Within certain larger categories or themes, such as opposition to the war, the politics of escalation, or the Tet Offensive, this is still mostly true. It remains a significant challenge to offer anything that is not, in the main, a retreat of old ideas and arguments, albeit with a fresh wrinkle here and there. *Vietnam's Second Front* has gone beyond that to offer a comprehensive examination of an aspect of the War heretofore largely untouched at least to my knowledge: the Republican Party's response to the Vietnam War.

To be sure, Republican voices and views on the war have shown up here and there in other works. Whether Lyndon Baines Johnson's grouching over Republican opposition—"don't believe our newspapers and Republican critics—the country is for our Vietnam policy"—or Barry Goldwater's uber-hawkish harangues, anecdotes and examples can be readily found.¹ But that is just the problem; those mostly add up to a caricature that, in the end, doesn't really tell us much that is useful. When one considers the literature on Democratic opinion in support of or against the war, the yawning gulf in the scholarship is evident.

Johns' narrative, because it covers essentially a decade of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, necessarily contains much that will be familiar to the initiated—Kennedy's abiding concern with domestic political implications growing out of the Cuba fiasco and the Vienna summit, for instance, will come as a surprise to no one. Nor is it revelatory to say that LBJ was nearly obsessed with domestic politics during the "long 1964," as numerous other have. Yet by focusing specifically on the Republican Party as he does, the author offers something of a novel interpretation within this familiar terrain. For instance, he writes of John Kennedy's "Goldilocks" approach; "he pursued this policy by doing just enough to satisfy the needs of the moment, fearing the domestic political consequences of either not doing enough to save South Vietnam or going too far in escalating the U.S. presence in Southeast Asia. Looming over all these decisions and evasions, the Republican opposition was an omnipresent reminder of the need for caution." (p. 40) Here and elsewhere, Johns put archival teeth into the conventional wisdom that JFK and LBJ feared opposition on the political right more than they did the political left during the decade.

Accepting this argument, Republican opposition, which Johns concedes was "reactive," began a dangerous dance. Lyndon Johnson responded to Republican opposition (among other factors) by guarding his flanks with greater militancy and hawkish moves of his own. Johnson expanded the Goldilocks strategy by increasing the level of America's

¹ Melvin Small, *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves*. (Rutgers University Press, 1989), 85.

material commitment to Vietnam, but not too much. He did not fundamentally alter the equation. In doing this, he not only boxed himself in, he also boxed in Republican opponents who were left to carve out positions within a rapidly narrowing range of possibilities, all moving toward wider war. Neither, of course, could consider recognizing the futility of the project and suggest getting out. That option was beyond the pale well before major escalation.

Johns is at the same time careful not to portray the Republican Party as a unified force. The War in Vietnam was, by 1967, giving Republicans fits much the same as it was giving Democrats fits. Some such as Senators John Sherman Cooper and Jacob Javits chose outright opposition to the war while most pursued what can be categorized as more hawkish positions. Some won election to Congress because of their opposition to the war; some nearly lost because of it. Johns argues that because the elections of 1966 were “ambiguous at best,” the Party’s position on the War was of relatively minor import. (p. 127) What mattered is that Richard Nixon seemed to emerge as the Republican’s leading man and the war would matter a lot more in the election of 1968 than it had up to that point. Still, the Republican Party was badly divided on what position to take. In 1967, more Republicans came out in opposition to the war, even as influential politicians such as Goldwater continued to advocate escalation. (p. 137) And while Republican opposition to the war gained some modest respectability, according to Johns, and as polls suggested falling public support for the war, Congress continued to vote for greater and greater commitments, such as the \$12 billion appropriation in March 1967 that earned exactly one nay vote in both houses of Congress combined.

Johns chalks this up to a “permissive congress,” but does, thankfully, qualify this phrasing. Congress wasn’t just permissive, but cautious politically and ideologically committed to the Cold War. For however much war in Vietnam began to cause fractures, the consensus on a range of Cold War, anti-communist policies proved more durable.

Even as Republicans groped about for a consensus, the hawkish view seems to have prevailed, or at least been the loudest. That hawkishness, of course, is a commonplace characterization of the Republican Party’s response to the war in the literature. While the author admirably nuances that characterization, one still gets the impression that Republican opposition was largely thoughtless and reactionary, concerned more as it was with politics than with the situation in Vietnam.

The haranguing from such notables as Strom Thurmond, Barry Goldwater and Gerald Ford was utterly bereft of nuance and reflects deep and stubborn ignorance that can really only be taken seriously as domestic politics, certainly not as genuine or useful policy prescriptions. On the other hand, Johns highlights the outright opposition of those like perennial presidential candidate Harold Stassen and Jacob Javits, who declared “the time has come to mark the beginning of an end to our commitment [in Vietnam].” (p. 161) This theme left me wondering about a potential variant of Republican opinion, perhaps in the middle someplace.

I confess that this curiosity comes from a nugget discovered during my own research. In 1966 a team from the House of Representatives conducted the first ever comprehensive investigation into all U.S. programs in Vietnam. Reporting on the results of that investigation, Representative Donald Rumsfeld complained, “I want this record and you gentlemen to know how disappointed I was at the discussions in Vietnam with AID personnel. Invariably the reason [our questions] could not be answered was because of the lack of records, the lack of audits, the lack of procedures whereby this information would be available...I got the feeling...that the information is not available...It is distressing for a...member of a subcommittee to be attempting to come to grips with these problems, and to be repeatedly told that necessary and basic information is not available.” (p. 228) The subcommittee of which he was a part had discovered widespread waste, inefficiency, and corruption. Rumsfeld had also criticized the enormous role of private construction firms, accusing the Johnson administration of abetting war profiteering. These were not insignificant criticisms and really struck at the heart of the failure in Vietnam—hugely expensive waste and corruption.

It occurred to me while reading the book that these kinds of charges and statements would have been troubling to Republicans. Because these views were not genuinely opposed to the war and they highlighted deep deficiencies with the whole project, it stands to reason that prescriptions for solving these problems must surely follow. Beyond grist for the domestic politics mill, I wonder what the Party made of these more meaningful, more reality-based critiques of the war. Additionally, if Republican critiques focused on the actual situation in Vietnam, then the war takes center stage as having the most important influence or impact on domestic politics. This seems to me to speak forcefully to the point that foreign policy influences domestic politics. I think the author could have productively dealt much more with actual conditions in Vietnam in speaking to the political issues that animate the study. (There are numerous other points worthy of debate here, such as the author’s argument that LBJ’s decisions related to Vietnam were driven more by domestic politics than by any real efforts to achieve results in Southeast Asia. I have chosen to leave those points aside for the sake of brevity)

Finally, one of Johns’ most probing and interesting themes is the cynical way in which Richard Nixon successfully navigated the many shifts during the war to position himself as the Republican choice for president in 1968. Tragically, if expectedly, the Republicans did not show themselves any better than had Democrats in the years leading to Nixon’s presidency. Neither of the two Parties had a solution and Vietnam was cynically destroyed so that neither would have to admit it. Johns offers a fine analysis of the Republican Party response to the Vietnam War. He does so admirably and without getting bogged down in politics and absent any overt partisanship. I suspect it will be universally welcomed as an important contribution to literature on the War.

Andrew Johns contends that historians of U.S. involvement in Vietnam have given decidedly inadequate attention to domestic politics, Congress, and the Republican Party. He is correct on all counts, and *Vietnam's Second Front* successfully addresses these historiographical deficiencies. Having mastered the secondary literature and done exhaustive primary research in manuscript collections housed across the country, in government documents, in appropriate oral histories and memoirs, and in a broad array of both national and local newspapers, Johns has written a cogent, forcefully argued, and compelling account. In short, this is a highly impressive and informative book.

First, Johns argues that domestic political considerations had a continuous and primary influence on the formation and implementation of U.S. foreign and military policies in Vietnam—that, as Gabriel Kolko has affirmed, “Eventually, domestic politics takes precedence over everything else.”¹ Johns asserts persuasively that Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon all made policy based primarily on domestic political and electoral calculations. Based on these calculations, all three presidents were determined not to lose in Vietnam, all especially feared a right-wing backlash if they appeared weak or to be losing, all pursued an uncompromising and dominant negotiating posture, all sought to mold public opinion and thereby influence domestic politics, and all delayed crucial decisions for political reasons. Therefore, he concludes in an important observation, “The story of the Vietnam War . . . demonstrates the striking similarities and continuities between all three administrations and presidents.” (332)

Second, Johns responds directly to Robert David Johnson’s lament regarding the lack of scholarly attention to “congressional influence . . . especially in works dealing with the Cold War,” and I might add, U.S. involvement in Vietnam.² While devoting primary

¹ Gabriel Kolko, “Familiar Foreign Policy and Familiar Wars: Vietnam, Iraq . . . Before and After,” in *Iraq and the Lessons of Vietnam: Or, How Not to Learn from the Past*, eds. Lloyd Gardner and Marilyn B. Young, (New York: The New Press, 2007), 172.

² Robert David Johnson, “Congress and the Cold War,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 3 (Spring 2001): 76. Johnson provides two excellent chapters on Vietnam in *Congress and the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); William Conrad Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War: Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships* (4 vols.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986-1995) includes extracts from a broad range of important documents and oral interviews of congressmen and senators; Robert Mann, *A Grand Delusion: America’s Descent into Vietnam* (NY: Basic Books, 2001) provides an informative overview of executive-congressional relations from the early 1950s through the end of the war; the biographical essays addressing key congressmen and senators in Randall B. Woods, ed., *Vietnam and the American Political Tradition: The Politics of Dissent* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2003) afford collective insight into Congress, domestic politics, and the war; and Gary Stone, *Elites for Peace: The Senate and the Vietnam War, 1964-1968* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007) examines the nature and importance of dissent in the upper house.

attention to congressional Republicans, Johns demonstrates more generally that Congress should not be criticized solely for permitting the executive to fight this disastrous war, but also “held accountable for aiding and abetting the escalation and duration” of the conflict. (333) Like the Vietnam era presidents, congressmen and senators from both parties focused principally on domestic political ramifications and prospects for reelection and consistently voted to fund the war and opposed legislative attempts to curtail or end it. They too lacked the courage and political will to make the choices that could have helped alter flawed policies or end U.S. involvement.

Third, and most important, Johns evaluates the Republican Party’s role in the Vietnam War. This alone constitutes a significant contribution since there is no comparable book assessing either party and only a few studies that grapple directly with the topic of party politics and the war.³ Johns quickly disposes of any lingering misconception that the GOP’s stance on the war was monolithic. He does so by carefully tracing the activities of hawks such as Barry Goldwater, Ronald Reagan, John Tower, Strom Thurmond, and Gerald Ford; doves such as John Sherman Cooper, Clifford Case, George Aiken, Mark Hatfield, and Pete McCloskey; and key figures, such as Jacob Javits, Thruston Morton, and Melvin Laird, who altered their perspectives and came to doubt the war’s viability. While Republican doves, like their Democratic counterparts, helped make dissent respectable and kept alternative policies before the public, they possessed little political leverage and had the least influence on policy. GOP hawks had a far greater impact. Their constant pressure for more aggressive prosecution of the war and inflexible demands for victory rendered meaningful negotiations, a compromise settlement, or withdrawal politically hazardous for Johnson and Nixon. Of the Republicans who came to question the war, Melvin Laird, who has often received insufficient historical attention, was easily the most consequential given his status as the most vigorous and effective advocate within the Nixon administration for withdrawal and Vietnamization.

Johns’ treatments of Eisenhower and Nixon are especially acute. Although the retired five-star general and former president refrained from direct public criticism of either Kennedy or Johnson, he dismissively rejected gradual escalation of the war in favor of unrestrained bombing of North Vietnam and the mining of Haiphong Harbor. Eisenhower also counseled Republicans on the proper political strategies for addressing Vietnam, recommended threatening the use of atomic weapons, characterized dissenters and protestors as essentially treasonous, and in 1968 called for a declaration of war against North Vietnam. As a popular ex-president with formidable military credentials, his hawkish stance commanded great popular attention and respect. Both Kennedy and Johnson courted his favor and lived in fear of a public scolding from Ike.

³ Terry Dietz, *Republicans and Vietnam, 1961-1968* (NY: Greenwood, 1986) is a pioneering study, but is based on far less research and is far less inclusive in terms of information or chronological coverage. See also, Mann and Woods cited in note 2 for domestic politics.

Although Eisenhower and Nixon at times acted as a “tag team” in pressuring Johnson, Nixon exercised far greater influence on his party, U.S. policy, and the nation during the 1960s and 1970s. (116) Johns evaluates this influence thoroughly and perceptively. Vietnam, he demonstrates, was the key issue on which Nixon based his political comeback, and from 1964 through mid-1967, he rebuked Johnson’s ostensibly timid, no-win policies. Typically, Nixon declared his support for LBJ and then sternly chided him for failing to prosecute the war with sufficient vigor. As the 1968 presidential election approached, Nixon tempered his hawkish rhetoric and moved toward the center to attract moderates. Thereafter, he brilliantly maneuvered “to woo the doves while holding on to the hawks.” (196) When both George Romney and Nelson Rockefeller, his principal GOP challengers, stumbled badly in addressing Vietnam, Nixon won the nomination without committing to any “specific course of action in Vietnam,” save the Republican platform declaration in favor of ending the war. (216) He remained equally evasive during the general election while his intermediaries covertly encouraged South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu to oppose a Johnson bombing halt designed to facilitate peace talks and perhaps aid Democratic candidate Hubert Humphrey. Both the back-channel contacts and Nixon’s blatant lie in denying to Johnson any knowledge of the affair foreshadowed the Watergate scandal.

Ironically, after leading voters to believe that he had a definite strategy for ending the war, for winning a satisfactory peace, Nixon assumed the presidency with “no concrete strategic plan” for U.S. withdrawal. As Johns states so well, Nixon’s rhetoric over the previous four years “placed him in an unwinnable situation in an unwinnable war.” (239, 336) Despite his protests to the contrary, Nixon formulated his Vietnam policies primarily in response to the same public and congressional pressures that had dogged Johnson. Having successfully appealed to both hawks and doves in the election, his efforts to mollify these incompatible groups led to the contradictory and ultimately futile policy of simultaneous escalations of the war through increased bombing and invasions into Cambodia and Laos set against the steady reduction of U.S. forces and influence through Vietnamization. Tricky Dick had painted himself and his Vietnam policy into an inescapable political corner.

Based on this meticulous and insightful assessment of the domestic political dynamics of the 1960s and 1970 and the role of the Republican Party in the Vietnam conflict, Johns concludes convincingly that this most disastrous Cold War military intervention should not be characterized as “Lyndon Johnson’s war.” (338) Rather, given Eisenhower’s and Nixon’s actions and decisions, the pressures from GOP and southern Democratic hawks, and the failure of congressmen and senators from both parties to exercise their institution’s war power prerogatives, responsibility and blame should be placed on the entire nation.

Given the foregoing praise for *Vietnam’s Second Front*, the following two reservations (perhaps best termed “quibbles”) are indeed minor. As Johns correctly notes, when Democrats attacked Nixon’s policies much more aggressively than they had Johnson’s and

important Republicans sided with Democratic doves in seeking to end the war, Nixon gained crucial support in Congress and the general public from southern Democrats. But, Johns devotes no attention to these southern hawks and their reasons for backing the president. Similarly, in a book devoted to domestic politics, the student response to the U.S. invasion of Cambodia and the important political implications of this unprecedented national protest warrant attention and explanation. Finally, Johns' astute observation regarding the similarities among the Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon administrations' political motivations in devising Vietnam policies and his attribution of responsibility for the war to the entire nation raise a potential question for this roundtable discussion. Beyond the influence of domestic politics, what does the continuity in Vietnam policies over the three presidencies and the national responsibility for such a forceful and sustained intervention in this small Southeast Asian country reveal more generally about U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War? Or over even a longer chronological span?

In his SHAFR presidential address, Thomas Alan Schwartz issued a “plea for recognizing the ongoing importance of politics in our work and perhaps acknowledging that more traditional political explanations may explain more about American foreign relations than some of the more recent and trendier undertakings in our field.”¹ A 2009 review in *Journal of American History* featured Thomas Zeiler worrying about another major historiographical trend diminishing (perhaps unintentionally) the study of how domestic politics affected U.S. foreign policy. Zeiler conceded that “rooting the field in international history risks losing sight of the Americanness that is the very character of U.S. diplomatic history.”²

Andrew Johns’ richly researched and impressively argued book confirms the wisdom of such laments. A field that too often in recent years has chosen to ignore the intersection between domestic politics and the making of U.S. foreign policy is, alas, less and less likely to produce books that ask the needed questions explored in *Vietnam’s Second Front*.

Johns’ initial section reminds us that domestic politics remained a key concern for policymakers throughout the Vietnam conflict. As John Kennedy explained to Senate majority leader Mike Mansfield in mid-December 1962, “If I tried to pull out completely now from Vietnam, we would have another Joe McCarthy Red Scare on our hands, but I can do it after I’m reelected. So we had better make damn sure that I am reelected.” (28) And a few months later, JFK told a friend, “We don’t have a prayer of staying in Vietnam. Those people hate us. They are going to throw our asses out of there at almost any point. But I can’t give up a piece of territory like that to the Communists and then get the American people to reelect me.” (31)

But Johns’ interest lies not with Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson, or the congressional Democrats who came to dissent from their party’s Vietnam position, but instead with the GOP’s response to the Vietnam War. Johns argues convincingly that “Republicans played critical roles in the entire American experience in Southeast Asia”; indeed, “to tell the story of the Vietnam War without the GOP would be like watching ‘Seinfeld’ without Kramer.” The book carefully reconstructs how the GOP responded to the escalation of the war—a topic that to date had not received such a comprehensive treatment in any scholarly monograph.

¹ Thomas Alan Schwartz, “Henry, . . . Winning an Election Is Terribly Important’: Partisan Politics in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations,” *Diplomatic History* 33 (April 2009), p. 173.

² Thomas Zeiler, “The Diplomatic History Bandwagon: A State of the Field,” *Journal of American History* 95 (March 2009), pp. 1053, 1060.

The book's freshest interpretations come in its discussion of the Republican approach to Vietnam during the Johnson presidency. Johns claims, plausibly, that the GOP might have become the "party of peace" in the 1960s. Benefiting from comprehensive research in collections rarely—if ever—mined by diplomatic historians, Johns contends that anti-interventionist sentiment was much stronger than scholars have realized in the mid-1960s GOP congressional caucus. The search for a less militaristic approach to the war dominated the thinking of figures such as Kentucky senator John Sherman Cooper, whom Johns correctly labels "one of the least familiar but most influential dissenters on the Vietnam War." But the possibility of a peace caucus also emerged with the elections in 1966 of Charles Percy in Illinois and Edward Brooke in Massachusetts.

That said, Johns suggests that domestic political pressure ultimately pulled the Republican Party in the opposite direction. Despite the backlash against the Great Society, Johns positions Vietnam as an equally important explanation for the GOP surge in the 1966 midterm elections. The GOP gains in that election placed a premium on appeasing the "hawkish" wing of the party for politically ambitious Republicans, a development that especially threatened the GOP's nominal frontrunner, Michigan governor George Romney.

Vietnam's Second Front provides the best explanation to date for Romney's infamous claim that he had been "brainwashed" into supporting U.S. policy during a 1965 visit to Vietnam. Johns supplies the necessary context for Romney's political collapse, showing how the Vietnam issue was a serious one for Republicans in the 1968 primary campaign, and it therefore was impossible for Romney to have avoided discussing the matter with some specificity. What previously had been seen as a foolish gaffe, therefore, was actually a reasonable response to political requirements—if also, as Johns points out, an incredibly poor choice of words.

Johns is less original in his discussion of Nixon and Vietnam, a topic that, obviously, has received extensive scholarly attention. Nonetheless, he features a revisionist and well-argued claim about the role of Defense Secretary Melvin Laird in the Nixon administration. Johns portrays Laird as being much more powerful than the consensus interpretations of Nixon's national security policy have suggested, pointing especially to the extraordinary agreement through which Laird assumed his position (the President gave him complete freedom in staffing the Pentagon) and the major role Laird had played in the House in formulating the congressional GOP's response to Vietnam.

Johns is too kind to some of his subjects. He convincingly argues that some Republicans, especially in the Senate, tried to offer concrete alternatives to Johnson's Americanization of the war effort, and similarly tried to avoid approaching the war through an exclusively partisan lens. Yet, even in Johns' sympathetic portrayal, many other congressional Republicans (most, at least in the House?) appeared most interested in scoring political points by criticizing the President, and never came close to developing an intellectually coherent critique of Johnson's handling of the conflict. That development should come as

little surprise. The pending 2010 midterm elections have provided only the latest reminder that the party out of power has no obligation to offer positive policy prescriptions — and, indeed might suffer politically from doing so.

Such quibbles aside, *Vietnam's Second Front* makes an important contribution to our understanding of the Vietnam War, Cold War foreign policy, and executive-legislative relations in the foreign policy arena.

More broadly, this book also shows what the field will lose as it redefines itself as a combination of international history and domestic-based works that primarily focus on analyzing U.S. foreign policy through the prism of race, gender, identity, and culture. I quite understand the pragmatic reasons for these developments. We live in the era in which the Americanist wings of History departments have become dominated by scholars who research race, class, and gender. Entry-level candidates in U.S. foreign relations have a much better chance of obtaining positions if their approach either won't challenge the supremacy of the race/class/gender trinity or will fall primarily outside the realm of U.S. history. But the effects of such compromises are real: if diplomatic historians don't explore the kind of important questions that Johns addresses in *Vietnam's Second Front*, who will?

In a 2006 paper about past historiography in the field, Cornell's Fred Logevall chastised his colleagues for choosing to "treat the professional politicians involved in the making of foreign policy as though they were not politicians at all."³ In the long term, perhaps the best we can hope for is not quality scholarship like Johns' first book, but for historians of U.S. foreign relations to still see the study of "the professional politicians involved in the making of foreign policy" as among the field's most important missions.

³ Fredrick Logevall, "Water's Edge: Reconsidering the Foreign-Domestic Nexus in US Foreign Policy" (unpublished paper delivered at the University of Cambridge, October 30, 2006), cited in Schwartz, "Henry, . . . Winning an Election Is Terribly Important," p. 179.

Author's Response by Andrew L. Johns, Brigham Young University

Let me begin by thanking Steven Casey, James Carter, Andy Fry, and KC Johnson for participating in this roundtable, and Tom Maddux for organizing this discussion. I appreciate the obvious care and attention the reviewers put into their assessments of *Vietnam's Second Front*—each clearly took the time to read the book closely and engage its arguments on their merits -- and I am extremely grateful for their overwhelmingly generous comments about my research.

In an editorial in February 2010, deputy national security adviser John Brennan wrote that “politics should never get in the way of national security.” Brennan accused critics of the Obama administration’s foreign policy of deliberately “misrepresenting the facts to score political points,” and argued that politically motivated attacks only served to help the country’s enemies.¹ Brennan’s perspective is predictable given his position within the executive branch; after all, de-legitimizing criticism of foreign policy as unpatriotic or detrimental to national security is a familiar tactic that has historically been employed by virtually every administration since that of George Washington. But Brennan’s sense of (frankly disingenuous and hypocritical) outrage reveals a fundamental characteristic of U.S. foreign policy: the line dividing domestic and foreign affairs has, as John F. Kennedy observed, “become as indistinct as a line drawn in water.”

Vietnam's Second Front represents an effort to examine this nexus in the context of America’s longest war. More specifically, the book explains the pivotal role played by domestic political considerations in the making and implementation of U.S. Vietnam policy, and the reciprocal influence foreign policy had on American politics during the period from 1961 to 1973. As Robert McMahon pointed out in 2005, diplomatic history (or the history of foreign relations...or international history...or transnational history ... depending on one’s perception and definition of what we do) is, “intrinsically, a Janus-faced field, one that looks both outward and inward for the wellsprings of America’s behavior in the global arena.”² The trajectory of the scholarship in our field over the past two decades -- the emphasis on international history and area studies, the cultural turn (broadly conceived), and the increasingly sophisticated and varied approaches to understanding the U.S. engagement with the rest of the world -- reflects these competing

¹*USA Today*, 9 February 2010.

²Robert J. McMahon, “Diplomatic History and Policy History: Finding Common Ground,” *Journal of Policy History* 17/1 (Winter 2005), 97. In the same article, McMahon argues that since “the state’s highest-level actors rarely isolate or compartmentalize the domestic and foreign policy issues that they confront, students of the state...should consider exploring more fully the interrelationships between the two and the manifold ways in which politics, bureaucratic as well as electoral, impinge on both.” McMahon, “Diplomatic History and Policy History,” 104.

imperatives.³

Yet in the midst of this vibrant and engaging scholarship the influence of domestic political factors -- electoral calculations, partisan politics, and public opinion -- on U.S. foreign policy has been, at the very least, obscured.⁴ But I would suggest that given the nature of the U.S. system, it is crucially important to realize that “those who shape international affairs are best understood first as politicians and only later perhaps as statesmen.” As a result, “understanding how leaders come to and stay in office” can be just as important to our grasp of major events in international politics as “traditional ideas about the balance of power or polarity.”⁵ Fortunately, we seem to be on the cusp of a renaissance that recognizes the centrality of these influences on policymaking. Over the past several years, Tom Schwartz’s 2008 presidential address to the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations (SHAHR), Jussi Hanhimäki’s 2003 SHAHR Bernath lecture, and the recent books by Julian Zelizer and Campbell Craig and Fred Logevall (to cite but a few examples) have underscored the need to restore the balance in the literature and account for domestic political forces in our hierarchies of causality.⁶

It was heartening to discover that all of the reviewers acknowledge the importance of addressing these issues in the historiography and accept most of the arguments made in the book. For the sake of a productive discussion, however, allow me to focus on three

³On the richness of the scholarship in the field, see Thomas W. Zeiler, “The Diplomatic History Bandwagon: A State of the Field,” *Journal of American History* 95/4 (March 2009), 1053-1073.

⁴Recent historiographical overviews of the field either marginalize or ignore domestic politics. See, for example, Zeiler, “The Diplomatic History Bandwagon;” and Brenda Gayle Plummer, “The Changing Face of Diplomatic History: A Literature Review,” *The History Teacher* 38/3 (May 2005), 385-400. It is also instructive to note that in the second edition of their important methodological overview of the field, Michael Hogan and Thomas Paterson neglect the role of domestic considerations, inexplicably omitting Melvin Small’s essay on public opinion. See Michael J. Hogan and Thomas G. Paterson, eds., *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004). For the original essay, see Melvin Small, “Public Opinion,” in Hogan and Paterson, eds., *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 165-176.

⁵*New York Times*, 15 September 2007.

⁶Thomas Alan Schwartz, “‘Henry,...Winning an Election is Terribly Important’: Partisan Politics in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations,” *Diplomatic History* 33/2 (April 2009), 173-190; Jussi M. Hanhimäki, “Global Visions and Parochial Politics: The Persistent Dilemma of the ‘American Century,’” *Diplomatic History* 27/4 (September 2003), 446; Julian E. Zelizer, *Arsenal of Democracy: The Politics of National Security—From World War II to the War on Terrorism* (New York: Basic Books, 2009) ; and Campbell Craig and Fredrik Logevall, *America’s Cold War: The Politics of Insecurity* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2009). See also Logevall, “Politics and Foreign Relations,” *Journal of American History* 95/4 (March 2009), 1074-1078, a response to Zeiler’s *JAH* essay.

issues raised by the panelists in their comments. The first relates to the scope of the book. Professor Fry notes that I devote virtually no attention to the conservative Democrats (particularly those in the South) who provided critical political support for John Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon on the war. I plead guilty, but with extenuating circumstances. To be sure, Democratic supporters of the war like Senators John Stennis (D-MS) and Henry “Scoop” Jackson (D-WA) are intriguing figures who have not received their due in the scholarship (aside from Fry’s own work, of course).⁷ More generally, regional political differences on the war have not been explored sufficiently. There remain scores of rich congressional archives waiting to be mined by scholars of U.S. foreign relations, and fascinating books crying out to be written. I simply could not realistically examine in the detail required all of the political facets of the war in a volume which specifically examines the GOP role during the conflict.

The same rationale holds true for James Carter’s question as to why I did not explore in greater detail the conditions in Vietnam that drove the political debates at home. His point is well-taken, but this was a conscious choice on my part to define the parameters of the study. The book focuses on the *second* front of the war (the domestic political battles in Washington and throughout the country) as a coherent, interpretive whole rather than the story of the *first* front on the ground in Southeast Asia, which has, as Carter notes, voluminous attention in the literature. In doing so, it provides a more complete and detailed picture of the origins, evolution, and consequences of U.S. Vietnam policy as reflected in American domestic politics.

Professor Fry also wonders why the student response to the Cambodian incursion in 1970 does not receive more consideration. Discussion of such domestic unrest would, as he suggests, be appropriate in a book that focuses so explicitly on domestic politics. But recall what Lyndon Johnson once said to Undersecretary of State George Ball: “Don’t pay any attention to what those little shits on the campuses do. The great beast is the reactionary element in the country.”⁸ This typically unfiltered remark may have reflected the president’s frustration with protests against the war, but it is revealing just the same. Opposition from the left concerned JFK, LBJ, and Nixon far less than fear of political attacks from the right. Rooted in their collective experience in Congress during the “who lost China?” recriminations in the early 1950s, this concern pervaded their decision-making calculus and militated against serious consideration of significant de-escalatory actions. Some historians suggest that they misjudged the political environment, that the conservative threat was illusory and no right-wing monster lurked at the presidents’

⁷Joseph A. Fry, *Debating Vietnam: Fulbright, Stennis, and Their Senate Hearings* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006); and Fry, *Dixie Looks Abroad: The South and U.S. Foreign Relations, 1789-1973* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2002), especially chapter 8 on the Vietnam conflict.

⁸Quoted in Zelizer, *Arsenal of Democracy*, 194.

door.⁹ Yet the evidence demonstrates two things quite clearly. First, whether the danger was real or perceived, their fear of the right was palpable. Second, this fear was grounded in a discernable political reality. As a result, I chose to focus primarily on how the three administrations dealt with this pressure rather than the less influential (although certainly not inconsequential) student movement. Indeed, even Nixon, the archetypical anti-communist, worried more about criticism from the *National Review* crowd than he did about discontent from the antiwar left.

Another quibble deals with the book's treatment of the Nixon administration. As KC Johnson points out, the literature on Nixon and Vietnam has grown substantially in recent years, due in large measure to access to previously classified or restricted materials. Yet the work of Jeffrey Kimball, Lewis Sorley, and others rarely details the domestic political aspects of Nixon's Vietnam policy or demonstrates the continuities between his administration and those of his predecessors.¹⁰ Further, while the overarching narrative of Nixon, Kissinger, and Vietnam may be familiar to those immersed in studying the conflict, the internal dynamics of the Republican party -- with which Nixon grappled as president -- have received far less attention. The significant roles played in the administration's policy debates by key (but overlooked) figures like Melvin Laird, Pete McCloskey, John Ashbrook, and John Sherman Cooper -- which is the focus of the final two chapters and to which all the reviewers point as one of the book's strengths -- attest to the tangible domestic political constraints facing Nixon and help to explain why he pursued the simultaneous and contradictory policies of escalation and withdrawal.

Finally, Professor Carter's characterization of the GOP deserves a brief comment. Carter opines that "haranguing" from hawks such as Barry Goldwater and Gerald Ford lacked nuance and reflected "deep and stubborn ignorance that can really only be taken seriously as domestic politics," while more generally characterizing Republican opposition as "thoughtless and reactionary." He is correct. Much of the hawkish Republican rhetoric was reflexive to counter policies with which they disagreed in an effort to make political gains. Moreover, much of the GOP opposition was strategic. Many Republicans preferred to allow Kennedy and Johnson to hang themselves with their policies; they envisioned little political upside to giving up their rhetorical flexibility, especially as the party positioned itself for the 1968 campaign.

⁹For example, Fredrik Logevall questions the existence of a "right-wing beast" in 1964 and 1965, suggesting instead that there was "a remarkable *absence* of hawkish sentiment in public opinion [and] in Congress...in the key months of decision." See Logevall, "Comment on Francis M. Bator's 'No Good Choices: LBJ and the Vietnam/Great Society Connection,'" *Diplomatic History* 32/3 (June 2008), 356 (emphasis in original).

¹⁰On Nixon and the war, see for example Jeffrey Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1998); and Lewis Sorley, *A Better War: The Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America's Last Years in Vietnam* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1999).

That being said, it is important to remember that some members of the GOP did in fact attempt to provide nuanced and detailed positions on the war. But those who did frequently succumbed to political disaster, becoming irrelevant or marginalized both within the party and nationally. One need only recall George Romney's devastating "brainwashing" comment in 1967, Nelson Rockefeller's overly detailed proposals in 1968, or Pete McCloskey's pleas to Nixon to negotiate an end to the conflict from 1969 to 1972 to realize that efforts at specificity were made; they simply failed. More generally, this underscores a problematic feature of American politics: the fact that hawkish voices often drown out more thoughtful critiques of U.S. foreign policy based on short-term political calculations. As Senator Mike Mansfield (D-MT) lamented, "the scars of partisan politics are still with us years afterward. Let no one doubt that we have paid a massive price for the politics of foreign policy of an earlier day."¹¹

Let me conclude by responding to a comment from Professor Fry's review. In pointing to my argument about the similarities between the Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon administrations in the way each approached the war, he wonders whether these continuities have implications about the role played by domestic politics in U.S. foreign policy both in the broader Cold War and beyond. Unsurprisingly, my response would be an unequivocal yes. From the partisanship inherent in the Federalist and anti-Federalist debates over foreign policy in the 1790s to the anti-communism of the Cold War to the war on terrorism, domestic political imperatives have influenced (and continue to influence) foreign policy and decision-making, quite often to the detriment of the national interest.

Consider the Obama administration and the war in Afghanistan. The president has invested his personal credibility in the conflict. In August 2010 he said, "We face huge challenges...But it's important that the American people know that we are making progress and we're focused on goals that are clear and achievable. If Afghanistan were to be engulfed by an even wider insurgency, al Qaeda and its terrorist affiliates would have even more space to plan their next attack. As president of the United States, I refuse to let that happen."¹² His words sound very much like those repeated endlessly by Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon: "I will not be the first president to lose a war." Toward that end, Obama announced in December 2009 he would send an additional 30,000 troops to Afghanistan to counter the resurgence of the Taliban, and since he took office in January 2009 the number of U.S. troops assigned to the region has increased by more than 300%. These actions represent an obvious effort to blunt criticism from the right and avoid being tagged as weak on national security by the GOP. But in the same speech, he announced that U.S. forces would begin to be withdrawn in July 2011. Obama, like his predecessors in the Oval Office, recognizes the political peril that looms. He knows that

¹¹Quoted in Zelizer, *Arsenal of Democracy*, 193.

¹²*New York Times*, 3 August 2010.

if the situation has not stabilized by the summer of 2012, the Republicans will grab hold of the issue and use it to bludgeon the administration in the presidential campaign. Obama would be the first to agree, then, with Chester Bowles, who served in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations and observed that “the division between ‘domestic’ and ‘foreign’ policies no longer has meaning.”

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