AUGUST 7, 1964

Gulf Of Tonkin Response

House Gives Johnson War Authority

Johnson Bows Out

AUGUST 6, 1974

House Slashes Vietnam Aid
Cut Seen As Signal To Thieu

Nixon Resigns

coalition to stop funding the war

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Often the sweep of momentous events prevents us from fully comprehending their real historical significance. Sometimes we must step back and read what appear to be historical footnotes to really grasp the scope and import of the full story.

While world attention focused on the White House, history was quietly made at the Capitol last week. Amidst mounting rumors of his impending resignation, the House of Representatives appropriately dealt a staggering blow to Richard Milhous Nixon's Indochina policy. By a resounding vote of 233-157 the House adopted the Flynt-Giaimo-Conte amendment to substantially reduce military aid to South Vietnam. It thereby served notice to both Richard M. Nixon and Nguyen Van Thieu that they could no longer ignore political realities.

It is indeed ironic that the vote should have come when it did: August 6, 1974—ten years from the week that the House of Representatives gave the President unlimited war-making authority by unanimously adopting the infamous Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. The US Congress thereby succumbed to one of the greatest deceptions in American history—a deception which has persisted, in one form or another, over the past ten years. Watergate and the demise of the Nixon presidency are the latest but certainly not the final chapters.

What lessons are Congress and the American people slowly and painfully learning from the Vietnam-Watergate fiasco? The foremost lesson is that a policy based on deliberate deception is doomed, sooner or later, to fail. Lyndon Johnson could not escape from the 'great lie' of the Gulf of Tonkin. Slowly, but inexorably, his presidency was entangled in its own deceptions and contradictions and finally consumed by a storm of popular opposition to an unjust war.

Richard Nixon's mistake was that he too tried to perpetuate the 'great lie'. He extended the war—by changing its form—and called it "peace". He bombed Cambodia—but he did so secretly. Unable to deal with public knowledge of the real facts of the war, he formed the "plumbers" in response to the publication of the Pentagon Papers. As opposition to the war mounted once again, he attempted to surreptitiously disrupt and discredit that opposition. The result was Watergate. Richard Nixon, as much as Lyndon Johnson, was a casualty of his own Vietnam war.
WHAT HAVE WE ACCOMPLISHED?

FLYNT-GIAIMO-Cconte: MORE THAN AN HISTORICAL FOOTNOTE

Passage of the Flynt-Giaimo-Conte amendment represents a major turning point in Congressional attitudes toward American involvement in the Indochina war and a re-affirmation of the Congressional role in the formation of US Indochina policy. This change is the product of a ten year long process of failure, disillusionment, and continued, widespread, public opposition to a seemingly never-ending war. While the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution was a blank check for American involvement in Indochina, passage of the Flynt-Giaimo-Conte amendment represented a critical and sophisticated analysis of the dynamics of warfare in Vietnam and a commitment to move toward disengagement and a genuine political settlement.

It would, however, be an understatement to say that the size of the vote was surprising. It was, in fact, the largest anti-war majority in the House on the question of US involvement in Southeast Asia. In addition to the "disillusionment" mentioned above, there were essentially three factors that contributed to the astounding 233 majority.

The first was the overriding weakness of the Nixon presidency. When Richard Nixon referred to the loss of his "political base" last Thursday night, he was referring to more than the necessary number of votes to avoid impeachment and conviction. He was admitting that his ability to muster votes on any issue in either the House or the Senate had eroded to the point where he was, in fact, powerless. The support of moderates and conservatives on the Flynt-Giaimo-Conte amendment was, to a certain extent, a reflection of their abandonment of the Nixon presidency.

The second factor was the credibility and reasoned arguments of Congressman John Flynt of Georgia. As a southern conservative who had long supported the war, John Flynt's advocacy of a reduction in aid to Saigon seemed, to many of his fellow conservatives, politically safe and defensible. As a result, all but one member of the Georgia delegation and such ultra-conservatives as Delbert Latta of Ohio and Richard Ichord of Missouri supported the cut. Approximately twenty Congresspeople voted against aid for the first time.
The third and most important factor was the enduring concern of the American people over the past ten years and the translation of that concern in recent weeks into an intensive campaign of constituent pressure focused on Congress. Prior to the vote over twenty national organizations including Americans for Democratic Action, the United Presbyterian Church, and the U.S. Conference of Mayors sent formal letters to members of Congress in support of the aid cut. The number and diversity of the organizations testified to the widespread opposition to American war by proxy and the abuse of our national resources which that entails.

In addition to organizational statements, thousands of individual constituents literally flooded Congressional offices with letters, telegrams, and phone calls. In the course of making "whip calls" to remind Congresspeople of the upcoming vote, one Coalition staff member was plaintively asked by an aide to a New Jersey Congressman to "...please call your people off. We're going to support your amendment." The aide had apparently spent the better part of the previous two days dealing with constituents concerned about the Flynt-Giaimo amendment. Another aide to a prominent southern Congressman scornfully referred to the stack of letters on his desk from "knee-jerk liberals". His boss was one of the twenty people who voted against aid for the first time. Congressman Giaimo's office indicated that "several dozen" Congressional offices had made inquiries about his amendment in order to be able to answer their constituents. These ranged from high-school activists to business executives.

This flood of correspondence was the result of several kinds of activity. In any case, the principle is simple: Let people know the real facts and they will respond. Long Island activists, armed with stationery and typewriters, accompanied Jean-Pierre Debris and the Indochina Mobile Education Project to several speaking engagements and encouraged people to write letters immediately. A group of Washington activists spent a Saturday afternoon leafletting at a shopping center in conservative Goodloe Byron's district. The afternoon's leafletting produced an estimated thirty letters and telegrams--many probably from people who had not thought much about Indochina in the last year. Several letters-to-the-editor appeared in local newspapers across the country and there was a continuous presence on the Capitol steps by people participating in the Tiger
Cage Fast and Vigil.

Finally, Charlene Long of Arlington, Massachusetts writes that she discovered a Coalition Action Agenda on the street one day and "...was delighted to realize that someone is still trying to get us out of Vietnam totally...This particular leaflet resulted in a minimum of two letters to Tip O'Neill and I will work hard on others."

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

In spite of the victories that we have achieved in recent months and over the past ten years, we would be making a grave mistake if we assumed that the issue has in any way been settled. Gerald Ford has pledged a continuation of the Nixon-Kissinger foreign policy. The "honey-moon" mood that now pervades the Congress and the country at large may make it possible for the Ford Administration to recoup recent losses or at least to hold the line against further aid cuts in the immediate future. According to a report in August 11th's Washington Post, Gerald Ford's first meeting of the National Security Council, on his second day in office, was devoted to devising plans to restore the $300 million cut by the Flynt-Giaimo amendment.

We agree that the next few months should be a time of healing and national unity. But we also believe that one of the best ways to do that is to resolve, once and for all, the issue which has dominated American society for most of the last ten years and has led, in one way or another, to the downfall of our last two presidents.

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ECONOMIC AID

Committees in both the House and the Senate are voting on the Foreign Aid bill this week. Neither has scheduled floor consideration at this time, but there have been some committee votes on Indochina matters.

The House Foreign Affairs Committee has voted $573 million for economic aid to Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, $69 million more than last year. This is, however, much lower than the Administration request of $943 million.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee has included two amendments offered by Senator Abourezk in the bill. The first ends all foreign police and prison training and support either in this country or abroad and abolishes the International Police Academy. The second requires the State Department and A.I.D. to regularly report to Congress on the status of political prisoners in aid receiving nations.

It is quite likely that amendments will be introduced on the floor of each House to reduce the level of economic aid at least below this year's level. Senator Kennedy has introduced an amendment to the Foreign Aid bill calling for $475 million. His bill also requires that "a significant portion of funds be distributed through the Red Cross, the U.N. and other international organizations.

BINGHAM AMENDMENT CUTS US PERSONNEL IN VIETNAM BY 10%

Immediately after passing the Flynt-Giaimo amendment, the House of Representatives voted a 10% cut in the number of American personnel working in support of the South Vietnamese military. The amendment, offered by Bingham of New York, says the U.S. government will pay for no more than 2,850 people.

NIXON VETOES AGRICULTURE APPROPRIATION BILL

As his last official act, Richard M. Nixon vetoed the Agriculture Appropriations bill, calling it inflationary. This is the bill containing the 10% per country limitation on Food for Peace funds. An attempt will be made to override the veto. We will keep you informed of new developments.