Becoming a Dove: Senator Claiborne Pell's Opposition to the Vietnam War

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BECOMING A DOVE:
SENATOR CLAIBORNE PELL’S OPPOSITION
TO THE VIETNAM WAR

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INTRODUCTION

This study examines the opposition of Senator Claiborne de Borda Pell to the Vietnam War and his role as a member of the United States Senate’s anti-war movement. Pell’s speeches, Senate statements, and correspondence reveal his criticism of the Vietnam policies of Presidents Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon and his attempts to alter them. Also, this study traces the influences which shaped Pell’s decisions, including his own experience in the United States Foreign Service, his theory about the forming of foreign policy, the opinions of his Rhode Island constituents, and his relationship with other Senate “Doves” who opposed the war. Opponents to the Vietnam war were known as “Doves” which are the traditional symbols of peace, while supporters of the war were known as “Hawks.” In short, this work will show that Pell was one of the earliest and most consistent opponents of the war, and that he played an important role in the construction of the anti-war faction in the United States Senate.

Pell first opposed the war because he believed that America’s national interests were not well served by a massive military commitment to Vietnam. He also opposed the use of strategic bombing in North Vietnam, believing that the costs and risks far outweighed any potential gains. His opposition to the war grew as America’s military commitment to Vietnam increased. Pell viewed these increases as wasteful and was particularly angered by the number of American soldiers who were sacrificed for no apparent gain. His dissatisfaction with the war climaxed in 1969 when he, along with Republican Senator Jacob Javits, introduced legislation requiring the removal of all American combat troops in Vietnam. While their proposal was defeated, Pell supported anti-war legislation in the Senate until America’s involvement in Vietnam was finally ended in 1973.
His role in the Senate anti-war movement was important, but it has remained mostly unrecognized. Despite his strong opposition to the war, Pell never reached the level of national prominence in the anti-war movement as his fellow Senators J. William Fulbright of Arkansas, Frank Church of Idaho, Wayne Morse of Oregon, Ernest Gruening of Alaska, Robert Kennedy of New York, George McGovern of South Dakota, or Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota. Pell’s lack of recognition was due, in part, to the fact that he never became an anti-war candidate for President, as did Kennedy, McGovern and McCarthy. Nor did he have the seniority in the Senate which allowed Fulbright to become prominent as the chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Furthermore, Pell’s consistent, moderate anti-war stance along with his preference to work within the Senate rather than with the public anti-war movement meant he was overshadowed by those who used public presentations before protest groups as a way to build a national constituency. Thus, one of his limitations was that he could not gain national recognition and support for his proposals.

Pell recognized this limitation, but described himself as a “work-horse not a showhorse,” who made important contributions to the Senate anti-war movement.¹ In 1965, he became one of the first senators to speak out against the war and was one of only a handful of Democrats opposing President Johnson’s Vietnam policies, despite the potential political risks. Undeterred by the consistent defeats and pressure, Pell remained with the solid core of anti-war senators that steadily grew throughout the 1960s until, in the early 1970s, they were strong enough to pass anti-war legislation. Also, while Pell was not known as a fiery speaker, his intelligently-crafted arguments against the war inspired others in the anti-war movement. Unlike many who attacked the war on moral grounds, Pell preferred to demonstrate that the United States’ Vietnam policies were flawed because they did not best serve America’s national interests. His reasonable

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¹“Chafee and Pell Argue Positions on War, Other Issues,” The Providence Journal, October 17, 1972, 1, 33.
arguments, while often overshadowed by the radical speeches of others, provided a senatorial voice for moderate opponents of the war and strengthened the anti-war position as a whole.

Thus, the purpose of this study is not only to record Claiborne Pell’s opposition to the Vietnam war, but also to explore the Senate anti-war movement through his relationship with it. What Pell and other Senators offered to the anti-war movement was a sense of respectability and an official voice in Washington which inspired moderates to oppose the war. Although not the most famous Senate “Dove,” Pell helped to change the nation’s Vietnam policy as effectively as other more prominent senators. Like Pell, the strength of the Senate anti-war movement came from its consistent and often unglamorous long-term opposition to the war and not from occasional well-publicized actions or speeches. Therefore, Claiborne Pell was both part and representative of the Senate anti-war movement to end the United States’ military presence in Vietnam.

This study would not have been possible without the assistance of several people, including Claiborne Pell. Senator Pell has generously made himself available for personal interviews and has also provided a great service to the researcher by making the bulk of his papers available to the public while he is still in office. I would also like to thank Kevin Logan, the assistant director of Special Collections at the University of Rhode Island Library, where Pell’s papers are located. Mr. Logan’s assistance in finding documents was invaluable to this project. I would also like to acknowledge the efforts of Professor A. William Hoglund of the University of Connecticut for his assistance as an advisor throughout this project, and also for his incomparable skills as an editor. I also thank Professor Thomas G. Paterson and Professor Peter Bergmann, both of the University of Connecticut, for their suggestions for revising this work. Finally, I would like to thank my friends and family for their continued encouragement throughout this project.
I: BECOMING A DIPLOMAT

During his tenure as a United States Senator, and especially in his role as a member and later chairman of the United States Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Claiborne Pell has drawn upon his many years of training and experience in the field of diplomacy. The core of his experience comes from his seven years of duty with the United States Foreign Service between 1946 and 1952 and also his tenure as vice-president of the International Rescue Committee from 1952 until his election to the United States Senate in 1960. Despite this wealth of training, though, Pell acknowledges that the greatest influence in his life was his father, Herbert C. Pell. Pell has stated that his father was the “greatest man he has ever known” and credits him for inspiring a set of ideals which have guided him throughout his life: “integrity, independence, responsibility, and above all, concern for the underprivileged.” Pell’s commitment to these ideals shaped the evolution of his position on the Vietnam War, where his sense of integrity and responsibility led him to take a stand against the war despite the potential risk of such opposition to his political career.1

His father, Herbert Claiborne Pell, was born on February 16, 1884, in New York City into a family of great prestige and wealth. The family’s roots in America date back to 1672 when John Pell arrived to claim an inheritance which included much of Westchester County and the Bronx. For the next two hundred years the family prospered on the wealth and security made possible by its real estate holdings. By 1884 the Pells were renowned in the United States, not only for their wealth, but also for their

1Michael Steward Blayney, Democracy’s Aristocrat: The Life of Herbert C. Pell (Lanham, Maryland, 1986), 1.
successive generations of public service at both the state and federal levels.²

Herbert Pell grew up in Tuxedo Park, New York, an exclusive community founded by his maternal great-uncle Pierre Lorillard, heir to his family’s tobacco and real estate fortune. Tuxedo Park, completed in 1886, was one of the great symbols of the Gilded Age in America. Now more famous for its dinner jacket namesake, Tuxedo Park was a planned community of seven thousand acres forty miles north of New York City where society’s elite could relax and escape urban pressures. Tuxedo Park served as a retreat in autumn and winter for New York society in much the same way that Newport served as a retreat in summer, but with one important distinction. While anyone who could afford to live in Newport could do so, Tuxedo Park was built on private land, and therefore its only residents were those who were invited to become members of the Tuxedo Club, one of the most exclusive in America. Strict membership rules ensured that only the right sort were permitted to join, who in the viewpoint of the residents of Tuxedo Park, included only those of well established families and wealth. Thus Tuxedo Park was a community of staid refinement and comfort in contrast to the extravagance and opulence of the nouveau riche at Newport and other resorts.³

Life was comfortable for Herbert Pell as a child. The months from autumn through spring were spent at Tuxedo Park, while summers were often spent at the family’s summer home in Newport. After his primary schooling he was sent off to boarding school, first to St. Bartholemew’s and then to the Pomfret School, where he was a good, though not brilliant student. In 1902 he went to Harvard University, but he left the university after his sophomore year and never finished his formal education. Pell claimed that he disliked the importance that the university placed upon studying to pass examinations as opposed to learning to gain knowledge. He also stated that most of his

²Besides several state officials, Herbert Pell’s ancestors included four United States Senators and Congressmen, and William Claiborne the first governor of the Louisiana Territory. Ibid., 23-25; Leonard Baker, Brahmin in Revolt: A Biography of Herbert C. Pell (New York, 1972), 5-9.
³Ibid., 9-17; Cleveland Amory, The Last Resorts (New York, 1952), 77-121.
fellow students had an attitude towards wealth that was much different from his own. The Pell family had used its wealth to live comfortably, but others saw money only as a way to make more of it. According to Pell, most of his classmates believed that “it was the great duty of man to make money . . . and nothing else really counted,” a view which he abhorred. Instead, he valued his family’s wealth because “it provided an opportunity for seriously developing one’s own interests and character.”

Pell also believed in the ideal of noblesse oblige, as exemplified by his years of public service and his charitable contributions, such as his donation of his Newport home to the Catholic church to serve as St. Catherine’s Academy.

Freed from the bounds of formal education, Herbert Pell continued his education through reading and travel. In the ten years after leaving Harvard, Pell developed a pattern of spending most of each year in Europe while summering in America at Tuxedo Park and Newport. He had first gone to the continent in 1895 with his parents, but in 1908 Pell went to Europe alone and began to explore it with his automobile, accompanied only by his chauffeur. While in Europe, Pell refused to follow a set schedule, and instead traveled a few miles each day and studied the local history and architecture of the region, aided by his fluent knowledge of French and German. He also began an intensive study of art at museums across Europe. In this manner Herbert Pell got to know Europe and the cultures of its different peoples, a knowledge which would serve him well in later life.

In 1912, while summering at Tuxedo Park, Pell became interested in the Progressive party of Theodore Roosevelt and took an active role in his campaign, serving as a committee man for Orange County, New York. This decision shocked many of the other residents of Tuxedo Park, not merely for his support of Roosevelt, but because of his interest in politics at all. Nevertheless, Pell found politics fascinating and when the Progressives united with the Democrats in some New York counties he found himself a

4Blayney, Democracy’s Aristocrat, 31-32.
candidate of both parties for a seat at the state constitutional convention. He lost the race in the heavily-Republican Orange County, but got his first taste of running for office.\(^5\)

On November 3, 1915 Pell married Matilda Bigelow, the daughter of a socially-prominent New York family whose mother was a descendent of George Dallas, former Vice-President of the United States, for whom the city of Dallas is named. Pell and his new wife made a honeymoon tour of Europe, but the First World War cut short their travel. He attempted to join the military service following America’s entrance into the war but was rejected because of his weak eyesight. Upset by his inability to serve, he attempted unsuccessfully to use his influence to get a non-combatant's position. Pell then tried a new tactic and decided to run for Congress. His plan was to campaign in 1918 as a Democrat in the solidly-Republican Seventeenth District in New York City. He believed that if he were able to conduct a strong campaign, he could then call upon his friend and fellow Democrat, Franklin D. Roosevelt, who was serving as Assistant Secretary of the Navy, and secure a job in the Navy Pay Corps.

Pell’s chance of success seemed impossible; he was running in a strong Republican district against the head of the state’s Republican party. Many of his friends and Democratic officials advised him not to waste his time and money on a hopeless campaign. Pell ignored their advice and pursued his campaign. Several factors contributed to Pell’s campaign. First, his Republican opponent was so overconfident that he hardly bothered to campaign. Second, the popular Alfred Smith headed the Democratic ticket that year. Third, Pell campaigned against prohibition, while his opponent received the endorsement of the Anti-Saloon League. All of these advantages, along with Pell’s active campaigning, led to an upset victory over his Republican opponent by 1,700 votes. Shortly after his election his only child, Claiborne deBorda Pell, was born on November 22, 1918.\(^6\)

\(^5\) Ibid., 52-55; Baker, Brahmin in Revolt, 70-74.
\(^6\) Ibid., 77-82.
Pell served in Congress for only one term. In 1920 he was defeated when he ran for re-election, in part because of Warren Harding’s landslide and also because the Republicans no longer underestimated him. Despite this defeat, though, Herbert Pell did not abandon politics. In the summer of 1921, the chairman of the New York Democratic party resigned. Pell campaigned for the position and won as the result of a compromise by Alfred Smith’s Tammany Hall machine and the rest of the party. Pell served in this position until early 1926 after having conducted the party’s campaigns in 1922 and 1924. During these years he learned the inner workings of the American political system and formed close friendships with many of the other state Democrats. He especially grew close to Franklin Roosevelt, whom he had known before, and the ties between them became stronger during these years. At the same time he also grew apart from Smith, whom he had originally admired. Pell believed that Smith, who had originally run as a progressive, had become too conservative. Furthermore, he believed that Smith put himself and his own success ahead of the party’s interests. Disagreements between the two led to Pell’s resignation as state party chairman and marked the end of Herbert Pell’s political career.7

Following his resignation, Pell returned to Europe. On February 26, 1927 the Pells divorced. On June 20, 1927 Pell remarried, this time to Mildred Bigelow Tilton, a cousin of his first wife. Herbert Pell and his new wife now moved to Newport, in part so that he could be near his son who was attending the prestigious St. George’s boarding school there. His tours of Europe were now usually limited to summers, and he often took his son along with him.

During the late 1920s and early 1930s Herbert Pell was relatively inactive, especially compared to the vigorous life he had lived up to that time. While not financially ruined by the Depression of 1929, the hard economic times proved to be a death blow to the life style of high society and travel. He was also out of politics, though

7Blayney, Democracy’s Aristocrat, 66.
he did write several articles about his political views and gave his support to Franklin Roosevelt’s campaigns in 1932 and 1936, but his influence within the party had faded. President Roosevelt, however, recognized the growing conflict in Europe in the late 1930s and decided that his friend’s knowledge of the region was too valuable to waste. Therefore, in the spring of 1937 Roosevelt appointed Herbert Pell as United States Minister to Portugal.

Herbert Pell was in his early fifties when he began his new career as a diplomat, but his years of travel and experience in society’s highest circles served him well. Although there were few American interests in Portugal, Lisbon was still a very important post. In the upcoming war Portugal remained one of the few neutral nations in Europe and was thus used by both sides for the purposes of espionage and communication and also as a gateway to the allies for refugees and escaped prisoners of war. Pell also had a bird’s-eye view of the Civil War in Spain and was able to report on it to Washington.

Early in 1941, Pell was transferred from Portugal to Hungary where the political climate was even more tense. Though Hungary was still technically an independent country, it was a German satellite ruled by Regent Admiral Miklos Horthy. Almost simultaneously with Herbert Pell’s arrival in Hungary in April 1941, German troops entered the country to use it as a base to attack Yugoslavia. Pell had expressed fears about the Nazis shortly after Hitler came to power in 1933. Pell toured Germany several times during the 1930s, and he witnessed the Nazi military buildup and concluded that war was inevitable. He was also an early opponent of appeasement, declaring in a February 1932 letter to the New York Times that any appeasement of Germany would lead to the destruction of Europe. As the Ambassador to Hungary, Pell let it be known that he opposed the Nazi party and many anti-German Hungarians sought to appear with him in public as a symbol of their resistance. His service in Hungry ended with Germany’s declaration of war against America after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Pell
and his entire staff were interned until June 1, 1942 when they were returned to the United States in exchange for Hungarian and German diplomats.\(^8\)

Pell expected to be sent abroad again on another diplomatic mission, but the United States State Department did not favor his reappointment, because his close relationship with Roosevelt allowed him to ignore standard channels and to communicate with the President directly. Roosevelt finally appointed him as the American representative to the War Crimes Commission, which was to meet in England. Pell accepted the position, and after several delays on both sides of the Atlantic, arrived in London in November 1943. He played a key role in defining the duties of the War Crimes Commission and creating a classification system to determine who would be tried as a war criminal. His role ended, however, in January 1945 because the State Department, which still viewed him as an outsider, declined to ask Congress for a renewal of the funds necessary to maintain him in London. The end of the war and the death of his friend and political benefactor President Roosevelt effectively ended Pell’s diplomatic career.

In the postwar years Pell remained in retirement, once again returning to his role in society and as patrician of his family. He continued to travel in Europe, now accompanied by his grandchildren, and took a great interest in the beginning of his son’s diplomatic and political career. In June 1961, at the age of 77 he was traveling in Germany with his grandson and namesake Herbert Pell III. One evening while returning to their hotel in Munich following dinner, Herbert Pell suffered a heart attack and passed away, but his spirit and influence lived on to inspire the work of his son.

The early years of Claiborne Pell’s life were much like his father’s. Born on November 22, 1918, only a few weeks after his father’s election to Congress, Claiborne Pell, like his father, enjoyed comfort and luxury growing up. Pell grew up in Tuxedo Park and Newport. He also joined his parents on several European trips. Herbert Pell

\(^8\)Ibid., 86-105.
enjoyed showing his son the sites that he had earlier discovered and instilled within his son the cosmopolitan spirit that had inspired his earlier expeditions. When the Pells divorced in 1927, his mother gained legal custody of their eight-year-old son, but his father maintained an active role in raising him. The best evidence of this concern was when Herbert Pell winterized the family summer home in Newport so that he could be nearby as his son was attending St. George’s School in Newport.

Following his years at St. George’s, Claiborne Pell went on to Princeton University, where his father used his contacts to keep track of his son’s academic progress. In 1940 Pell graduated from Princeton cum laude. Between his schooling and his travels across Europe, he had become fluent in French, Italian, and Portuguese. During a tour of Europe in 1939, he found himself involved in an adventure that was reminiscent of some of his father’s earlier journeys. Pell had left America on a Polish ship which docked at Danzig where he and a few friends acquired a rowboat and went across the harbor to take photographs. Unfortunately for him and his friends, a German submarine plant was nearby, and Pell found himself under Gestapo arrest. According to his father, he got out of trouble by outsmarting the Gestapo:

Apparently knowing that there are just three things that are believed of every American in Europe - one, that he is crazy; two, that he’s a first class shot with a pistol; three, that he’s rich... Claiborne played on the first. He managed to convince the Gestapo that he thought these installations were art museums. He was left, however, in the Gestapo filing room and he amused himself looking over the files a little before he was released.9

With his family’s great wealth and connections with the White House, Pell could have avoided military service during the Second World War. Instead, he was determined to serve, as his father had been during the First World War. In the fall of 1941, before America entered the war, Pell enlisted in the Coast Guard as a cook. Promoted to Seaman and finally to Lieutenant following Pearl Harbor, he spent most of the war on

9 Ibid., 185-86.
patrol and convoy duty in the North Atlantic and the Mediterranean. In 1944 he was
stricken with undulant fever and sent to the Navy Hospital in Newport. While he was
recovering at the Navy Hospital he met Nuala O’Donnell, whom he married in December
of 1944. She came from another prestigious family and was the great granddaughter of
the founder of the Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company. Nuala and Claiborne Pell
remain happily married and today live in Georgetown and at “Pelican Ledge” in
Newport. The Pells have four children, Herbert Claiborne III, Christopher Hartford,
Nuala Dallas and Julia, and often spend time at their Newport home with them and their
five grandchildren.

Following his marriage and until the end of the war, Pell taught a course on
government at the Navy School of Military Government in Princeton. Pell’s career in
international relations began immediately after the end of the war when he was appointed
by the State Department to serve as a Special Assistant at the San Francisco Conference
of 1945 which established the United Nations. He held a minor position, but Pell’s
interest in the United Nations has continued, and on several occasions he has tried to use
the organization to help solve America’s foreign policy crises. In 1970 Pell returned to
the United Nations when President Richard Nixon appointed him as an United States
delegate to the General Assembly. Following the San Francisco Conference, Pell went to
Columbia University where in 1946 he earned a Master of Arts degree in international
administration.

In April 1946, the United States Foreign Service commissioned Pell and assigned
him to the embassy in Prague. In 1947 he moved to Bratislava, Czechoslovakia to set up
the consulate general there. While he was stationed in Bratislava, Pell had his first
contact with a Communist government. When the Marshall Plan was announced in June
of 1947, the Czechoslovakian Foreign Minister Jan Masaryk stated that his nation would
like to participate in the program, but was prevented by the Soviet Union from going to
the conference on the Marshall Plan. In February 1948, a Communist coup overthrew the
coalition government of Edward Benes, and Czechoslovakia joined the growing Soviet Bloc in Eastern Europe. Pell remained in Bratislava for several months after the coup and had what he described as “the very useful and disagreeable experience of dealing on a day-to-day basis with the new Communist government.”

The coup, coupled with the mysterious death of Masaryk, showed Pell the lengths to which the Soviet Union would go to maintain its control over Eastern Europe. His experience in Czechoslovakia was integral to the development of his anti-Communist views which were to play a key role in his later theories on the creation of American foreign policy.

In 1949 Pell went to Italy where he served as the vice-consul in Genoa until 1950, when he was transferred back to the United States. In Washington, he served as the Baltic Desk officer in the United States State Department which once again allowed him to work with diplomats on the other side of the Iron Curtain. In 1952, Pell resigned from the Foreign Service and returned to Rhode Island to work in the private sector. Most of his work was in investment banking as a director of International Investors Inc. and as a partner in Auchincloss, Parker and Redpath. He also served on the boards of several other firms, including a term as vice president of the North American Newspaper Alliance.

At the same time he maintained his interest in international relations by serving as the vice-president of the International Rescue Committee. While serving in this capacity in 1956, he worked on the Austrian border to help refugees fleeing the Soviet occupation in Hungary. Here, as in Czechoslovakia, Pell saw the extent to which the Soviet Union would go to maintain its hold on Eastern Europe and the sacrifices and effort that many were willing to make to escape Soviet domination.

During the 1950s Pell also engaged in politics at both the state and national level. He started as a fund raiser and executive assistant for the Rhode Island Democratic party. Pell quickly recognized, though, that advancement was limited in state politics and,

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therefore, offered his services to the Democratic National Committee. He served as a consultant to the national party from 1953-1960, as registration chairman in 1956, and also as a chief delegate and tally clerk at the National Conventions of 1956, 1960, 1964 and 1968. These positions, though, did not satisfy Pell’s ambitions and he decided that he wanted to seek public office. His opportunity arose in 1960 when ninety-two year old United States Senator Theodore Francis Green decided to retire after his fourth term. Receiving encouragement and advice from his father, family friend John F. Kennedy, and others, Pell decided to run for the United States Senate. The Democratic primary for United States Senator in Rhode Island that year featured three men: Pell, Dennis Roberts, and J. Howard McGrath. Because of the Democratic majority in the state, everyone realized that the winner of this race would be the next senator from Rhode Island. Very few, however, thought Pell could win the race when he first entered.

One disadvantage that Pell faced was his inexperience. Pell had never held public office before, while both of his opponents had served terms as governor of Rhode Island: Roberts from 1951 to 1958 and McGrath from 1941 to 1945. McGrath had also served as United States Solicitor General and Attorney General under President Harry S Truman as well as a brief term as United States Senator and Chairman of the Democratic National Committee. Another disadvantage was that Roberts had the endorsement of the State Democratic party, and an unendorsed challenger had never won before in Rhode Island. Third, Pell had to overcome his image as a wealthy Newport resorter to gain votes in working class neighborhoods.

Pell had several advantages of his own, however, to counter these weaknesses. Pell used his family’s wealth to finance radio and television advertising. He became one of the first candidates to use television in a senatorial campaign by creating twenty-six weekly television programs. These programs, running for five minutes, allowed him to present his positions to a much wider audience than could any individual public speech. He also engaged in an extensive door-to-door campaign across the state, especially in
working class neighborhoods. Both of these techniques increased his familiarity with Rhode Islanders. Furthermore, Pell recalled the long service to the Democratic party of both he and his father and noted that his grand-uncle, Duncan Pell, had served as lieutenant governor of Rhode Island from 1865-1866. Exploiting the connection between his family and Franklin D. Roosevelt, he had Franklin D. Roosevelt Jr. campaign for him and also used the former president’s traditional theme song “Happy Days Are Here Again.”\textsuperscript{13} Pell’s experience as a world traveller allowed him to speak to Portuguese, Italian, and French audiences in their native languages. All three of these groups made up a large percentage of the Rhode Island population and were mainstays in the Democratic party.

Another advantage that Pell enjoyed was that he was not tainted by political scandal, as were both of his opponents. After his opponent had been initially declared the victor in the Rhode Island Gubernatorial race in 1956, Dennis Roberts challenged almost five thousand mail ballots and subsequently won re-election by 711 votes. This action angered many Rhode Islanders who believed that he had stolen the election. On April 3, 1952, President Truman forced McGrath to resign as Attorney General of the United States. At the time the Justice Department faced accusations that it was negligent in the performance of its duties by failing to prosecute several people who had connections to the Democratic party and several of the department’s employees were forced to resign or even face arrest because of corruption and tax evasion charges. While McGrath himself was never charged with corruption, most believed that he was incapable of managing his own department.\textsuperscript{14}

In contrast to these two old-style politicians, Pell proclaimed himself the candidate of change as opposed to politics as usual. His experience in foreign relations proved to be another valuable asset to the campaign. Pell’s stance on communism was

\textsuperscript{13}Blayney, \textit{Democracy’s Aristocrat}, 136-37.
\textsuperscript{14}For the complete story of the McGrath scandal see Robert J. Donovan, \textit{Tumultuous Years: The Presidency of Harry S Truman, 1949-1953} (New York, 1982), 375-81.
unique during this period of the Cold War, because he stated that the United States
should deal with each communist nation separately rather than as part of a bloc. As the
campaign progressed, Pell’s popularity grew, and in the end he won a staggering upset,
receiving 83,000 votes to Roberts’ 45,000 and McGrath’s 7,500. One key to this victory
was that patrician Pell convinced working class and ethnic voters that he would respond
to their needs better than the traditional politicians. In November Pell handily defeated
his Republican opponent Raoul Archambault by over 150,000 votes, taking 68.9% of the
vote.\textsuperscript{15}

Pell’s victory only began his political career, but in many ways it was the pinnacle
of his life’s work up to that point. In an interview shortly after his election he stated,
“this is the type of life, the type of work, I’ve always had in the back of my mind since I
was twenty.”\textsuperscript{16} In reality, however, Pell’s training for the United States Senate had begun
long before that, in the grooming for public service that he received since birth. The key
factor in his development was his father who demonstrated by word and example just
how a public servant should act. Family wealth had allowed Claiborne Pell to receive a
first-class education and to travel throughout the world, but it was the influence of his
father, who had himself gone against the traditional stance of his social class to enter
politics, that inspired Pell to seek public service first in the Foreign Service and then in
the Senate.

Pell’s upbringing and experience not only inspired him to run for the Senate, but
also influenced his decisions and opinions on United States policy. When he entered the
Senate, shortly before the inauguration of President Kennedy in January 1961, Pell found
himself part of a new generation of leaders who were promising change. Pell’s theory of
dealing with each Communist nation separately was seen as radical by some, but it
accurately reflected the opportunity to exploit fissures in the Soviet Bloc. He also had an

\textsuperscript{16}Current Biography:1972, 343.
unique vantage point from which to make these observations, having been the only member of the Senate in the Foreign Service and the only one who had ever served in a Communist nation.

On January 3, 1961 Pell took his oath as the junior Senator from Rhode Island along with the other members of the Eighty-seventh Congress. He wanted to be named to the Foreign Relations Committee because of his diplomatic experience, but there were no openings on it at the time. Instead, he was assigned to the Labor and Public Welfare Committee, a traditional bastion for northern Democrats. His committee assignment, though, did not prohibit him from speaking out on major foreign policy issues, and he was determined to add his input on each issue. Pell’s Foreign Service experience proved valuable throughout his senate career because it gave him a singular insight into the intricacies of foreign relations and the bureaucracy of the State Department. According to Pell, his experience allowed him to appreciate the difficulty of Foreign Service officers who were trying to inform the Senate about the realities of the situation in a region while trying to protect or promote their careers at the same time. Furthermore, Pell’s knowledge of Europe was better than most of his colleagues, because of his foreign service duty and his years of travel to many of the crisis areas of the Cold War. He also brought with him to the Senate a diplomat’s insight into the difficulty of creating a sound foreign policy.17

The first major foreign policy crisis to face the new Kennedy administration was the Bay of Pigs invasion. The failure of United States-backed anti-Castro forces to overthrow the Communist government in Cuba was both a tragedy for the invaders and a fiasco for the United States and its new President. This setback upset Pell because, shortly after his election, he had made a private trip to Cuba to investigate the economic and political conditions on the island. He discovered that, despite some economic difficulties, the government still enjoyed massive popular support. His conclusion

17Telephone interview with Pell, July 23, 1993.
contrasted greatly to the analysis of Cuba made by the Central Intelligence Agency, which reported that the invasion had been expected to inspire a popular revolt against the government. He shared his own findings with the Central Intelligence Agency director Allen Dulles and his assistants on March 14, 1961, a month before the invasion, and he complained to Kennedy about their failure to heed them.  

Pell also promoted a new, less antagonistic, analysis of Communism and the Cold War, based on Lord Henry Palmerston’s dictum which stated, “We have no eternal allies and no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual, and those interests it is our duty to follow.” In revising this theory, Pell stated that “every nation’s foreign policy should be based on that nation’s true interests, to the exclusion of sentiment, nostalgia, or evangelical fervor.” Believing strongly in this theory Pell argued “that much of our past and present foreign policy errors may be traced directly to our tendency to disregard it, to follow policies rooted in tradition rather than in true national interest.”

By the early 1960s, Pell realized that a change had occurred within the ranks of Communist nations. When he first entered the Senate in 1961, many Americans still believed that all Communist nations were part of a monolithic bloc controlled by the Soviet Union. Pell, on the other hand, realized that, while the Soviet Union had promoted Communist expansion, especially into Eastern European countries, significant differences existed between them. Also, the self-interests of the individual nations were often at odds with the interests of the Soviet Union, as in the case of China and Yugoslavia, which, due to the power of their respective leaders Mao Tse-tung and Josip Tito, had never been under Soviet control, despite their close ties. Both Mao and Tito advocated a Communist system based on nationalism, not international Communism. During the late 1950s and 1960s the nationalist Communist theory, not the old Soviet model, and the exploits of Mao in China served as the inspiration for Communist

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18 Pell to President John F. Kennedy, April 29, 1961, Papers of Claiborne Pell, 87th Congress: President, Office of the: JFK (Special Collections, University of Rhode Island Library).
19 Pell, Power and Policy, 16.
movements throughout the Third World.

Pell discerned that the countries of Eastern Europe were striving to express their individual nationalistic identities and recognized the difficulties of trying to impose Marxist theories upon industrially-advanced nations that were multi-ethnic. The conflict between the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, he claimed, was leading to stagnation and decay in the region. Pell had a great deal of experience in Eastern Europe and declared that he was not surprised that “the veneer of communism should wear thin first in this historically volatile area,” especially since the traditionally strong nationalism of the region was roused by Soviet domination. The best examples of these rifts were the anti-Communist revolts in Hungary and Poland in 1956. Thus, while the Soviet Union remained the dominant power in Eastern Europe in the early 1960s, the idea of a monolithic Communist bloc had faded.20

American foreign policy, however, still advanced the theory that Communism was monolithic and inspired by the goal of world domination. Most Americans could only associate Communism with the fall of China, the war in Korea, Soviet tanks in Eastern Europe, and the Soviet Union’s nuclear weapons. These thoughts created fear, and many Americans were determined to stop the spread of Communism, even if they had to fight a war like the one in Korea. Pell, on the other hand, stated that the United States should forget these old fears and preconceptions of Communism, as well as recognize the changes that had occurred, and refine United States foreign policy to respond to them.21

Pell proposed that the United States should return to the original intentions of the containment policy - as based upon the Truman Doctrine, Marshall Plan, and Point Four Program. The original purpose of these programs “was to buy time for the non-Communist world while international communism slowly dissolved under the stress of its

\[\text{\textsuperscript{20}}\text{Ibid.}, 51-56, 59-62.\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{21}}\text{Ibid.}, 62-68.\]
own internal contradictions.” Therefore, Pell stated, “it would obviously be to our advantage to encourage this erosion through trade, through cultural contacts, and bridge building of all possible varieties with individual communist countries.” Yet, he noted, the United States had failed “to encourage separatist movements within the Communist bloc” throughout the Cold War and had “actually helped to frustrate such developments” on some occasions. “Somehow - perhaps through listening to our own rhetoric - we became so obsessed with the dangers of aggressive, monolithic international communism,” he explained, “that we forgot the origin and purpose of our own policy.” Thus, Pell declared, that while times had changed “American foreign policy stayed still. . . . Like Santayana’s fanatic, having forgotten our purpose, we just redoubled our efforts.”\textsuperscript{22} 

In 1963 Pell reaffirmed his theory when he released a proposal to reduce some of the pressures of the Cold War. He advised the United States and other Western nations to accept the division of Germany and not attempt to reunite the two sections by force. In return for the West’s recognition of East Germany, he hoped that the Soviet Union would create an international zone connecting the West to Berlin. In his view, such a zone would increase trade between the West and Berlin and, in turn, increase the trade between the East and the West. He thought that encouraging trade between the East and the West would affect the economies of the Communist nations and impress their people with the strength of capitalism. Thus, Communism could be defeated without resorting to military action, but by using economic pressure to exploit the inherent weaknesses in the Communist system. He also hoped to reduce pressure in Europe by urging both America and the Soviet Union to agree not to give nuclear weapons to either East or West Germany. When Pell announced his proposals in 1963, many senators regarded them as radical. By the late 1960s, however, these ideas had become part of American policy.

\textsuperscript{22}Ibid., 22-23.
Pell’s theories about Communism and foreign policy were not as refined in the early 1960s as when in 1972 he wrote his book *Power and Policy* which outlined his theories on the formation of foreign policy. The ideas expressed in his book reflected, of course, his reaction to the Vietnam War, the Czechoslovak revolt in 1968, and the growing sense of detente in the early 1970s. However, Pell’s proposal on Germany in 1963, as well as his reference to Lord Palmerston’s ideas in several speeches in the early 1960s, showed that he had already formulated his opinions on how to make United States foreign policy, and especially in relation to Communism and the Cold War. Pell had determined that the policy must be flexible enough to respond not only to crisis, but also to the gradual changes and evolution of international relations and conditions in other nations. His thinking did not rule out using military force as an option to pursue America’s best interests, but not in response merely to preconceptions and fear. The Vietnam war would give Claiborne Pell an opportunity to put his theories of foreign policy to the test.

Southeast Asia, comprising the nations of Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and North and South Vietnam, was one of the most volatile regions of the world when the Kennedy administration took office. America’s role in Southeast Asia became the nation’s major foreign policy issue for most of the 1960s and the early 1970s. It also provided Senator Pell an opportunity to display his skills in international relations outside of Cold War Europe where he had previously served. As America’s role in the Southeast Asia grew, Pell analyzed the problem, by studying political and economic conditions in the region and United States’ national interests.

Turmoil had undermined the nation of South Vietnam since its founding in 1954 by the Geneva Accords, which settled the colonial war between the French and the nationalist Viet Minh movement of the Communist Ho Chi Minh. Ngo Dinh Diem, a Catholic anti-Communist, ruled South Vietnam with American economic aid and military advisors. Diem’s greatest problem was the Communist government of North
Vietnam led by Ho Chi Minh, who demanded nationwide elections to unify the nation, as called for in the Geneva Accords. Diem and his American advisors, however, refused because they knew that Ho would win any popular election. This refusal to hold free elections led to the formation of a strong Communist guerrilla movement, known as the Vietcong, whose goal was to overthrow the Diem government and reunite Vietnam under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh. By 1961 the political crisis in South Vietnam had weakened the government to a point where President John Kennedy’s advisors feared its complete collapse. To prevent that, the United States agreed to increase its aid package to $400 million a year and to send 10,000 military advisors to train the South Vietnamese army.\textsuperscript{23}

The growing crisis in Vietnam interested both Pell and his constituents. In a letter of March 7, 1962 Pell presented one of his earliest positions on Vietnam and stated, “I fully support all of our government’s efforts to assist the people of Viet Nam to defend themselves against Communist subversion.” Although preferring political rather than military solutions, he hoped that the government of South Vietnam will make additional reforms, which I believe, would weaken the position of the Communist Guerrillas in certain areas. Certainly the experiences of the French in Indochina demonstrated that military measures alone are not enough to overcome Communist guerrilla activity.\textsuperscript{24}

On October 16, 1962, Pell received an opportunity to view the crisis in Vietnam for himself when President Kennedy asked Senator Mike Mansfield to make a fact-finding tour “to visit selected areas of major significance to United States policy . . . particularly, Berlin and Vietnam and other nations in the southeast Asian region.” Mansfield created a bipartisan committee, comprised of himself and Senators J. Caleb Boggs, Benjamin A. Smith and Claiborne Pell. This trip gave Pell a first-hand look at the

\textsuperscript{23}U. S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Viet Nam and Southeast Asia, 88th Congress, 1st Sess. (Washington, 1963), 3-5.

\textsuperscript{24}Pell to John A. Cory, March 7, 1962, Papers of Claiborne Pell, 87th Congress, Box 5: Foreign Relations, January-March 1962.
war in Vietnam and Laos and allowed him to analyze the effectiveness of United States policy in the region. The tour occurred in November and December of 1962 and included visits to South Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, Burma, Malaya, the Philippines and India, as well as some stops in Europe.\textsuperscript{25}

Following the tour, the senators produced a twenty-one page report on their findings. The focus of the report was the civil war in South Vietnam between the government forces and the Vietcong and also America’s efforts to assist Diem. The South Vietnamese government had developed a plan to defeat the Vietcong. It called for a massive increase in American military aid and the creation of strategic hamlets to protect rural peasants from Vietcong attack. Both Vietnamese officials and American advisors who spoke to the senators during their tour were highly optimistic, and almost all declared that the new plan would lead to success within two or three years. Pell and the other senators were not so optimistic. They realized that while a military victory over the Vietcong might be possible with massive amounts of United States aid, the key to long-term stability and success in Vietnam depended on strong and “selfless Vietnamese leadership in all parts of the country and at all levels,” something which was sadly lacking.

The senators concluded that the South Vietnamese government was authoritarian and riddled with corruption and incompetence. Diem had the devoted support of his Catholic clique and used strong police and military force to control the cities, but not rural areas. In the rural areas, governments proved inept and corrupt, unable to win support from the local peasants, who often gave aid to the Vietcong. Pell and the other senators recognized that the key to political stability in South Vietnam was the creation of local governments backed by popular support. The senators found, though, that the Diem government was more concerned with getting increased American aid to defeat the Vietcong militarily. “It is most disturbing,” they wrote, “to find that after 7 years of the

\textsuperscript{25}Committee on Foreign Relations, \textit{Viet Nam and Southeast Asia}, 22.
Republic, south Viet Nam appears less, not more stable than it was at the outset, that it appears more removed from, rather than closer to, the achievement of popularly responsible and responsive government.” They also observed that the Vietcong were not entirely to blame for the instability in Vietnam and that the Diem government and American policy in Vietnam “particularly in the design and administration of aid, must bear a substantial, a very substantial, share of the responsibility.”

The conclusion of the report added further criticism. It stated that the United States needed to revise its military and economic aid programs to make them more effective. The senators warned that by increasing its commitment to Vietnam, America risked reaching a point when the war became a “greater concern and greater responsibility to the United States than it is to the Government and people of South Viet Nam.” Such a course, they noted, “could involve an expenditure of American lives and resources which would bear little relationship to the interests of the United States or, indeed, to the interests of the people of Viet Nam.” Thus, “to avoid that course” it had to be made clear to both the American and South Vietnam that “the primary responsibility” for fighting the war belonged to the Vietnamese, and any increases in the military effort had to come from them and not the United States. In summary, the report stated that if the Vietnamese did not provide the necessary effort to fight the war,

the United States can reduce its commitment or abandon it entirely, but there is no interest of the United States in Viet Nam which would justify, in present circumstances, the conversion of the war in that country primarily into an American war, to be fought primarily with American lives.27

The senators recognized that much of the future of Southeast Asia and America’s role there was dependent on the actions of Communist China. They reported, however, that it was not necessarily “in the interests of the United States or that it enhances our national security to respond . . . in every specific situation in Southeast Asia.”

26 Ibid., 6-8.
27 Ibid., 8-9.
Furthermore, they wanted to prevent any Southeast Asian nation from becoming dependent on United States aid for its survival because of “the failure or inadequacies” of the local leadership “in meeting its own responsibilities to its people.” In their view, America’s interests would best be served by a Southeast Asian policy that did not extend aid to any nation that was not already receiving them and also sought to reduce the amount already given. Their policy also called for an increase of aid “from other free nations” to increase the non-American role in the region. The senators also wanted to promote relations between the nations of the region, especially by commercial and cultural exchanges. Their ultimate goal was the creation of a policy which brought internal peace to South Vietnam while maintaining America’s “advisory capacity,” and was effective not only “in stopping Communist aggression in Southeast Asia but also in terms of the social, economic, and political benefits which the policy helps bring to the ordinary people” of South Vietnam. They demanded, however, that any policy must consider “the cost and depth of the United States commitment in men and money to maintain that policy.”

Overall, the report presented a very pessimistic view of the political conditions in Southeast Asia and Vietnam in particular. Its key conclusion argued that the defense of South Vietnam was not integral to the national security of the United States and that it was not in the best interests of the Americans to take an active military role in the war there. Instead the better policy was to provide only minimal economic and military aid assisting a Vietnamese-led effort to defeat the Vietcong and form an effective government with popular support. The report admitted that there were certain circumstances which might require a greater effort in Vietnam, but did not identify them exactly. The tone of the rest of the report, though, suggests that only an invasion of South Vietnam by North Vietnam or China could force the senators to approve the all-out use of United States military force.

\[28\textit{Ibid.}, 20-21.\]
These conclusions were similar to the policy that Pell proposed for Eastern Europe as it emphasized that the United States should minimize its military presence and increase its economic and educational aid to help create a strong local government. The report also followed Pell’s basic principles for foreign policy. First, it advised a plan of action which was in the best interest of the United States and did not merely respond to the traditional fears of Communism. South Vietnam was not integral to the national security of the United States, and therefore America should not fight a war there even if a Communist government would take control. Second, the report acknowledged that the situation in Vietnam might change and that certain conditions might require a stronger American response, which permitted the flexibility that Pell believed was necessary in foreign policy. Finally, it advised that other non-communist nations should contribute to Vietnam’s defense and reconstruction in line with Pell’s desire to involve the United Nations or other organized international bodies in the nation-building process whenever possible. Such involvement was particularly desirable in Vietnam, where the United States wanted to avoid charges that it had merely replaced France as an imperialist master.

The report revealed that the greatest fear of the authors was that, while the United States was not yet committed to defending South Vietnam, the pattern of an increased military presence in Vietnam would inevitably lead to a point where America had invested too much to pull out without a fight. Pell, Mansfield and several other senators were determined to prevent that from happening. In their opinion, America’s goal in Vietnam was not to defeat the Vietcong, but instead to build a government that was strong enough to defeat the Vietcong itself with a minimum of outside aid. The leadership and impetus for this effort, however, had to come from the Vietnamese, rather than their American advisors, and if Vietnam lacked such leadership, Pell and other senators were willing to reduce aid to Vietnam or suspend it entirely. On September 12, 1963 Pell and twenty-two other senators introduced Senate Resolution 196 to promote
this policy. The resolution stated:

That it is the sense of the Senate that unless the Government of South Vietnam abandons policies of repression against its own people and makes a determined and effective effort to regain their support, military, and economic assistance to that Government should not be continued.\(^{29}\)

The resolution passed easily, but it could not be enforced. It was a weak resolution that lacked conditions and deadlines. Also, it specifically expressed official concern about conditions in Vietnam without committing the United States to any particular action. A stronger resolution, however, would have caused a backlash from hard-line conservative senators, claiming that Vietnam had been abandoned to Chinese expansion. The Senate adopted the resolution as a warning to both the Diem and Kennedy administrations that most of its members wanted the South Vietnamese government to reform itself in order to continue receiving American support. The resolution, though, had little effect on American policy. By 1963, both the military situation and the popular support of the Diem government had declined. The deteriorating situation led the United States to increase its aid to Vietnam and to raise the number American troops there to 14,000.

Also in 1963, social unrest increased in Vietnam. In the summer of that year, Buddhists began to protest even by self-immolation their persecution by the Catholic-dominated government. On August 2, 1963, Pell commented on this religious persecution of Diem stating that he agreed “that the actions of the Diem government in this regard have been deplorable and have placed a great strain on the enthusiasm which we in the United States can have for supporting such a regime.” He followed, however, with a statement which showed new support for Diem. “It is my belief,” he said, “on the basis of my visits to South Viet Nam that the Diem government, despite its limitations, is our best bet at present and that we should join all our efforts to help it reform and

\(^{29}\)U.S., Congressional Record, 88th Congress, 1st. Sess. (September 12, 1963), 16824.
become more responsible to the people.” Pell echoed this seemingly uncharacteristic support for the United States’ Vietnam policy in another letter written a month later which stated:

Certainly we have expended a great deal of effort and money to bolster Viet Nam against Communist encroachment. American soldiers have lost their lives. The country is in a highly volatile and unstable condition, but it has strategic importance. Reverses can be expected in such an area, even with the most enlightened intelligence operation. Conditions can change abruptly. They are receiving our day-to-day careful attention. At this moment, it seems to me that we are doing all we can in the midst of complex and hazardous circumstances.

This letter showed a marked difference in Pell’s attitude towards Vietnam. Never before had he mentioned the region’s “strategic importance.” He also excused the ineffectiveness of the American efforts there by noting the difficult conditions in Vietnam. Given the fact that the conditions in Vietnam at this time were worse then when he had visited, it is difficult to understand why Pell had become more compromising in his views. Furthermore, no records show any premeditated change in his opinions. The change of policy might be credited to Pell’s belief that America should make sacrifices for other nations in its role as the leader of the free world. While he believed that the Diem regime was flawed, he might not have seen any other viable alternatives to replace it.

Perhaps deepening political instability in South Vietnam also inspired Pell’s mixed opinions about Vietnam. Diem’s regime was in grave danger and the Kennedy administration feared it would either fall or resort to intensive repression to remain in power. The United States needed a new policy to respond to these possibilities. Therefore, the Kennedy administration began to study its options which included investigating the potential of a coup. On November 1, several generals of the South Vietnamese Army launched a coup after being assured that the United States would not

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defend Diem. Diem and his brother fled the palace and hid in a Catholic church in the Chinese section of Saigon. Here they were found by the plotters, who then had them brutally killed.

Questions arose about the impact of the Vietnam coup upon United States policy. On November 5, Mike Mansfield declared before the Senate that it was an appropriate time to reassess the nation’s Vietnam policies and to make certain that they encouraged “the growth of popularly responsible and responsive government,” and contributed to the “development of internal stability” in South Vietnam to a point where the nation would no longer have to rely upon the United States. Pell concurred with Mansfield and expressed hope that the coup would show the new rulers of South Vietnam the necessity of meeting the needs of the people responsibly. Pell further stated his desire that the new government should not become dependent on the United States because America’s goals for South Vietnam were not only that nation’s “freedom from authoritarianism,” but also the “reduction of our manpower and financial commitment” there.32

Pell and his fellow senators recognized the need to reform the nation’s Vietnam policy, but they also realized that the new regime would need some time to stabilize and to create its own policies. The United States would do its best to influence these new policies, but wanted the Vietnamese to take the first step. As Pell wrote to a constituent on November 7 “we have no choice but to give it [South Vietnam] all the support we can and hope for the best.”33 President Kennedy never responded to these proposals as he was assassinated on November 22, 1963, only three weeks after the coup. The decision about America’s relationship with Vietnam now belonged to President Lyndon Johnson, and Pell and his senate colleagues had to decide what role the Congress would play in helping to shape this new policy.

II: AN EMERGING DOVE

In early 1964 Senator Pell began to change his opinions about Vietnam. He wanted to find a peaceful solution to the crisis in South Vietnam, but still thought that American military and economic aid was necessary to support that nation’s efforts against the Vietcong and North Vietnam. Pell also still believed that the key to success in Vietnam was the formation of a stable government which had popular support. In March 1964, he expressed these views in a letter stating that “the root of the problem in Vietnam” was “the lack of a government with a broad popular base.” Pell added that, unless a popular government was formed, American aid would “only have limited results.”

The political situation in South Vietnam had become quite fragile at this time. The North Vietnamese and the Vietcong recognized the instability caused by the anti-Diem coup and increased their attacks to take advantage of this weakness. The new American President, Lyndon Johnson, was determined to support the new South Vietnamese regime by supplying it with aid, but he did not want to become over committed to Vietnam at this time and therefore approved only minor increases beyond the levels set by Kennedy in 1963. Pell supported Johnson’s plan of limited commitment to Vietnam. In a letter to a constituent on May 13, 1964, he identified three possible alternative policies for Vietnam. The United States could “pour more troops and more money” into the war and possibly even “carry the war into the North,” or it could pull out “and hope that all will go well and that the Laos type of situation will evolve.” Considering both of these options to be “foolish,” Pell concluded that “we are left with

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\(^1\)Pell to Wellington Tow, March 18, 1964, Papers of Claiborne Pell, 88th Congress: Foreign Relations, Viet Nam, 1963-1964 (Special Collections, University of Rhode Island Library).
continuing to do what we are presently doing. This is a course which is distastefully expensive, but still bearable. My own belief is that this last course is about the best one for the time being.”

A week later President Charles de Gaulle of France proposed reconvening the Geneva Conference, which had settled the colonial war in 1954. The goal of this conference would be to create a stable and neutral Vietnam. Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield presented De Gaulle’s proposal to the Senate, and further advised that the United States should look for ways to find a negotiated settlement in Vietnam while maintaining its military and economic aid to keep South Vietnam stable. Mansfield conceded that the negotiations might force the United States to make some difficult concessions and sacrifices but claimed that the nation should be willing to endure them in return for a lasting peace. Pell supported Mansfield’s proposal and added that he hoped that “the policies his words represent may, before too long, be those of the administration.”

By mid-1964 Pell’s opinions on Vietnam seem to have solidified. He sought to create a stable, popular government and to end the guerrilla violence which threatened to destroy the nation. Until this ideal was reached though, Pell was willing to send American economic aid and military advisors to assist the South Vietnamese government. It was necessary, however, to keep strong restraints on the American military personnel in Vietnam and prevent escalation into a potentially catastrophic war with China. Pell refined his three alternative policies for Vietnam in a letter that he wrote on July 16, 1964. The first was to pull out of Vietnam, but this option “would be very harmful indeed to our national interest,” because “it would break faith” with an ally and set a bad precedent. Pell also feared that it would “leave a vacuum” in South Vietnam “which the Communists would inevitably fill.” The second option would be to

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expand the war into North Vietnam, “perhaps using nuclear weapons,” but this policy would also be “a bad error in judgement” leading to another situation like the Korean War and risking “a direct confrontation with Communist China,” and possibly “World War III.” His third alternative was

to continue and intensify our present campaign, all the time probing and searching for a firm settlement. I realize that this third alternative is a frustrating one and that it does not offer a quick solution.

But this last alternative is a bearable course and, to my mind, it is preferable to either of the first two. In fact, I believe that this latter course is the only sensible one open to us at the present time, and I shall be doing what I can to see that it is used with imagination and caution.4

Pell did not like the American presence in Vietnam, but was willing to tolerate it as a necessary evil, because the United States, as a world superpower, had a duty to protect its allies who could not defend themselves, much as the British had done during the nineteenth century. This position was unpopular with many Americans who were traditionally isolationists. American fears of Communism and nuclear war led to an acceptance of the United States' new international role, though many were still reluctant to spend the nation’s resources and lives in a region such as Vietnam, which was not regarded as strategically significant to the defense of the nation.

Pell considered commitments such as America’s military presence in Vietnam and its contributions to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, as well as United States foreign aid programs, to be integral to the nation’s role as a world leader. He wanted to make certain, though, that the United States did not become the colonial master of the regions it protected. To do so would go against one of America’s oldest traditions and put a tremendous strain on the nation’s economic and military resources. Furthermore, since all of the great colonial empires had almost completely disintegrated by the early 1960s, it would be a great mistake for the United States to attempt to build a new one.

Doing so would only lead to vicious attacks from the Communist Bloc as well as threaten relations with the former colonial powers who had just broken up their empires. America’s limited role in Vietnam had already led to charges of neocolonialism that Pell and most of his senate colleagues ignored in the face of the results of the United States foreign aid program there. A single incident in August 1964, however, forced the United States to radically alter its Vietnam policy.

On August 2, 1964 three North Vietnamese patrol boats attacked the Maddox, a United States Navy destroyer, while it was patrolling the Gulf of Tonkin off the coast of North Vietnam. The United States claimed that the attack had been unprovoked and that the Maddox had been in international waters. Later investigations revealed that the Maddox actually was on an intelligence gathering mission, using sophisticated electronic equipment to pinpoint the location of North Vietnamese installations. Furthermore, the North Vietnamese were on alert because the region had been the site of a secret South Vietnamese amphibious commando raid which violated the Geneva Agreements.

President Johnson and his advisors in Washington decided not to retaliate, because they were unwilling to escalate the situation unnecessarily. Johnson did, however, order the Maddox and another destroyer, the C. Turner Joy, to resume operations in the Gulf of Tonkin and had a list of potential targets in North Vietnam prepared in case retaliatory air strikes were necessary. The Johnson administration was looking for a reason to strike against North Vietnam to show the full strength of America’s military power. The administration received its wish on August 4, when the Maddox and the C. Turner Joy, while sixty miles off the coast, reported radar and sonar sightings of a North Vietnamese attack. Both ships opened fire, and requested air support. Later reports determined that the Americans had not made any visual sightings of North Vietnamese craft. Furthermore, a severe thunderstorm that day might have caused the radar and sonar reports that the American sailors assumed came from attacking North Vietnamese ships.
After the report of the second attack and upon the advice of Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and the military Joint Chiefs, Johnson approved air strikes against North Vietnamese torpedo boat bases and neighboring oil facilities. In and of themselves, the air strikes were a minor show of America’s military power, but Johnson decided to use this event as an opportunity to get legislation which would allow him to take whatever actions he believed were necessary to promote American policy in Vietnam. This legislation, known as the Southeast Asia Resolution or the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution stated that the President, acting as Commander in Chief, could take “all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.” The resolution also stated that the United States regarded as vital to its national interest and to world peace the maintenance of international peace and security in southeast Asia. Consonant with the Constitution and the Charter of the United Nations and in accordance with its obligations under the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty, the United States is, therefore, prepared, as the President determines, to take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force, to assist any member or protocol state of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty requesting assistance in defense of its freedom.5

Johnson called upon his friend, Arkansas Senator J. William Fulbright, to push the resolution through Congress quickly. In his position as Chair of the Foreign Relations Committee and as a ranking Democrat, Fulbright had the power and position to shepherd the bill through successfully. Fulbright’s task was not particularly difficult, though, as polls showed that approximately 85% of Americans supported the president. Fulbright presented the resolution to the Senate on August 6. Several senators asked questions regarding the accuracy of the reports of the second attack. Senator George McGovern asked Fulbright “why a little state such as North Vietnam should seek a deliberate naval conflict with the United States,” and he and others questioned why small torpedo boats would be sent sixty miles out to sea to attack much larger boats that had the advantage of

air support. Senator Wayne Morse also attacked the resolution, stating that he had confidential information that the Maddox had been involved in covert South Vietnamese raids of North Vietnam. Morse wanted desperately to avoid a war and announced that “the place to settle the controversy is not on the battlefield but around the conference table.” Senator Ernest Gruening of Alaska concurred stating bluntly that “all Vietnam is not worth the life of a single American boy.”

Fulbright responded to these attacks by defending it as a moderate measure “calculated to prevent the spread of war.” Several other powerful senators agreed. Richard Russell of Georgia, who had previously expressed doubts about the American role in Vietnam, now firmly stated, “our national honor is at stake. We can not and will not shrink from defending it.” Pell also supported the resolution. In a statement released on August 6, Pell said that it was “important to stand behind our president in this time of tension” and that he had “confidence in President Johnson’s prudence and in his determination to avoid any unnecessary widening or escalation of military clashes.” Johnson would, in his view “further strengthen our efforts toward peace as he seeks to avoid any weakening of our position and purpose.”

Pell, however, also issued a warning, claiming that the North Vietnamese action could not have been accidental. Therefore, he suggested responding “with reason and calmness” and avoiding any action that might start a war with Communist China. He asked that the issue be kept out of the election campaigns that year to ensure that political considerations would not affect decisions on Vietnam. Furthermore, he expressed hope that “other freedom loving Asian nations” would help the United States to “carry some of the burdens for keeping peace in the Far east” and that similar assistance would come from the United Nations. In defense of the President, he concluded:

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I trust the people and press of the world will be aware that as the world’s strongest nation and defender of freedom, we will not stand for unprovoked attack or aggression, but at the same time be aware that we do not seek material or territorial gain. We only desire freedom, for ourselves, and for the people of other nations.\(^8\)

The statement showed support of the president’s resolution, but it raised several crucial points about the development of the United States' role in Vietnam. It expressed concerned, as Pell would for the duration of the conflict, that American aggression would provoke a war with Communist China, a conflict that might lead to a nuclear war. Pell also restated his desire for multinational involvement in Vietnam, especially by the United Nations and hoped that by enlisting other nations, the United States could limit or even reduce its role in Vietnam. Furthermore, the presence of other Asian nations, Pell hoped, would eliminate the charges of neocolonialism made by the Communist nations. Finally, Pell showed his determination to use the power of the United States to promote “freedom . . . for the people of other nations.” Despite his desire to avoid war with China and the Soviet Union, Pell was an anti-Communist who had received the bulk of his diplomatic training in the Foreign Service during the Cold War. His experiences in Czechoslovakia and Hungary showed him what effect a Communist government could have on a nation and also the fears that many people had about being forced to live under a Communist system. Therefore, he was willing to support the anti-Communist government in South Vietnam, despite its weaknesses, because he believed it was a better alternative than Communism.

Despite some unanswered questions, opposition to the bill quickly dwindled and the Southeast Asia resolution passed on August 7 by an overwhelming margin, 416 to 0 in the House and 88 to 2 in the Senate with only Senators Morse and Gruening dissenting. The passage of this measure, combined with the failure of two successive presidents to ask Congress for a declaration of war, proved to be a bane to Congress until

\(^8\)Ibid.
the end of the war. In a recent interview Pell stated that he regrets supporting the Southeast Asia resolution and acknowledged that both Presidents Johnson and Nixon took advantage of the loosely-written resolution to proceed with Vietnam policies that were contrary to what the Senate intended when it originally approved the measure. He also said he believes that the Senate was misinformed by the Johnson administration about the actual events that took place in the Gulf of Tonkin, although he claimed not to know whether this action was intentional or accidental. Pell and many of his colleagues would later remark that they wished that a fraction of the time spent debating the resolution over the next eight years had been used in August 1964, but Johnson had used his power to push the measure through Congress in two days, not allowing enough time for serious debate or questioning.9

During the fall and winter of 1964 America’s commitment to South Vietnam gradually increased. South Vietnamese commando raids and United States naval patrols in the Gulf of Tonkin resumed, and American air strikes attacked supply lines on the Laotian border. Pell’s opinions during this period were similar to those that he had expressed at the time of the Southeast Asia resolution. Although no positive steps towards peace had yet been made, the United States had not undertaken a major combat role. On August 17, Pell proposed a foreign policy plank for the upcoming Democratic convention. The party, he said, should promise a policy of “strength, restraint and innovation.” About Vietnam he commented:

In our pursuit of total victory over Communism, we pledge that this policy will continue to shun quick and easy solutions—no matter how tempting they may seem—and that it will be based, instead, squarely on considerations of our long-range national interests. We assert that this nation must avoid siren calls for reckless actions that could result in greater loss of life and resources than if we courageously, steadily and vigorously pursue a policy of farsighted prudence and strength. We must keep our military strength overwhelming and in a high state of readiness, for it is only by dealing from strength that we shall achieve ultimate

9Written answers to questions submitted by present writer, August 20, 1993.
victory. But we would always temper power with wisdom, and never squander life when the cause of freedom can be served at the conference table.¹⁰

This proposal resembled Pell’s previous statements on foreign policy as it advised restraint and negotiation rather than military power, but acknowledged the need for a strong military force so that the United States could negotiate from a position of strength. The language of this statement also hints that Pell had been a “Cold Warrior.” In September, he agreed with a constituent who doubted the possibility of neutralization in South Vietnam, stating that “a much more realistic objective might be a ‘stabilization’ of the situation, much like that obtained in Korea, where the west yields nothing that we already hold.” Reiterating this view in a letter written just before Christmas, he agreed “that the situation in that country is indeed troublesome and that our policy is being sorely tested” and suggested that “we must concentrate our efforts on stabilizing the situation without yielding ground to the Communists before we can consider a withdrawal.” He concluded that the Johnson administration undoubtedly was “giving their most serious consideration to this matter and that our future course of action will reflect their wise judgement.”¹¹

Despite Pell’s efforts to achieve a settlement, America’s military commitment to Vietnam changed dramatically in February 1965. On February 6 the Vietcong attacked the American helicopter base at Pleiku, killing nine Americans and destroying five aircraft. Johnson decided it was time to strike back and ordered operation Flaming Dart, a series of air strikes against targets just across the North Vietnamese border. Another series of retaliatory strikes followed another Vietcong attack on February 10. Over the next few days, Johnson and his advisors decided to increase the United States efforts in Vietnam. On February 24, the United States initiated Operation Rolling Thunder, a

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policy of increased air strikes against targets in North Vietnam. These air strikes sought to destroy North Vietnam’s military resources, eliminate the supply lines to the Vietcong, and destroy the morale of the North Vietnamese people. Operation Rolling Thunder, including several sustained pauses, lasted until 1968.

At the time of the attacks on the air base at Pleiku, General William Westmoreland, the commander of the American forces in Vietnam, requested that some United States Marines be sent to protect the major airfield at Danang. Several presidential advisors, like General Maxwell Taylor, then Ambassador to South Vietnam, expressed concern about this decision, but Johnson and the majority of his aides were convinced that the time had come for the United States to use its full military power in Vietnam. On March 8, two battalions of Marines, a total of 3,500 men who were equipped with artillery and tanks, came ashore at Danang. The United States was now undeniably in the Vietnam war.¹²

The arrival of combat troops in Vietnam brought a new awareness of the conflict to the American public. The vast majority of Americans still supported the president and his Vietnam policy, but they began to ask questions as the troop levels and casualty lists grew. Americans wanted to know why the United States was fighting in Vietnam and wondered what was its ultimate goal. For many people, the answers that the government provided to these questions were not satisfactory and often contradicted information that had been released by the press or had been gained from returning soldiers. Soon, these unsatisfactory answers led to anger, which by the spring of 1965 inspired protest against the war. The protests were mild at first, often expressed in informational sessions such as the teach-ins held at several major universities in the spring of 1965. These sessions increased the nation’s knowledge of the Vietnam conflict and attracted a lot of press coverage, but had little effect on the decisions of the Johnson administration which

truthfully claimed that it had the backing of the majority of Americans and would not allow policy to be dictated by a small vocal minority. In April Johnson decided to allow the Marines to take an offensive combat role, and by June 30, 1965, the number of American soldiers in Vietnam had reached 60,000, up from 23,300 at the beginning of the year.\footnote{Melvin Small, \textit{Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves} (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1988), 26-27.}

Pell’s opinions on Vietnam began to change soon after his appointment to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee at the beginning of the 89th Congress in January 1965. As a member of this committee, he received more information on foreign affairs than the general public or even the rest of the Senate. As the most junior member of the committee, Pell had little influence on the formation of policy, but by his actions and statements within the Committee he tried to sway the opinions of other more powerful members. His new position also gave him the opportunity to work particularly close with Senator Fulbright. Fulbright played an important role in the formation of Pell’s opinions on Vietnam, not only by openly expressing his own views on the war but also by using the Foreign Relations Committee as a forum to discuss the war.

One of Pell’s first opportunities to criticize Johnson’s handling of the war came during an executive session of the Foreign Relations Committee in June 1965. On May 12, President Johnson announced a brief pause in the bombing of North Vietnam, in part to appease the growing criticism of the war, but also on the advice of his advisors who thought it might encourage the North Vietnamese to begin negotiations. Because the North Vietnamese did not respond, on May 16 at a National Security Council meeting Johnson ordered the bombing to resume two days later. Johnson also instructed Secretary of State Dean Rusk to inform Senate critics, such as Mansfield, Kennedy and Fulbright, that he had tried to begin talks, but the North Vietnamese refused to negotiate. On May 18, however, just before the bombing resumed, Mai Van Bo, the senior North
Vietnamese diplomat in Paris, sent word through the French that negotiations were possible. Unfortunately, due to the time lag, the bombing resumed before the United States could reply.

Johnson did not reveal this unsuccessful attempt at contact to the Senate, but Pell learned about it from a former Foreign Service colleague who leaked the information to him. Pell asked Rusk about Mai’s message during an executive session on June 3. Rusk expressed surprise at his knowledge and responded that it did not represent any change in North Vietnam’s position and that there was “no indication that they were interested” in opening negotiations. Pell replied that in order to ascertain if they were serious about negotiations, it would “require a conversation,” which had not happened. After meeting subsequently with Johnson’s advisor William Bundy who told him the full story about the incident, Pell agreed to keep the potential channel with the North Vietnamese a secret. Later in July, when Pell was traveling to Paris on other business, he offered to meet with Mai, but Bundy, after asking Rusk, said that it would not be advisable.14

The escalating American commitment to Vietnam also inspired Pell’s constituents to write to him. Most of them received a form letter that was changed every few weeks, but several times a month Pell took the time to respond personally to some of these letters, especially those that asked specific questions about the nation’s Vietnam policy. In these letters, Pell presented a succinct response expressing his views on the situation in Vietnam. In a letter written in March, shortly after the Marines were sent to Danang, Pell replied to a constituent who criticized a government informational pamphlet, entitled Viet Nam: The Struggle for Freedom, which explained the administration’s Vietnam policy. “I recognize,” Pell wrote, “that it is not an explanation with which everyone will be in full agreement. In fact, I will be frank to say that I share some of your own misgivings about it.” In another letter, Pell noted that “Congress does

not always accept at face value or without argument the policy decisions of the administration.”\textsuperscript{15}

Despite these concerns, Pell did not publicly proclaim his dissent. In fact, in May Pell voted to support Johnson’s request for a special military appropriation of $700 million. He defended his vote with the argument that Johnson had said “support of it is necessary to halt communist aggression in South Viet Nam, a condition that is necessary for the achievement of peace and stability in South East Asia.” He further commented:

I vote for this appropriation, though, with a heavy heart just as I am sure our President does in asking for it because what we are voting is not simply the expenditure of dollars, but the expenditure of American and Viet Namese lives. For this reason, I fervently urge our President and our Administration to make every effort to avoid escalation of this war.

Our President has had more then a normal President’s share of responsibilities, problems and critical decisions. He had always handled these problems with decision, with resolution and with compassion. Accordingly, I support him in this request.\textsuperscript{16}

As in the case of the Gulf of Tonkin resolution, Pell's support came with some reluctance but once again he did not take any steps to prevent the action nor question its wisdom. It is quite possible that Pell believed that increased expenditures and a small United States combat force were a necessary sacrifice that America had to make not only to protect South Vietnam, but also to meet its responsibility as a democratic superpower. Political pressures, however, also influenced Pell's decision. In May 1965 a large majority of Americans and Rhode Islanders supported the president’s Vietnam policy. Johnson still had the support of the great majority which supported him in the election of 1964 and had also increased Democratic power in Congress. Pell knew it was important for him to support a Democratic President, and he had to consider his own re-election in 1966.


Other political factors also influenced Pell. The Senator had received Johnson’s support for two of his favorite projects, the construction of a high-speed rail line between Boston and Washington and a program for the Arts, which eventually led to the creation of the National Endowment of the Arts and the National Endowment of the Humanities. Pell also had a great interest in Johnson’s Great Society programs which he believed were crucial for America’s future. These were factors which Pell had to consider before every vote involving presidential policy, not just those relating to Vietnam. It is impossible to say how much effect these factors had upon Pell. Pell declared in a recent interview that he never had much contact with Johnson and that he was never pressured by Johnson or other Democrats to support the war effort. Yet, Pell’s relationship with Johnson deteriorated drastically after he openly came out against the war.\footnote{Written answers to questions submitted by present writer, August 20, 1993.}

Pell continued to give his grudging support to the President throughout 1965, and the letters to his constituents during this period show his conflicting desires for peace and a firm foreign policy. In a long letter of April 21, 1965 he reiterated the president’s statements reporting that Johnson “has no wish to go in for indiscriminate bombing and escalation in the north” but he also did not want to pull out and “leave a vacuum.” Pell also reported that the president realized that “many of us are apprehensive concerning affairs in Viet Nam and always asks us for a better idea.” Everyone, he stated, “would like to negotiate” and “get out eventually,” but noted that “so far neither Hanoi nor Peking has indicated much desire to negotiate” nor had they shown any signs of deescalating their war efforts in South Vietnam. Pell then revealed his own opinions on the war:

Speaking personally, my own views are parallel to your own, as I really don’t want to see us get in a position of committing land troops in that unhappy part of the globe.

The tragedy in South Viet Nam is that we are in a situation where we originally got ourselves committed in 1955 and find ourselves unable to
get out of this quagmire. While President Johnson’s actions are strong, I believe his objective is to eventually get us out. But, I can make no commitment or guarantee that he will be successful - I only wish I could.\textsuperscript{18}

Even after the president increased the United States troop levels in Vietnam to 60,000, Pell continued to give him his grudging support. In a letter to a professor of philosophy at Brown University on June 21, 1965, Pell wrote that, while he did not “support the escalation of out bombing north,” he did support “the use of all the conventional forces necessary to maintain our position in South Vietnam” so that the United States could negotiate from a position of strength. He expressed hope that a negotiated settlement would “result in increased responsibilities by other countries in that part of the world” allowing for a reduction in American forces there. In his view, however, an immediate withdrawal would cause a vacuum which would be filled by the Communist, harming American foreign policy worldwide.\textsuperscript{19}

Several sources influenced Pell as he formed his Vietnam policy. First and foremost was his own experiences as a diplomat. Second, he respected the views expressed by his constituents and used their letters as a guide to public opinion about the war both in Rhode Island and nationwide. The opinions of his fellow senators were likewise important. Pell especially valued the views of Senate leaders like Fulbright and Majority Leader Mike Mansfield, not only for their wisdom, but also because he knew that the criticism of senior senators would be necessary to change eventually the nation’s Vietnam policy. By 1965, a small core of war critics began to form in the Senate under the leadership of Mansfield and Fulbright, and included, among others, Pell, Wayne Morse, Gaylord Nelson, Frank Church, Eugene McCarthy and George McGovern. While these senators did not call for the United States to pull out of Vietnam at this time, they worried about what was the eventual goal of Johnson’s policy and wanted to restrict the

\textsuperscript{18}Pell to Carl Haffenreffer, April 21, 1965, Papers of Claiborne Pell, 89th Congress, Box 6: Foreign Relations, Viet Nam, 1965.
American military commitment as much as possible. In addition, they encouraged Johnson to make every effort to negotiate a settlement to end the war.

Senator Mansfield had influenced Pell on the Vietnam issue after they had travelled together to South Vietnam in 1962. Mansfield was one of the earliest critics of America’s Vietnam policy and had informed both Presidents Kennedy and Johnson about the fallacy of the United States commitment there. Mansfield’s opinion carried weight, not only because of his role as Senate Majority leader, but also because he was recognized as the Senate expert on Asian affairs. Throughout 1965 and 1966, though, Mansfield found difficulty in balancing his personal opposition to the war with his duties as Democratic leader of the Senate and his close personal friendship with Lyndon Johnson. These factors caused him to restrain his attacks against the war, but by 1967 the situation had grown so precarious that he renewed his opposition and damaged his relationship with Johnson. Pell respected both Mansfield’s opinions and his position, and the Majority Leader’s comments made his own opposition as a freshman senator easier.

On September 1, 1965 Senator Mansfield declared that President Johnson had offered to “enter into ‘unconditional discussions’” with the North Vietnamese several times, beginning with a speech at Johns Hopkins University in April 1965, but these offers had been rejected. Mansfield claimed that it was crucial for the two sides to begin negotiations, and therefore, laid out each side’s conditions for peace as presented in official statements. The North Vietnamese, according to Mansfield, wanted the “rights of the Vietnamese” including “independence, sovereignty, unity, [and] territorial integrity” as defined by the Geneva Accords to be recognized. Secondly, they wanted to eliminate “foreign military alliances, bases, or troop personnel” in both North and South Vietnam. Finally, they demanded “that the internal affairs of South Vietnam will be determined by the South Vietnamese people themselves alone in accordance with the
National Liberation Front program and without foreign interference.”

Mansfield then reported the conditions for peace that the Johnson administration had identified. Johnson declared that the people of South Vietnam must have a free choice of their own government, “free of terrorism, violence and coercion from any quarter” as described in the Geneva Accords. He also insisted on the “withdrawal of all foreign forces and bases throughout Vietnam.” Mansfield declared that he and the President agreed that there were two other conditions necessary for successful negotiations: a provision to “secure amnesty” for all in Vietnam to prevent continued bloodshed, and a mutual agreement by both sides to a complete cease-fire during negotiations. Mansfield recognized that there were some key differences between the American and North Vietnamese conditions and asked that both sides to begin talks to reconcile them.

Republican Senator Jacob Javits of New York supported Mansfield and declared that America “should constantly reiterate . . . our willingness to negotiate.” Pell also endorsed Mansfield’s ideas and said he found himself “nearly always in agreement with the views . . . expressed by our majority leader.” He then applauded Mansfield’s role in determining the course of America’s Vietnam policy. Pell also reaffirmed his support for Johnson’s Vietnam policy, noting that while he opposed “unilateral escalation into the North,” the President’s policies generally “reflect completely, to my mind, the requirements of the situation and the objectives of our foreign policy, which are peace and freedom. I find myself in full 100-percent support of those objectives.”

Pell held a fairly conservative position on Vietnam at this point, as shown by his support of Johnson’s policy. While he supported negotiations and a bombing halt, he also affirmed his firm commitment to defend Vietnam. Despite his distaste for the use of military force, Pell was still a “Cold Warrior” who opposed Communism. Unlike other

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20 Statement by Radio Hanoi, quoted in U.S., Congressional Record, 89th Congress, 1st Sess. (September 1, 1960), 22561.
21 Ibid., 22561-62.
22 Ibid., 22562.
anti-Communists who wanted to use America’s military might to defeat Communism in battle, Pell believed that the Communist nations would self-destruct under their own inherent weaknesses. While waiting for this self-disintegration, though, he believed that the United States should contain Communism by sacrificing some of its economic and military resources.

His own experiences in Europe showed him the weaknesses of Communism, but he also recognized the difference between the Cold War in Europe and the shooting war in Vietnam. The United States claimed that it was fighting Communism in Vietnam, but many Vietnamese viewed the war not as a conflict between Communism and democracy, but between nationalism and foreign domination. The Vietnamese, especially in rural areas, did not distinguish sharply between the United States and the France, despite American claims to the contrary. Pell recognized that the key to success Vietnam was not defeating the Communists, but finding a popular government that could rule the country with a minimum of American support. He also realized that for such a government to succeed, it would have to work and negotiate with all groups in Vietnam, including the Vietcong.

With these ideas in mind, Pell drafted his first major speech on Vietnam, which he delivered at the St. Francis School in Providence on November 8, 1965. Several crucial events had occurred since his statement on September 1. The return of college students to campuses after summer break led to a renewal of anti-war protests. The number of American troops in Vietnam had also increased, and in October the United States forces fought their first major battle of the war in the Ia Drang valley where they defeated three North Vietnamese regiments. This victory convinced many Americans, both in Vietnam and the United States, that a military victory over the North Vietnamese would be possible and increased their support for Johnson’s policy. Pell, on the other hand, realized that these expectations could lead to a dangerous over-commitment of American military forces to Vietnam in an attempt to win a quick military victory’
therefore he reiterated the necessity of seeking a peaceful solution to the conflict.

In this speech Pell outlined his opinions on the war and presented some potential policy options that could lead to a settlement in Vietnam. Pell reiterated his “complete support for President Johnson,” stating that he favored the majority of his decisions on Vietnam because there was “no clear alternative to the course we have followed.” He further complimented the president for avoiding the two extreme policies of withdrawal and massive escalation for middle course of limited American military commitment. Pell noted that there was a possibility that this decision could lead to a military commitment of “three, five or ten or more years,” but he believed that the United States had to be prepared to make a long-term commitment, because the Asian Communists had “added a new dimension to warfare . . . time.” America had to prove that it was just as willing as the Communists to fight a long war and thus force them to negotiate.23

The one specific criticism that Pell made regarding Johnson’s policy was the bombing of North Vietnam. While the bombing was tactically successful, he claimed that “it is counter-productive in its political effects, in that it tends to strengthen Communist unity and morale,” and he reminded his audience that the war in Vietnam was “a political not a tactical” one. He also declared that the United States would have to recognize Communist China’s power in Southeast Asia. While he agreed that America should fight to prevent China from conquering South Vietnam, he believed that any permanent settlement in Vietnam would have to accept China’s influence in the region, just as other nations accepted the United States’ influence in Latin America.24

Pell stated that America needed a “systematic, step by step plan not only for concluding the military engagement but for securing the peace which should follow,” and he presented his own seven-step proposal for meeting these requirements. First, he believed that the United States should limit its military involvement in South Vietnam

24Ibid., 5-6.
with a minimum of casualties. Therefore, he advised “digging in at the coastal cities,” where the United States air and naval power could be used to their fullest extent before expanding slowly into other areas. Furthermore, he exhorted the United States to deescalate its bombing of North Vietnam. Second, he wanted America’s other Asian allies to take a greater role in fighting the war, not only to lower the number of American troops necessary, but also to “dispel the impression . . . that this is a white man’s colonial war,” a charge that both North Vietnam and China were making against the United States.25

Third, Pell proposed that America develop South Vietnam’s education and economic systems as suggested by President Johnson and that other countries and the United Nations should take a greater role in the rebuilding of Vietnam. Fourth, his speech echoed Senator Mansfield’s proposal that Great Britain and the Soviet Union be urged to “reconvene the Geneva Conference” and attempt to neutralize the entire region of Southeast Asia. Fifth, Pell proposed to involve the United Nations in the peace process, which required the United States to agree beforehand to accept whatever solution might evolve. Sixth, Pell declared that the United States had to negotiate with the Viet Cong to settle the war. Seventh, the speech stated that the United States should strive to hold nationwide free elections in Vietnam, as specified in the Geneva Accords of 1954, and accept the results as long as amnesty or expatriation were guaranteed for all who might fear retribution for their political beliefs. Such an election would probably lead to at least a partial victory for Ho Chi Minh, but Pell believed that Vietnam would develop into a “nationalist Communist regime, like that of Yugoslavia” and the traditional antagonism between the Vietnam and China would prevent Chinese domination of the new nation. To prevent further Chinese expansion, Pell also proposed that the Soviet Union and the United States guarantee Vietnam’s independence and

25Ibid., 8.
neutrality.  

Some of Pell’s proposals were radically opposed to the President’s policy. The Johnson administration was not willing, at that point, to recognize or negotiate with the Vietcong. It regarded the Viet Cong as only an arm of the North Vietnamese army and would only deal with the government in Hanoi. Others believed that Pell’s idea of holding enclaves would limit the effectiveness of the United States forces and allow the Vietcong to force them slowly out of the nation. Pell’s most serious challenge to Johnson, though, was his willingness to accept a coalition or Communist government. At this time, most Americans supported the President’s Vietnam policy and would accept nothing less than a non-Communist government in South Vietnam.

Pell sent a copy of this speech to President Johnson, but there is no record of any response to it. The speech had little if any effect on the creation of the nation’s policy, nor did it receive notice nationwide. Rhode Island newspapers, however, reported it. The Providence Journal, the state’s leading newspaper, responded favorably to the speech with a front page story. The Journal, a conservative newspaper, considered Pell’s view of a potential Communist regime in Vietnam to be “unpleasant,” but did not present any other criticisms of the speech. While many constituents wrote letters commending the speech, Rhode Island Governor John Chafee disagreed with it. On November 15, Chafee said that “it is a mistake to move along in this dream that there will be negotiations eventually.” Instead, Chafee believed that the United States would “just have to drive them [the Vietcong] out of there” with military force. Pell and Chafee’s different opinions about Vietnam would continue to be a major issue in Rhode Island politics for the next seven years.

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27 Pell to Lyndon Johnson, November 19, 1965, Papers of Claiborne Pell, 89th Congress: President, Office of.
At the end of 1965, Pell’s opinion on Vietnam left him outside of the mainstream pro-administration and anti-war camps. His outspoken calls for negotiation, recognition of the Vietcong, and a bombing halt placed him much closer to the anti-war movement, but many protestors could not understand his willingness to maintain a limited military commitment in Vietnam. Despite his willingness to continue defending South Vietnam, Pell’s main concern was to lower the level of this commitment. He elaborated his views further in a letter to William Bundy, with whom he had previously discussed the war. In the letter, Pell stated: “I am sure, too, you can imagine how concerned men like me feel at the steady enlargement of the area and scope of hostilities. I continue to be amongst those who, while believing in standing firmly would like to see the areas of conflict restricted not enlarged.”

Pell recognized the value of a minimum use of American military force to prevent the spread of Communism, but he did not want to see the nation become involved in a major land war in Asia which would in no way be in America’s national interests. These concerns led Pell to begin to question the wisdom of the nation’s Vietnam policy, and he hoped his criticism could influence Johnson to revise his policy. As the situation in Vietnam deteriorated and the United States became more deeply involved in the quagmire, Pell became more and more vocal in his opposition to the war. He realized that Johnson was determined to solve what he considered to be a political problem by military means. Pell considered the corrupt and inefficient Thieu government, and not the Vietcong guerrillas, to be the gravest problem facing South Vietnam. Reforming the government of South Vietnam, even to the point of including the Communists, he believed, would solve Vietnam’s problems much quicker and more efficiently than by using increased American military power. Thus, by the end of 1965, Pell was committed to opposed the escalation of America’s military commitment to Vietnam and

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concentrated his efforts on finding a peaceful solution to the crisis there.
III: RE-ELECTION AND REFLECTION

In 1966 Pell faced a year of conflicting challenges. He wanted to find a peaceful solution to the war in Vietnam, but he also worried about his campaign for re-election in November. Despite the increasing vocal opposition to the war, public opinion polls showed that the great majority of Americans still supported the president’s Vietnam policy in 1966, and Pell did not want to offend the voters of Rhode Island by openly attacking it. Pell’s stance was that of a moderate “Dove,” who wanted to limit the American combat role in South Vietnam and end the bombing of North Vietnam. He did not, however, call for withdrawing all American military forces from Vietnam as did many of the more radical peace advocates in the United States, and he still approved Johnson’s commitment to support the anti-Communist efforts in South Vietnam.

The first hopeful sign for a peaceful solution in Vietnam came on December 25, 1965, when President Lyndon Johnson ordered the cessation of American bombing in North Vietnam, and he attempted to begin peace negotiations with the North Vietnamese. In an article in the Providence Journal on January 4, 1966, Pell noted that two years he had advocated a halt to the “counter-productive” bombing of North Vietnam because it had not demoralized the North Vietnamese, nor closed the supply routes to South Vietnam. He also observed that while “we can’t just pull out, it is best to de-escalate. This is not a politically popular view, but I hope it will be adopted.” Pell also applauded the president’s effort to begin peace talks, because he believed that a negotiated settlement was the only way to guarantee a stable future in Vietnam.  

On January 19 another article in the Providence Journal compared the Vietnam opinions of Pell and his fellow Rhode Island Senator, John O. Pastore. The article noted

that both senators basically supported the president’s policy and the American commitment to Vietnam, but each had some specific differences with it. Both men
wanted to see an extension of the bombing lull and supported the president’s attempts to find a settlement, though each expressed doubts about the usefulness of Johnson’s “whirlwind peace offensive.” Pastore described the peace efforts as an attempt by the American government “to convince their own people as well as the people of the world that we are serious about getting a settlement.” He further claimed that while there was some validity to this effort, he still thought it to be “largely a propaganda effort.” Pell expressed hope that “there is substance behind the form,” but feared that the publicity of the effort might distract from the results.” Pell, who was described as a “deescalator” in the article, also stated that “further escalation of the war would be against our long-term national interest,” especially since he believed that the Communists could match any increase in American ground forces.

While both Rhode Island senators presented a united front at this time, their views on the war quickly diverged. Pastore was a loyal party man and, more importantly, loyal to his close friend Lyndon Johnson. Thus, while Pastore quickly applauded all of Johnson’s peace efforts and criticized the South Vietnamese government, he was also a key floor leader in the passage of the President’s war legislation. Although Pastore recognized the public resistance to the war and realized that the policy was flawed, he continued to support the president. Pastore best presented the reason for this support in an interview with Time magazine in 1965 in which he stated:

The question of whether we should have gone in there in the first place is subject to debate. The situation that confronts us now is not debatable. We have a commitment. The Administration, with the backing of Congress, has stated the policy. It’s firm. It’s fixed. It does us all well to support it unequivocally.

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3Even Pastore’s patience could be tested, however. From Christmas 1966 to April 1967 he voiced new oppositions to the war, inspired by growing “hawkish” sentiments that called for an “all out military victory” requiring
By the end of the January 1966, it became apparent that the peace efforts would not be successful. Johnson, however, expressed reluctance to resume the bombing because he feared the backlash from the anti-war critics. On January 25, Johnson’s aide Jack Valenti wrote to the president, stating that “the minute we resume . . . the doves, the Lynd-liners, and the [New York] Times will shriek.” Valenti specifically named Pell, along with Senators George McGovern and J. William Fulbright, as among those who would protest the decision to resume bombing. 4 A news service report the next day supported Valenti’s belief. Fifty senators were polled about the decision to halt the bombing, and they were evenly split about the action. Pell was quoted as saying that bombing should be resumed only “when it is firmly established that the infiltration rate has been stepped up and that bombing is militarily effective in stopping this infiltration.” 5

Finally, on January 31, after a thirty-seven day pause, Johnson ordered the bombing to resume. As expected, an outcry arose against the bombing from the anti-war faction but it was matched by statements from Johnson’s supporters who declared that the bombing halt had allowed the Vietcong and the North Vietnamese to send troops and supplies unhindered into South Vietnam. Many Americans agreed with this position and believed that bombing was necessary “to protect our boys” in Vietnam. While the resumption of bombing upset the peace movement, the failure of the pause to bring about a settlement led to a greater acceptance of escalation by the majority of Americans, who now believed that, if the North Vietnamese would not negotiate, it would be necessary to defeat them militarily. A large percentage of Americans held this position. Throughout 1966, polls showed that only between 25% and 35% of Americans believed the war in

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Vietnam to be a mistake, but many of them also believed that, because the United States was already involved, the nation had to make a maximum effort to win. Pell had to consider this opinion as he ran for re-election.\(^6\)

The other major event of January 1966 was the beginning of the Vietnam hearings by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Committee Chairman William Fulbright decided to turn the routine hearings about the foreign aid package for Vietnam into an extensive public investigation into the United States’ involvement in the war. The purpose of these hearings was not to change Johnson’s policy, but to educate the American people about the Vietnam War and perhaps gain the support of some of his fellow senators. The hearings began on January 28 and continued on February 4, 8, 10, 17, and 18. Among those called to testify before the committee were Secretary of State Dean Rusk along with several other State Department officials and General Maxwell Taylor who all supported the administration’s policy. Dissenting views came from former Ambassador George Kennan and General James Gavin.

Senator Fulbright set the tone of the hearing set on the first day when he declared, during his interrogation of Secretary Rusk, that it was the duty of the committee and the administration “to clarify the nature of our involvement there, what it is likely to lead to, and whether or not the ultimate objective justifies the enormous sacrifice in lives and treasure.” Fulbright also questioned the legitimacy of Johnson’s claim of North Vietnamese aggression and asked Rusk to clarify America’s objectives. Fulbright concluded by stating he was “not ready to say at the moment that I am positive that our policies in Vietnam have been wrong, but I am anxious to have greater enlightenment about just what we are about and what our ultimate objective is.”\(^7\)

Taking the opportunity to point out some of the flaws in Johnson’s policy, Pell asked Rusk why the United States had 200,000 troops in South Vietnam, four times the

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\(^6\)Small, Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves, 74-77.

number of North Vietnamese soldiers, fighting what was essentially a South Vietnamese civil war. Rusk responded by claiming that the leadership, supply, and training for the Vietcong came from North Vietnam and China and that the sovereignty of South Vietnam had to be protected from foreign attack. Later Pell asked why the Vietnam War had not been brought before the United Nations. Rusk responded that it had been discussed at the United Nations on several occasions, including a formal debate in August 1964 during the Gulf of Tonkin Crisis, but that it was “the opinion of those in New York primarily responsible for this [American foreign policy] that a formal meeting of the Security Council on this [Vietnam] would result in a bitter debate with no outcome.”

Rusk’s assistants, David Bell, the Administrator of the Agency for International Development, and Rutherford Poats, the Assistant Administrator for Far East, Agency for International Development, returned to testify before the Committee on February 4. At this time Pell inquired about reports that, because of the nature of the fighting in Vietnam, there were more civilian casualties then military. He stated that, while the people of South Vietnam were “horrified at the assassination of city leaders and rural leaders” by the Vietcong, he wondered “if that horror might not be more than balanced by the horror of those who are related or friends of those who are killed by napalm” and by other American or South Vietnamese military actions. Pell also theorized that the massive destruction and civilian casualties caused by the American military was causing the Vietnamese peasants to join the Vietcong.

On February 8, retired Lt. General James Gavin testified before the committee. Gavin had written a letter to Harper’s Magazine in which he criticized the military strategies being used in Vietnam. In the letter, he stated that “the time has come, . . . when we simply have to make up our mind what we want to do and then provide the

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8Tbid., 29-32, 78.
9Tbid., 174-79.
resources necessary to do it.” He claimed that America’s military strength in Vietnam was being stretched “beyond reason” by the attempt “to secure the entire country of South Vietnam from the Vietcong.” He also declared that increased bombing would “add to our problems rather then detract from them, and it will not stop the penetration of North Vietnamese troops into the South.” Instead, Gavin advised that the United States “hold several enclaves on the coast, where sea and air power can be made fully effective” and then “seek to find a solution through the United Nations or a conference in Geneva.” Gavin admitted that such a strategy might cause some difficulties, but he believed that it could be accomplished “with the forces now available” and that the problems involved “would be far less serious then those associated with an expansion of the conflict.”

Gavin’s letter impressed Pell, and he entered it into the Congressional Record on January 27, 1966. Its theories were very close to his own as they advised reducing the bombing, limiting the United States military involvement in Vietnam, and beginning internationally-sponsored negotiations. Pell asked Gavin his opinion on the effectiveness of bombing, stating that he believed that “in guerrilla warfare, bombing may well prove counterproductive” since it could create enemies “in the civilian population” and “harden the will of the North Vietnamese.” Agreeing that some bombing, especially tactical bombing in support of ground forces, was effective and necessary, Gavin observed that the bombing of Hanoi and other civilian areas “wouldn’t help a bit in solving the problems of dealing with the guerrillas in South Vietnam.” Pell also asked Gavin if he believed that in the future a unified Vietnam might become like Yugoslavia, “a national Communist but not expansive state.” That was possible, Gavin explained because “Ho Chi Minh would resist the Chinese as much as he resists the Russians.”

On February 17, former Ambassador George Kennan testified before the Committee. Kennan had served in the United States Foreign Service from 1925 until

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11Ibid., 297-300, 322-23.
1949 including six years in Moscow. He also served as Ambassador to the Soviet Union in 1952 and to Yugoslavia from 1961-1963. Recognized as one of America’s foremost authorities on the Soviet Union, Kennan had developed the theory of containment which was a guiding principle of United States foreign policy. This theory stated that in order to prevent the expansion of Communism the United States must maintain a policy of “long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies” which would include the use of limited conventional military force until the Communist government of the Soviet Union collapsed.

Kennan declared in his statement that “if we were not already involved . . . in Vietnam, I would know of no reason why we should wish to become so involved.” He claimed the Vietnam was neither militarily or industrially important and that if the Vietcong were to take control of South Vietnam it would not “present dangers great enough to justify our direct military intervention” except for “the considerations of prestige that arise precisely out of our present involvement.” Kennan further predicted that “a Communist regime in South Vietnam would follow a fairly independent course” and not become a Chinese puppet. He also expressed bewilderment about the American commitment to South Vietnam, which seemed to include not only defending it from outside attack, but also assuring the “internal security of its government in circumstances where that government is unable to assure that security by its own means.” Such a commitment, Kennan explained, went far beyond “the normal obligations of a military alliance.” Kennan admitted, though, that America’s actual involvement in Vietnam had to be recognized as fact and that an immediate withdrawal could cause serious problems for the United States and its foreign policy. He had determined, therefore, that the United States should reduce its military commitment to South Vietnam and try to find a political solution to the crisis.12

Kennan’s statement impressed Pell, because it, like General Gavin’s, promoted

12Ibid., 331-36.
theories similar to his own. Pell asked Kennan if he believed that continued American escalation in Vietnam would lead to a war with China, either conventional or nuclear, and if such a war did occur whether or not the Soviet Union would become involved. Kennan replied that in the case of a conventional war between China and the United States he believed that the Soviet Union would not become involved, but if nuclear weapons were used, the Soviets would probably enter the war, and perhaps begin a nuclear war with America. Replying to a question about the possibility of a unified Vietnam on the Yugoslavia model, Kennan stated that he was uncertain about it. If Vietnam were to become unified, however, he thought that it would be under a strong nationalist government that would be opposed to outside pressures from China.

On February 18, Secretary Rusk returned for the final day of testimony, in effect to give the Johnson administration a chance to respond to the testimonies of Kennan and Gavin. During this session, Pell reiterated that neither the witnesses nor any of the Senators were calling for the United States to “scuttle and run,” nor to “knock the chips off the Chinese shoulders,” but instead were attempting to settle on a strategy in the middle. He further noted that, although it was the Communists who introduced the element of time into modern warfare, America could also use time to its own advantage. Pell claimed that if the United States maintained a long-term limited military commitment in Vietnam, it would eventually be in the Communists’ interest “to get us out through negotiations.” On the other hand, Pell maintained that, if America escalated its commitment to Vietnam in an attempt to reach a quick solution, it would appear to the Communists that “we feel time is . . . against us.” Therefore, Pell believed it was to the United States’ advantage to limit its military commitment to Vietnam.13

Secretary Rusk agreed with this idea in part and claimed that President Johnson was determined to send only the number of troops necessary, but stated that the continued increases in Vietcong and North Vietnamese units in South Vietnam forced the

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13 Ibid., 648-49.
escalation of the American commitment. Pell also expressed concern about Johnson’s plans to meet the growing Communist presence in South Vietnam by doubling the number of American troops in Vietnam in 1966, from 200,000 to 400,000, and to increase the number to 600,000 in 1967. Pell stated that he believed that “if our present commitment could be held down to last over a 5-year period if necessary, we would be better off.” Rusk responded that he did not want the President’s options for Vietnam limited by a policy which prevented growth in the American military commitment even if it would never be used.\textsuperscript{14}

Overall, the hearings presented two distinct positions on the war. The anti-war faction on the Committee, including Senators Fulbright, Pell, Wayne Morse, Frank Church of Idaho, Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota, George Aiken of Vermont, and Albert Gore Sr. of Tennessee, all raised some serious questions about the nation’s commitment to Vietnam, but only Morse was willing to call for an immediate pull-out.\textsuperscript{15} The Committee members who defended Johnson, including Senators Russell Long of Louisiana, John Sparkman of Alabama, Thomas Dodd of Connecticut, and Frank Lausche of Ohio, each acknowledged that there were some flaws that needed to be addressed, but contended that America’s overall commitment to South Vietnam was valid and needed to be continued. While several different options were discussed, no one policy proposal was put forth as the solution to the Vietnam crisis. The Committee decided that the United States needed to continue its limited military commitment to South Vietnam, but this strategy left a wide range of policy options from reducing troop levels to tripling them over two years, as Johnson proposed. The majority of the Committee seemed to favor limiting the American role in Vietnam as much as possible, but they did not use this consensus to send any policy proposals to Johnson.

While the hearings had no immediate effect on Vietnam policy, they did play an

\textsuperscript{14}\textit{Ibid.}, 680-82.

\textsuperscript{15}Senator Mansfield was also a member of the Committee but did not take part in these hearings.
important role in educating the nation about America’s participation in the Vietnam war. The hearings were the first national discussion about the war since the teach-ins in the spring of 1965. More importantly, they were televised on network television, so that people across the nation could hear the senators’ arguments. They also provided an official government forum for anti-war criticism. The fact that nationally-respected figures like Fulbright and Kennan were questioning the administration’s Vietnam policy in an official Senate session brought a sense of respectability to the anti-war movement and encouraged critics of the war to continue their efforts. Most Vietnam dissenters were disappointed that the hearings did not have a more forceful anti-war stance, but the mere fact that they were held raised the nation’s awareness of the war and made moderates more concerned about the conduct of the war. Pell’s own opinion is that “the educational hearings held on the war were tremendous,” and he specifically complimented the role that Senator Fulbright played in using the Foreign Relations Committee as a forum to discuss America’s role in Vietnam. Fulbright influenced Pell’s opinions throughout the war, both by his own opposition and by providing a public forum through which the junior senator from Rhode Island could express his views to a national audience.16

Pell’s role in the hearings was somewhat limited because of his lack of seniority on the committee. His standing as the second-lowest ranking Democrat meant that he usually was the last to question the witnesses. By that time, his senior colleagues had asked many of the most important questions, and Fulbright and Morse, the two most prominent anti-war critics on the committee, somewhat overshadowed him. Pell used the hearings to promote several of the ideas that he had put forth in his speech of 1965, including recommendations to use the United Nations for negotiations, halt the bombings, and de-escalate the war. Pell’s role in the hearings also invoked a popular response among his constituents. He received several letters praising his position, and during the first three weeks of February 1966 his correspondence opposed escalation 51

16Telephone interview with Pell, July 23, 1993.
Following the hearings, Pell turned to his re-election campaign. His opponent in the race was Ruth M. Briggs, a former Colonel in the Women’s Army Corps during the Second World War. Pell had feared that popular Rhode Island Governor John Chafee would run against him and had even begun to prepare for such a race, but he decided to run for Governor again, and Pell faced a much weaker opponent in Mrs. Briggs. Pell did not deny that he was more “Dovish” than Briggs, but he did not want to run specifically as an anti-war candidate despite the overwhelming percentage of letters he had received supporting his position. He knew that it was very difficult to gauge the opinions of the entire state by a handful of letters. He also realized that, while many Rhode Island citizens did not support further escalation in Vietnam, they also did not want to see America “cut and run” in the face of Communist aggression.

In a newspaper report, Pell declared that he believed that, as a senator, he had a responsibility to offer constructive criticism to the president, but that his freedom to speak out as did other Democratic senators was limited because of his campaign for re-election. Furthermore, while he criticized some aspects of the Johnson policy, he also carefully pointed out to the people of Rhode Island the similarities between their two positions. Pell claimed that he always gave his fullest support to the American soldiers fighting in Vietnam and he continued to vote in favor of Johnson-sponsored bills on Vietnam in the Senate. Pell best expressed the difficulty of his position on February 10 when he answered a letter from his old friend Angier Biddle Duke, then serving as American Ambassador to Spain. Duke asked whether Pell was trying to be a “Hawk,” a “Dove,” or an “Owl.” Pell responded, “I am doing my best to being an ‘owl’ and also to being elected.”

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18Ibid.
19Pell to Angier Biddle Duke, February 10, 1966, Papers of Claiborne Pell, 89th Congress, Box 6: Foreign Relations, Viet Nam, 1965 (Special Collections, University of Rhode Island Library).
President Johnson attempted, on at least one occasion, to demonstrate to Pell the risk he was taking by opposing his Vietnam policy. In mid-February Johnson sent George Ball, himself an opponent of escalation, to show Pell the results of a recent poll taken in Rhode Island about the war. The poll, conducted for Johnson by Oliver Quayle, showed that about 60% of Rhode Islanders “agreed with the Administration’s stance on Vietnam,” 30% were “hawkish” and only about 10% openly opposed the war. Such numbers did not scare Pell into supporting the President, but until the election in November he remained fairly quiet on Vietnam. The only war-related statements he made in the senate supported proposals made by other critics, such as Senators Mike Mansfield and Robert Kennedy. Nor did he make any major public speeches on Vietnam.

He did, however, continue to answer the queries of his constituents on the subject. Many of these letters reflected the conflicting position in which Pell found himself. In a letter written during the hearings, he responded to a constituent who complained that the Congress had neglected its duties by allowing Johnson to fight an undeclared war in Vietnam. Pell replied that American involvement in Vietnam had been “authorized step by step by the Congress, first by resolution and then by specific votes on special appropriations.” He also stated that, while not everyone was “entirely satisfied with the conduct of our involvement,” he did not believe that there had been “an abrogation of Congressional Responsibility.” He further stated that

the current deliberations of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee . . . are demonstrating that the Congress can and will continue to exert its will, with considerable effect, I believe, on formulation of executive policy.

Within that framework, I do believe that there must be at least general support of the President in order to lend credibility to his efforts to attain a negotiated settlement, although I would certainly agree that this general support should not preclude debate and deliberation as to the future course

20Bruce E. Alterschuler, *LBJ and the Polls* (Gainesville, Florida, 1990), 54.
of our development.21

Pell tried to please both sides of the Vietnam issue at the same time, sometimes with the same action. On March 2, Pell wrote to a Johnson supporter to let him know that the Congress had passed the president’s request for a special military appropriation of $4.8 billion and that he “was among the 98 Senators who supported the measure.” The next day he wrote to a couple who opposed escalation and noted that the appropriation had passed “in spite of the fact that many members sincerely hope that our commitment will be limited in scope.” Furthermore, he stated that the overwhelming margin of support indicated “Congress’ belief that the additional support would be used for continued limited operations with a view toward ending our involvement as soon as possible.”22

As America’s military commitment increased throughout the spring of 1966, Pell’s letters showed a growing dissatisfaction with the nation’s Vietnam policy, but he still rarely expressed it publicly. On June 6, when he answered questions following a speech at the St. Matthew’s Catholic Youth Organization in Cranston, Rhode Island, however, Pell stated publicly that he thought the bombing of North Vietnam was unproductive. “It’s not a very popular theory,” he said, “But you can’t have a quick victory there.” He also feared that any attempt to win the war with bombing might lead to a conflict with China or the Soviet Union. When asked if the United States should stay in or pull out of Vietnam, Pell responded, “Basically, I’d like to see us out of there, particularly if the Vietnamese people developed an anti-American feeling. There’s no point in trying to occupy a friendly country.” He also stated, however, that America should maintain its military presence while it searched for a solution, claiming “we can’t just pull out now.” He also warned that the United States had to be careful about how it

promoted its policy in Vietnam. He stated:

It would be a great mistake to pressure the Ky regime to be more in our own image. If we pressure the Ky government, then we do exactly what our enemies say: we create a puppet government, and we would lose many of our neutral friends around the world.\textsuperscript{23}

Throughout the rest of the summer, Pell wrote several letters stating that while America should not abandon South Vietnam, neither should it expand its military role there, and that negotiations should begin as soon as possible to stabilize the crisis. He responded to several anti-war activists who were disappointed by his unwillingness to protest openly against the war. He stated his belief that his “own reservations should be expressed with restraint and in as constructive a fashion as possible,” so that he could work within the system to find a way to end the war.\textsuperscript{24} Thus, Pell remained fairly neutral about Vietnam throughout the campaign. Whether because of this tactic, or in spite of it, the war never became a major issue of the campaign. Pell defeated Mrs. Briggs by 114,493 votes, winning a majority of 67.6%. Now assured of a seat in the Senate until 1972, he could once again begin to criticize the war.\textsuperscript{25}

Though Vietnam had not been a key issue in Pell’s re-election campaign, it was quickly becoming the most important issue across America. By the beginning of 1967 approximately 400,000 United States soldiers were in Vietnam and all signs pointed to increased American involvement. At the beginning of the year, polls showed that over 30% of Americans thought that the war was a mistake, and this number reached over 45% by the end of the year. The number of people wanting an immediate withdrawal also rose to 10% by the end of the year.\textsuperscript{26} On January 5, 1967, just after Pell had been sworn in as a member of the 90th Congress, he responded to a questionnaire sent by CBS

\textsuperscript{24}Pell to Dr. Dale C. Krause, September 27, 1966, Papers of Claiborne Pell, 89th Congress, Box 5: Foreign Relations Viet Nam, July-September 1966.
\textsuperscript{26}Small, \textit{Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves}, 94-95.
News to the members of the Senate. CBS asked for the opinion of Rhode Islanders on
the war, and the Senator’s opinion on bombing, and the political implications of the war.
Pell replied that the people of Rhode Island were “increasingly concerned with the
conduct of the war” and that there had been “an increasing shift opposing our continuing
escalation.” He also reiterated that the bombing had been “counterproductive in its
effect,” a belief that had been reinforced by recent reports from Hanoi. Finally, he stated
that “the political implications of Vietnam will prove an increasing hardship to the
Democratic party in 1967.”

Pell was not the only senator concerned. Throughout the winter and spring of
1967 the anti-war faction in the Senate grew stronger and more outspoken. No one yet
dared to call for an immediate withdrawal, but several senators, including Mansfield,
Frank Church of Idaho, Robert Kennedy and John Cooper of Kentucky, began to criticize
openly Johnson’s Vietnam policy, both within the Senate and in other public addresses.
On March 2, 1967, Robert Kennedy made his second major Senate address on Vietnam,
stating that America had reached “a critical turning point” in the war and was now
“balanced between the rising prospects of peace and surely rising war, between the
promise of negotiations and the perils of spreading conflict.” He declared that the
United States should concentrate its efforts on seeking a negotiated settlement to end the
war, and to facilitate these efforts, Kennedy proposed an unconditional bombing halt in
the bombing of North Vietnam.

Kennedy’s statement sparked a debate on Vietnam. Senator Fulbright rose to
support the speech and Senator Mansfield was quick to point out that it was not an attack
against President Johnson, but a “calm and dispassionate” statement designed to open
debate on a sensitive subject. Others Democrats, however, criticized the speech.

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27 Telegram from Roger Mudd, David Schoumacher and William Small of CBS
News to Pell, January 3, 1967, and Letter from Pell to Mudd, Schoumacher and
Small of CBS, January 5, 1967, Papers of Claiborne Pell, 90th Congress: Foreign
Relations Viet Nam, January-June 1967.
28 “Vietnam,” U.S., Congressional Record, 90th Congress, 1st Sess. (March
2, 1967), 5280.
Frank Lausche declared that a bombing halt would leave “our young men” in Vietnam defenseless against the Vietcong supply lines from North Vietnam, and thus increase the number of American casualties. Lausche also argued that previous bombing halts had not led to negotiations, specifically noting the bombing halt in May 1965. Pell refuted him, noting that the North Vietnamese had made an effort to begin negotiations during this bombing halt, but the United States did not follow through.29 Later in the debate, Pell commended Kennedy’s speech and added to Mansfield’s argument that the speech was not an attack against Johnson. He stated that the president and the senate shared the same objectives, “a reasonable settlement and an opportunity to extricate ourselves from the quagmire of southeast Asia. The question is: How do we do it?” Therefore, Pell applauded Kennedy for his contributions to the Vietnam debate.30

On May 24, Pell presented his own speech on Vietnam. It was his second major one on Vietnam, but the first in which he spoke at length on the subject in the Senate. The speech underscored his concern about the “growing sense of impatience and frustration regarding the Vietnam war.” Many Americans, he noted, including some in the Johnson Administration, wanted to “‘escalate the war, get it over with and bring our young men home,’” but they did not realize that escalation would lead to many more deaths and “a permanent commitment of hundreds of thousands of our young men and billions of dollars annually, for many years to come.” Furthermore, he believed that “such a so-called victory” would “contain the seeds of far greater bitterness and disaster.”31

Pell did not deny that the United States could defeat North Vietnam militarily, but claimed that doing so would cause a power vacuum in Vietnam which would be filled by China. Therefore, he stated that “American national interest, Vietnam’s national interest, and the world’s self-interest” all depended on a “sane resolution to the conflict in

Vietnam,” and he advised that “to cool it down, to slow down” was the “correct, commonsense, [sic] immediate course to follow.” “The best permanent solution” to the Vietnam crisis was for the United States, along with the United Nations, to create a settlement “that reasonably represents the actual political forces in being there: the relatively small Ky right wing and Communist left wing and the large middle ground of neutralists of all complexions.”

The first step to this process, according to Pell, required the United States to “cease bombing the north and hold our present level of men in the south” and then to begin negotiations with North Vietnam. He proposed four other conditions which would ensure the cease fire: “verified free elections” in South Vietnam; the new South Vietnamese government’s freedom to create policy without outside interference; “agreement in principle” to withdraw all American troops after the election and simultaneously with the withdrawal of the North Vietnamese forces; and “immediate release of all political prisoners, amnesty for any political actions in past, and right of asylum for any South Vietnamese wishing it.” The “final objective” of this process was “the general military neutralization of the whole area.”

Criticizing Johnson’s Vietnam policy, Pell argued that an attempt to solve the Vietnam crisis militarily might succeed, but would produce “only a facade of victory” and “prove to be a long-term defeat for our country.” His major criticism was of Johnson’s bombing campaign. Pell supported a bombing halt to encourage the North Vietnamese to negotiate because he believed that the bombing was ineffectual. In defense of his opinion, Pell quoted a statement by Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, who in testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, had said “I don’t believe that the bombing up to the present has significantly reduced, nor any bombing that I could contemplate in the future, would significantly reduce the actual

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32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
flow of men and material to the south.”

Pell further noted that the bombing was not only ineffective, but also very costly for the United States. The majority of American prisoners of war were crewmen from downed aircraft. Also, he quoted Defense Department figures showing that the cost of downed aircraft was “more than five times the cost of the damage we inflicted” by the bombing. Furthermore, he reported that the bombing was “psychologically and politically counter-productive to our national interest by galvanizing the will of the North Vietnamese to resist and by driving North Vietnam into the arms of China.” Therefore, Pell claimed, the risks and costs of the bombing of North Vietnam by far outweighed any military advantage that was gained by it. This statement was Pell’s harshest criticism yet of Johnson’s bombing program. While previously he had attacked it as strategically ineffective, he now produced evidence that it was actually detrimental to America’s military effort.

Raising another critical issue, Pell asked “what is the real reason, the national interest reason, why we are in Southeast Asia . . . to the extent that we are.” He noted that the main reason given by the administration was the need to stop Communist expansion in Vietnam to prevent Communism expansion elsewhere. Pell, however, observed that America’s effort in Vietnam to this point was sufficient to convince the world that the United States was willing to fight to prevent the spread of Communism. If the American military effort in Vietnam continued, Pell foresaw:

At the very best, . . . a situation where the North Vietnamese military forces are destroyed and the National Liberation Front military potential is ultimately pushed way underground. With enough more killing of Americans and Vietnamese and enough more money and material from the United States, we may achieve this result.

I suppose, too, we will find that an election of sorts would have taken place legitimizing either Marshal Ky or General Thieu as President. Such a government would remain in power just as long as we would continue to

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34 Ibid., 13498-99.
35 Ibid., 13499-500.
shore it up with a quarter-million-man occupation force and several billion dollars a year.

Why would such a government need so much article support? The reason, as I see it, is that there simply will be no broad political base for that government.36

Such a result, in Pell’s opinion, would be worse than a military defeat. A long-term American commitment would not only be expensive, but also risk renewed uprisings against the South Vietnamese government. A tenet of America’s commitment to South Vietnam, since its inception, was that the United States had no intention of replacing France as the colonial power of the region. However, if Pell’s forecast were to become reality, the United States would become the de facto colonial master of South Vietnam, in spite of any denials made by the Johnson administration. Such a situation, in his view, would not only go against one of the basic tenets of the United States' foreign policy, but would be a dangerous over commitment to Vietnam, far beyond the value of the region to America’s national interest.

Pell believed that it was imperative to negotiate a settlement in Vietnam and, therefore, presented “an alternative, positive course of action” to encourage talks. First, Pell’s plan called for the cessation of the American bombing of North Vietnam. Second, it advised the United States to de-escalate offensive military operations to reduce American casualties and enable the military to concentrate “on securing and making economically viable those areas that are easily defended by our strong land and naval forces.” The proposal also declared that the United States should support “sweeping social and land reform” in South Vietnam to promote the anti-Communist efforts there. Pell recognized that the process of negotiations would be difficult, but stated that both sides had to “return to the Geneva Convention and follow it.” The United States, he declared, had to negotiate with the Vietcong and accept “the possibility that a nationalist Communist regime may eventually emerge.” This outcome, in his view, would be

36Ibid., 13498-99.
distasteful to many Americans, but he believed that a nationalistic Communist regime in Vietnam would probably prevent further Chinese expansion, because of Vietnam’s traditional animosity towards China. Pell declared that such a solution would be better “than the best alternative now ahead of us - namely, an artificial regime indefinitely shored up by American young men and dollars.”

Pell concluded that he believed this proposal “to be our wisest course for the future of Vietnam and Southeast Asia, based on a realistic and long-range view of our national interest and our history.” He noted with regret, however, that “our current policy does not seem to rest on such a basis” and issued a plea that “our objectives and our strategy may be reappraised accordingly.” The United States, Pell stated, should not try to solve the crisis in Vietnam by military means, but instead seek to find a long-term political solution by creating a stable government in South Vietnam which reflected “all the diverse political forces of the area.” Such a solution was the only way to guarantee the “settlement of the strife and military neutralization of the area.”

Although he reiterated many of the same points made in his speech of November 1965, Pell had modified his position in several ways. Pell had become more critical of Johnson’s policies in this speech, openly attacking his bombing policy and his overall strategy of using military power to end the crisis in Vietnam. He also simplified his program for a peace settlement, noting that the formation of a Communist government in Vietnam, as long as it was a Vietnamese nationalist government, would be preferable to a non-Communist government like the weak and corrupt Thieu regime that required great amounts of American aid to survive. This speech was a politically risky statement to make considering the nation’s general opinion about Communism.

Pell received great praise for his speech. Among his colleagues, Senators Mansfield, Morse and Albert Gore specifically commended him in the Congressional

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37 Ibid., 13500.
38 Ibid.
Senators Fulbright and Church each sent letters to Pell praising his speech. Fulbright declared it to be “very good indeed” and expressed hope that it would “be taken seriously by the Administration.”

He also received letters of support from such well-known anti-war proponents as his friend Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. and Dr. Benjamin Spock as well as from his constituents in Rhode Island. Praise also came from the Providence Journal, the Newport Daily News, the Pawtucket Times, and the Woonsocket Call, all of which supported his speech though the conservative Journal expressed slight criticism.

The four newspapers proclaimed the importance of searching for a solution in Vietnam and congratulated Pell for his courage in presenting such a forceful proposal. Both the Times and the Call added glowing editorial support for Pell as well.

Pell sent copies of his speech to several important figures in Washington, including President Johnson, Vice President Hubert Humphrey, and the entire cabinet as well as the Congressional leaders of both houses. Pell also met with President Johnson to discuss his speech and his growing opposition to the war; but no record exists of what was said during this meeting. How much effect his speech had on any of the recipients it is difficult to tell. The speech suffered greatly from bad timing. It was overshadowed by the beginning of the war between Israel and its Arab neighbors, an event which attracted the attention of everyone concerned with United States foreign policy. These outside events, though, did not diminish the importance of the speech to Pell’s personal anti-war campaign. He had taken an important step by clearly allying himself with the anti-war critics and also strengthened the peace movement with the clarity of his arguments.

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39 Letter from Fulbright to Pell, June 5, 1967, Papers of Claiborne Pell, 90th Congress Correspondence With Senators: Dirkson-Dodd-Fulbright; Letter from Church to Pell, June 23, 1967, Papers of Claiborne Pell, 90th Congress, Senators Correspondence: Church-Clark-Cooper.

40 David M. Barrett, Uncertain Warriors: Lyndon Johnson and His Vietnam Advisors (Lawrence, Kansas, 1993), 98. Barrett reports no record of this meeting in the Johnson Papers. A letter from Pell to Mike N. Mantos, an Administrative Assistant at the White House, on July 21 thanked Mantos for arranging this interview. Papers of Claiborne Pell, July 21, 1967, 90th Congress, President, Office of.
In late 1967, the Senate critics decided to submit the Vietnam issue to the United Nations formally by means of two Senate resolutions: Senate Concurrent Resolution 44, introduced by Senator Morse, and Senate Resolution 180, introduced by Senator Mansfield and fifty-three other senators including Pell. After Mansfield introduced his bill, Pell asserted that the Vietnam crisis was a perfect example of the kind of threat to peace that the United Nations “as envisaged by all of us at San Francisco more than 20 years ago” was founded to mediate. Morse’s resolution was by far the more forceful of the two, as it required the President to call an emergency session of the United Nations Security Council to consider the war in Vietnam and also pledged the United States to accept in advance “any decision on the matter by the Council.” Resolution 180 on the other hand only required the President to consider whether the American ambassador to the United Nations should submit the issue to the Security Council. Although Pell did not co-sponsor the Morse proposal, he believed that firm United Nations action on the Vietnam war was necessary. Supporting Morse’s proposal in a newspaper interview, he insisted:

We should say in advance that we will abide by the vote of the U.N., that we will abide by the collective judgement of the U.N. no matter what that verdict will be or how distasteful it is to us. Part of the process of going to the U.N. requires the acceptance of its arbitration and its wishes in this matter.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee held hearings on these resolutions on October 26, 27 and November 2. Pell had advocated that the Vietnam conflict be brought before the United Nations since 1964 and, therefore, played a key role in the hearings, even chairing part of the first session. In the hearings, Pell asserted that the United States’ actions in Vietnam violated the United Nations charter. He also advised

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that it would “be to the best interest of the Vietnamese and us, if we simply let a
government emerge reflecting the political forces that are present,” even though it was
probable that the Vietcong “would soon exercise a dominant force because they have
more cohesion and drive than any of the other groups in the country.” Pell suggested this
course, because he believed that the North Vietnamese would not negotiate unless the
Vietcong were guaranteed a dominant role, if not total control of any government to be
formed in post-war South Vietnam.44

Shortly after the end of these hearings, Pell made a statement regarding the next
key domestic event affecting the Vietnam war, the Presidential election of 1968. In a
poll of Rhode Island’s congressional delegation about whom they planned to support in
the upcoming election, Pell stated that “under present conditions I believe that I would
fully support the President.” He noted, though, that it was impossible to predict what his
position would be at election time if the war and the social unrest in America continued,
and he did not “want to find myself locked in.” Pell was the only one of the four Rhode
Island Congressmen who expressed any reservations about supporting Johnson, and the
article mentioned the similarity between the Vietnam stances of Pell and Johnson’s anti-
war challenger, Senator Eugene McCarthy. Pell admitted that the war would play a
major role in the election and observed that there was “a mood of unease and questioning
in the state” about Vietnam but he was “not sure the vacuum would be filled by Mr.
McCarthy.”45

By the beginning of 1968 the war in Vietnam had become the biggest issue in
America, both foreign and domestic. The number of American troops in Vietnam had
reached nearly 500,000 and battle deaths were over 15,000. The anti-war movement in
the United States was growing in size and the protests were becoming more radical and
violent. War protests and race riots were becoming common, and civil unrest threatened

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to tear the nation apart. The radical anti-war movement still involved only a small minority in America, but many moderates supported its goal if not its methods. About 45% of Americans believed that the United States’ involvement in Vietnam was a mistake and over 10% wanted an immediate withdrawal.\textsuperscript{46}

On January 31, however, the entire war changed, both in Vietnam and America. On that day the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong launched their largest offensive of the war, breaking the truce of Tet, the Vietnamese New Year. The attacks took place all across South Vietnam, and for the first time major military action reached urban areas, notably, over one hundred cities and towns. The most dramatic attacks were in Saigon, where Vietcong sappers assaulted the United States Embassy and held the courtyard there for six hours, and in Hue, the ancient capital of Vietnam, where about 7,500 Vietcong and North Vietnamese troops stormed the Citadel and took control. At Hue, the Vietcong abandoned their strategy of retreating before superior forces and resisted a massive American attack, leading to three weeks of urban fighting that decimated the city.

The Tet offensive startled both the United States military forces and the American people. The American military forces in Vietnam had become used to fighting in the jungle, with only minor terrorist attacks in the cities. The wide range of the attacks also surprised them, since previously the Vietcong had concentrated its forces for a major attack at only one place at a time. The Americans were shocked by the power of the offensive. For years the Defense Department, along with the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, had claimed that “victory was around the corner” in Vietnam. The Tet offensive proved, however, that the Vietcong were not demoralized and near defeat as the government had claimed. Many Americans now began to question not only their nation’s intervention in Vietnam, but the truthfulness of their government. General William Westmoreland claimed that the Tet offensive had decimated the Vietcong and that an

additional 200,000 soldiers would allow him finally to win the war. Interviews with North Vietnamese officials after the war prove that Westmoreland’s claim about the Vietcong was accurate, but the American public was unwilling to believe the Defense Department’s reports any more. Thus, while the Tet offensive was a military failure in Vietnam, it was a political victory in the United States as it inspired a massive wave of anti-war protests.

The ferocity of the Tet offensive also surprised Pell, and it inspired him to become more vocal in his opposition to the war. On February 26, Pell released a statement claiming that President Johnson had “overreacted to the Tonkin Gulf Incident” and since that time had “wrongly led the country deeper and deeper into the war.” His statement came a week after Secretary of Defense McNamara had testified before the Foreign Relations Committee defending the administration’s reaction to the Gulf of Tonkin incident. Pell claimed that, while he did not believe that the Johnson administration had either “provoked the incident” nor “willfully lied about it,” he believed it had taken advantage of the situation “to justify expanding . . . a small scale action . . . into a vigorous American North Vietnamese war.”

In analyzing the situation, Pell stated that at the time of the Gulf of Tonkin, many members of the Johnson administration believed that the United States had to make a major military intervention to prevent the collapse of the South Vietnamese government. Pell stated, “If we hadn’t intervened the government would have collapsed but I think we would have been in better shape all the way around.” He further proclaimed that the Gulf of Tonkin resolution was “too strong” and that he would not vote for it again. He was also angry at himself for his original support of the resolution and confessed, “I was imprudent, I guess, in my confidence that the Administration . . . would avoid widening the war.” In March, Pell joined other war opponents in demanding a full Senate debate

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48 Ibid.
on Vietnam. He stated that he had seen his fellow members of the Foreign Relations Committee become “increasingly disenchanted” with Johnson’s Vietnam policy. He also expressed his wish that all of the committee’s sessions would be open to the public because he believed that “there might be a shift in the Senate and the country as a whole” about Vietnam.49

Pell received his wish the next week, when the Senate Foreign Relations Committee held another series of hearings on Vietnam. Like the hearings in 1966, this series considered the foreign aid program for Vietnam. The hearings occurred on March 11 and 12, and once again the major witness was Secretary of State Dean Rusk. While interrogating Rusk, Pell commented on his own anti-war activities and his desire to make all hearings open to the public. He said he recognized that speaking out against the war could “harm the morale of our men . . . harm our position,” but claimed that there was “greater harm in not speaking out, not trying to galvanize public opinion if your feeling is that we were on a course of disaster.” He reported that during his three years on the committee there had been a great deal of debate about the war and that now “a majority of the Committee” had “adopted a view that deescalation is advisable.” Furthermore, Pell defended the hearings because the debate between Rusk and the committee provided a forum to present the administration’s Vietnam policy to the public, and also because the senators could ask the questions that many Americans wanted answered.50

Commenting on the unwillingness of the North Vietnamese to negotiate a settlement to end the war, Pell said that their attitude was possibly inspired by the feeling that they “have been welshed upon three times in international agreements”: in 1946 with the French, in 1954 at Geneva when they were forced to accept only half of Vietnam and in 1956 when the United States refused to allow the national elections to be held. On the

second day of the hearings Pell continued his attack on the war. He said that in his opinion the hearings were concentrating on two key questions, what were the “moral values” and the “national interest values” of the war. Pell told Rusk that the debate over the war came down to the one basic question, whether there was “a point at which we can arrive when we will say the amount of suffering, not of us, but of the South Vietnamese, will have more than justified what we would lose by not continuing.”

Rusk responded that he did not want to judge the war strictly on moral terms but said he considered the Vietcong to be immoral. He faced similar attacks during this hearing, but Pell’s questioning about the morality of the war brought his sharpest response. Unlike the hearings in 1966, when the senators questioned only the degree of American involvement in Vietnam, during the hearings in 1968 the committee questioned whether the United States military should be in Vietnam at all. Similar questions were being asked outside of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The Tet offensive inspired some of the most violent anti-war protests in the history of the nation, but this radical response was still held by a small minority. Much more important to the peace movement was that the Tet offensive inspired millions of Americans to rethink their moderate positions on the war and become active opponents of it. President Johnson realized the political implications of this movement and knew that the war would have a tremendous detrimental effect on his campaign for re-election. Therefore, on March 31, 1968 Johnson surprised the nation by announcing that he would not run for re-election, but would instead concentrate his efforts on finding a peaceful solution to the war. As part of this effort, he announced a bombing halt above the twenty-first parallel and began a deescalation of American troops.

On April 3, the North Vietnamese responded to Johnson’s peace overture and announced that they agreed to begin negotiations, which started in Paris on May 13. Pell applauded Johnson’s peace efforts, though he expressed regret over his decision not to

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51 Ibid., 128, 202.
run for re-election. A week after the talks began, Pell warned an audience not to “expect too much too soon” from the talks. He said that the American people needed to have some patience, but also suggested further reductions in troop levels and renewed his call to concentrate the United States forces in strategic enclaves. Despite his dislike of the war, Pell still did not call for an immediate withdrawal. Instead, he proposed that America “promote some sort of stabilized government in South Vietnam and then get out.” To form such a government, Pell said, it was necessary to hold a “verified free election . . . with the right to hold office open to every citizen in South Vietnam.” Such a policy, in his view, would allow the Vietcong to hold office.52

At the same time as the Paris peace talks began, Pell prepared his third major speech on Vietnam, which he presented in the Senate on June 21, 1968. This speech reiterated many of his previous views on Vietnam. In fact, several passages from his speech of May 1967 were repeated verbatim. Pell declared that it was incredible that an “inconclusive war with such a tiny and innocuous country . . . which has never really jeopardized our national interests” should become one of the major wars of American history. The speech expressed hope that the Paris talks would succeed, but again warned people not to “expect too much too soon.” It also warned the North Vietnamese not to misinterpret the dissent in the United States as a willingness “to settle for peace at any price.” Furthermore, Pell advised the Communists not to escalate their own military efforts, because it might inspire America to continue its fight. Once again, Pell rejected either escalating the war or withdrawing immediately from Vietnam and stated that America’s real goal was “to promote some sort of stabilized government in South Vietnam -- and, then to get out!”53

This speech repeated Pell’s now familiar requests to cease the bombing of North Vietnam and to stabilize the level of American troops in Vietnam until a cease fire could

be arranged. He endorsed holding a free election and the withdrawal of all American and North Vietnamese forces from South Vietnam following the cease fire. Pell wanted to clarify America’s relationship with Vietnam, and suggested that “a limited partnership is the relationship our nation should have toward countries or regions where our real national interest are not vital” and said he considered Southeast Asia a region where “real American national interests are negligible.” America, however, had allowed its limited partnership there to grow “into a full general partnership, with the full faith and credit of the United States having been pledged to that increasingly unhappy, increasingly ravaged little country with its corrupt, unpopular and unrepresentational Thieu-Ky government.”

Pell asserted that it was in America’s national interest to give up its partnership with South Vietnam. “No arrangement is eternal,” he claimed, and he quoted Lord Palmerston’s dictum that “We have no eternal allies, and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual, and those interests it is our duty to follow.” The problem facing the United States was to find a way to follow America’s true national interests in Vietnam, “and still maintain our credibility as a nation and as an ally.” Despite his arguments against the war, Pell continued to believe “that a good argument can be made for spending some lives and some dollars to halt, trip, obstruct, or contain those who are opposed to us, be they Communist or simply bandits.” He declared that this sacrifice was “part of the price of greatness, of world leadership” that America had to pay, but he wanted to be sure that the nation kept “a reasonable price tag” on such efforts, and got other nations to help share the cost whenever possible.

The speech proposed “several steps . . . to reduce our present military operation.” First, it again called for “the curtailment of the bombing of North Vietnam.” Second, it advised reducing ground operations and instead concentrating on securing those areas which the American air and naval power could best support. This policy, Pell believed,

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54 Ibid., 4-7.
55 Ibid., 7-9.
would cut America’s “casualties and dollar expenditures” by four fifths and allow the United States to “afford to stay as long as we felt absolutely necessary.” He claimed that a long-term, low-cost United States military commitment in Vietnam would force the North Vietnamese to negotiate, undermining their strategy of wearing down America’s will to remain in South Vietnam through a costly war in which no apparent gains were made.56

Once again, Pell reiterated the need for a negotiated settlement to end the war. As in 1967, he suggested that both sides follow the Geneva Agreement of 1954 and advised the United States to recognize the necessity of negotiating with the Vietcong. He renewed his plea that the Vietnam problem be brought before the United Nations, or another similar body, and also requested that other non-Communist Asian nations participate in the defense of South Vietnam to deflate the charges of neocolonialism. Finally, he warned the nation to be “particularly mindful of the present enlarging nature of the American commitment in Thailand and seek to reverse that dangerous trend toward another Vietnam.” He concluded that the United States’ goal in Vietnam should not be a military victory over North Vietnam, but instead “a military neutralization of the whole of Southeast Asia” and the political stabilization of the region.57

While this speech was basically a reiteration of Pell’s previous statements, it had some key new additions. Pell supported Johnson’s peace initiative, but doubted the effectiveness of the effort. He knew that the United States would have to make certain concessions to reach a settlement, including recognition of the Vietcong’s position as a political force, a concession which the Johnson administration was not willing to make. He hoped that the inevitable difficulties in reaching a settlement would not frustrate Johnson so much that he would again try to win a military victory.

The speech also shows the continuing evolution of Pell’s theory of conducting

56Ibid., 9-11.
57Ibid., 11-15.
foreign policy. Pell believed that all foreign policy decisions should be based on America’s national interests and claimed that the United States’ interest in Vietnam, which had been negligible initially, had been far outweighed by the sacrifice already made there. Pell recognized that North Vietnam in no way threatened America, nor did Southeast Asia offer the United States any valuable resources or any holdings vital to the defense of the nation. At the same time, America’s involvement in Vietnam had adversely affected relations with the Soviet Union and China, the other two nuclear superpowers. In a recent interview, Pell declared that the Vietnam War damaged the arms control talks between the United States and the Soviet Union which began in the early 1960s.58 Thus, according to his theory, America’s Vietnam policy was flawed, because the nation’s interests in Vietnam were not worth the amount of money and lives already invested and also because the war interfered with national interests in other regions.

Pell’s assertion that it was necessary for the United States to spend “some lives and some dollars to halt, trip, obstruct, or contain those who are opposed to us” as “part of the price of greatness” and “world leadership” reveals an interesting conflict in his thinking. While he did not want to form a Pax Americana, he believed that the United States should sacrifice some of its resources to aid other nations. However, he recognized that these commitments had to be limited so as not to weaken the nation. He also wanted to involve as many other nations as possible in these efforts, in part to limit the cost to America, but also to develop a sense of world community as expressed in the United Nations charter.

Although disappointed by President Johnson’s policy, Pell worked within the Democratic party to end the war. Following Johnson’s refusal to run for reelection and the assassination of Robert Kennedy, the two candidates for the Democratic presidential nomination were Senator Eugene McCarthy and Vice President Hubert Humphrey. The

58Written questions answered by Pell, August 20, 1993.
war was a major issue in the campaign as McCarthy promoted an anti-war platform, while Humphrey defended Johnson’s Vietnam policy. Pell tried to influence the Democratic party’s Vietnam policy. While on the drafting committee of the platform committee for the Democratic Convention in 1968, he helped to composed a Vietnam plank along with Wayne Morse, Theodore Sorensen, and others which committed the party to the “cause of early peace.” The proposed plank declared that the “war must be ended now,” but it could only “be ended by a fair and realistic compromise settlement.” The plank had four steps for peace in Vietnam. First, “an unconditional end to all bombing of North Vietnam,” while allowing air support in South Vietnam. Second, a negotiated “mutual withdrawal of all United States forces and all North Vietnamese troops from South Viet Nam.” Third, it encouraged America’s “South Vietnamese allies to negotiate a political solution with the National Liberation Front looking towards a government which is broadly representative of these and all elements in South Vietnamese society” and declared that the South Vietnamese should “assume increasing responsibility for the resolution of the conflict, and full responsibility for determining their own political destiny,” with only non-military aid from the United States. Fourth, the plank wanted to “lower the level of violence” in Vietnam by reducing American military offensive operations. Its purpose was to reduce American and Vietnamese casualties and to ease the United States withdrawal from Vietnam.59

The goal of the platform, as stated in the proposal, was the elimination of “all foreign forces from South Vietnam.” The proposal sought “the participation of international authority to guarantee troop withdrawals and the granting of asylum to political refugees.” It further resolved “to have no more Vietnams,” claiming that the United States accepted “each nation’s right to chose its political, economic and social system.” The proposal concluded:

We shall neither assume the role of the world’s policeman, nor lend our support to corrupt, oppressive regimes unwilling to work for essential reforms and lacking the consent of the governed. Above all, we shall avoid the uni-lateral [sic] use of military means where the issues are political in nature and our national security is not involved.  

The proposed plank clearly reflected Pell’s position on the Vietnam war, expressing not only his desire to end the war, but also his desire to prevent the United States from getting committed to harmful relationships with other nations. Despite Pell’s efforts, however, the platform committee rejected the plank. His position was still too moderate for many anti-war proponents, who wanted an immediate American pull-out, and too radical for Johnson supporters, who were only willing to negotiate while continuing to fight. Despite Johnson’s weakened political power, he still controlled the Democratic convention, including the platform committee, and his supporters would not accept a plank which attacked his position. According to Pell, “neither side wanted to compromise, neither the Hawks or the Doves. I was very disappointed that the platform received so few votes.”

The massive anti-war demonstrations in the streets of Chicago outside of the Democratic convention hall overshadowed the nomination of Vice President Humphrey. These riots shocked Americans and many associated them with the entire anti-war movement. Many conservative and moderate Americans feared that these riots would eventually threaten the government of the United States. Republican presidential candidate Richard Nixon used their fears and conducted a “law and order” campaign. He also claimed to have a plan to end the war in Vietnam, though he never revealed what it was. Humphrey eventually disassociated himself from Johnson’s Vietnam policy, as he realized it was a political liability, but this decision came too late and Nixon won election as president partially because of America’s dissatisfaction with Johnson’s handling of the war and its fear of radical change.

60 Ibid., 2-3.
61 Telephone Interview with Pell, July 23, 1993.
Pell had an intricate relationship with the anti-war movement. By 1967 he had achieved recognition as a Senate “Dove,” but he never reached the stature of other colleagues like Fulbright, Morse, Robert Kennedy, or Eugene McCarthy in the anti-war movement. Pell’s reserved nature was partially responsible for his standing in the peace movement. Unlike other senators, he did not use the Vietnam war as a way to build a national constituency. Also, while Pell took a great interest in the peaceful anti-war movement, he did not take part in any of its public activities, believing that it was not his place to do so as a United States senator. He believed that as an elected representative of the state of Rhode Island, he should concentrate his anti-war efforts within the Senate. Furthermore, Pell’s position on Vietnam remained too moderate for many in the movement who wanted to end the war immediately. Pell recognized this desire, but believed it was more important to guarantee the stability of South Vietnam before withdrawing. Pell also held a low opinion of the radical anti-war movement. While he appreciated its anger, he believed that its methods would do more harm than good. He believed that the only way to change the nation’s Vietnam policy was to build a nationwide consensus against the war and thought that radical actions would repel those moderates who otherwise opposed the war. He also feared that the radicals would alienate conservative Americans and thereby cause a reactionary backlash which would hinder the peace process by galvanizing support for the President and his policies. He believed that it was better to work within the political system, no matter how difficult, than to destroy it no matter how noble one’s goal.

Although averse to joining the organized anti-war movement, Pell became more assertive in his opposition to Johnson’s policies between 1965 and 1968. Originally, he gave his reluctant approval to the decision to defend South Vietnam, but as the war progressed and the American military commitment in Vietnam grew to a point which he believed surpassed the nation’s interest there, Pell began to reconsider his position. While he did not support an immediate withdrawal, because he feared the risk to their
South Vietnamese allies, he no longer defended Johnson’s commitment to Vietnam. Johnson was trying to force a military settlement of the crisis in Vietnam, but Pell believed that America could not gain a military victory in Vietnam and should instead focus its efforts on negotiating a political settlement. In 1968, Johnson finally began peace talks, but he was not willing to recognize the Vietcong and continued to increase American military pressure to force the North Vietnamese to negotiate. In contrast, Pell believed that American offensive military operations in Vietnam should be limited during the negotiations so as to encourage peace. He thought that it was more important for the United States to strive to create a stable representative government in South Vietnam than to try to defeat the Vietcong and support the corrupt Thieu-Ky regime. Thus, by 1968 the differences between Johnson’s opinions on Vietnam and his own had reached a point where Pell could no longer support the president’s policies and was openly questioning their wisdom.

Though Pell’s efforts against the war had met with little success up until this point, he remained determined to continue his appeals for peace. The escalation had finally ceased, but over 500,000 American soldiers were in Vietnam. The Tet offensive had shown the strength and resolve of the Vietcong and also convinced many Americans that the United States had to get out of Vietnam. The question now was how to do it, and America began to realize that it was much more difficult to get out of a war than it was to enter it. The year 1969 would bring a new presidential administration and for many a new hope that a solution to the war would be found. Pell realized that it would be difficult to reach a settlement and recognized the need for continue opposition to the war in the Senate, but was willing to maintain and even increase his anti-war efforts until peace was achieved.
IV: OPPOSING NIXON

The war in Vietnam remained the most important issue in the United States when Richard Nixon took office in January 1969, and the new President was determined that his administration would handle the crisis better than it predecessor. Nixon had stated during his campaign that he had a plan for ending the war, and many Americans were willing to give him some time to reach a settlement. Many in Congress, including Pell, shared this attitude and few Congressional critics attacked Nixon’s Vietnam policy during the first few months of his administration. Pell recognized that it would be easier to criticize a Republican president than a Democrat, but he hoped that Nixon would be able to meet his campaign pledge and did not want to attack him before he had time to act.

In January 1969 Pell applauded the Paris negotiations for raising new prospects of peace when they were expanded to include both the Vietcong and the South Vietnamese government. His elation was short-lived, however, and on March 12 he gave one of the first statements made by a senator critical of Nixon’s policy. Although he wanted to give the Nixon administration a chance to develop its own policy and to negotiate a settlement, he feared that it was “falling into many of the pitfalls of the old administration.” His statement especially warned against the temptation to change the nation’s goals in Vietnam after every political or military victory. He advised the Nixon administration to determine exactly what were the minimum requirements for a settlement and strive to achieve them. Constant revising of war aims, he cautioned, would only lead to unreachable goals and lengthen the war unnecessarily.¹

This statement reflected the criticisms that Pell had made about Johnson’s Vietnam policy in 1968. Pell supported the effort to negotiate, but he believed that America should simultaneously reduce its military commitment to Vietnam to increase the chances for a peaceful solution. He disputed Nixon’s opinion that the United States had to use massive bombing and other offensive measures to compel the North Vietnamese to agree to a peace settlement. Pell believed that reducing America’s offensive efforts in Vietnam would not only help lead to a peaceful solution, but also lower the nation’s war costs, in both financial and physical terms.

Nixon made the first move toward a settlement on June 8, 1969 when he announced the first reduction of American troops in Vietnam from 540,000 to 515,000. His announcement began the Vietnamization program which would gradually replace American ground combat forces with South Vietnamese soldiers. The final goal of this program was to create an all-Vietnamese combat force, trained by American advisors, supplied with American goods, and supported by America’s air and naval forces. Nixon designed this plan to encourage the North Vietnamese to make concessions during negotiations and also to placate the growing animosity toward the war in the United States by reducing the number of American soldiers in Vietnam.

Pell responded to this action and the administration’s entire Vietnam policy in a Senate speech on June 17. Pell noted that until March 31, 1968, when President Johnson announced he would work for a peace settlement, America based its Vietnam policy on the theory that the continued escalation of military pressure would eventually force the enemy to surrender. Johnson’s announcement and the beginning of negotiations, Pell claimed, “was an admission that a military victory was not possible” in Vietnam. Despite this admission, however, the war of attrition still continued after a year of negotiations causing the death of over 15,000 Americans in Vietnam since Johnson had started his peace effort. This continued military effort was dangerous, Pell declared, because any attempt to eliminate North Vietnam’s manpower and supplies completely
would lead to war with China. Instead of risking a war with China, or continuing to waste American lives in a futile effort, Pell argued that the United States should cease our search and destroy missions, assume a less aggressive military posture, and commence withdrawing our men at a substantial rate, thus forcing the South Vietnamese to assume the burden that is rightfully theirs. The question is whether they have the will to assume that burden or a sufficiently inspiring and accepted government to give their manpower the leadership that is necessary. The replacement of a twentieth of our men by the South Vietnamese is certainly a step in the right direction. But, I ask, is it a large enough step to result in a real change in direction. Far more significant would be a change in orders to our combat commanders, deescalating our present, long standing search and destroy strategy to a hold and secure strategy.\(^2\)

This speech raised an issue that was a key to the anti-war effort: whether the South Vietnamese military and government were strong enough to defeat the Vietcong even with substantial American aid. Pell had expressed doubts about the abilities of the South Vietnamese government several times since his trip to Vietnam in 1962, and much of this speech echoed sentiments put forth in his earlier one of November 1965. The often inept Thieu-Ky regime of South Vietnam was completely dependent upon American support to remain in power, and Pell recognized that the Vietcong and Ho Chi Minh had the popular support and administrative skills that Thieu and Ky lacked. Furthermore, the efforts of the National Liberation Front, the political wing of the Vietcong, had attracted many of the nation’s best leaders. The key to a successful settlement of the conflict, in his opinion, was the formation of a self-sufficient, popular government in South Vietnam. Thus he was willing to support the creation of a coalition or even Communist government as long as it ended the war and protected the human rights of the South Vietnamese people.

Viewing the war as “a military stalemate,” Pell could not “appreciate how the sacrifice of additional American lives” would “result in positive political gains in terms

of who is to control South Vietnam in the future.” The time had come, he believed, to remove the majority of United States troops and force the South Vietnamese Army, backed by American aid, to fight its own war. Until the United States pulled out, Pell stated, there was “little incentive for the Thieu government to bargain seriously in Paris or elsewhere.” Pell claimed that the South Vietnamese government did not want to negotiate, because it knew that “with peace, and without American troops and dollars, the prospects for their remaining in power would be slim indeed.” Therefore, the United States would have to force the Thieu-Ky regime to negotiate with the Vietcong by removing its own military forces which had effectively propped up the corrupt and unpopular government.³

Pell applauded Nixon’s removal of 25,000 American troops and the Vietnamization plan as a step in the right direction, but feared that it was not enough. Vietnamization, Pell believed, did not “constitute the kind of clear notice that should be served on President Thieu.” Instead, he declared that the withdrawal “smacks of a sop to American public opinion.” Pell knew that the peace movement was necessary to change the nation’s Vietnam policy and feared that it would be weakened if Nixon ordered a minor troop reduction to show that he was committed to ending the war. This action, Pell feared, would lure moderate opponents from the anti-war movement. He advised the President to inform the Thieu-Ky government:

(1) that the United States has already delivered on its commitment and that now it is up to South Vietnam to carry on the fight, militarily and politically; (2) that the United States forces will scale down offensive operations in expectation of some comparable response from the other side; and, finally, (3) that the bulk of our American troops will be withdrawn in accordance with a definite, specific timetable.⁴

Pell grew critical of Nixon’s lack of progress in negotiating a settlement in Vietnam. He recognized that finding a peaceful solution to the war would take some

³Ibid., 2-4.  
⁴Ibid., 4-5.
time, but was upset that America’s military efforts had increased in Vietnam while the negotiations were progressing. Almost forty percent of American combat deaths in Vietnam had occurred since Johnson began the peace process on March 31, 1968, and Pell feared that the effort to continue pressuring the North Vietnamese during negotiations wasted lives and hindered the peace talks. Pell, however, still placed his hope for a settlement upon the Paris talks. In a press release on July 22, Pell stated that “the best situs for discussing deescalation is in Paris” and further commented that he was distressed by the efforts of the South Vietnamese government to disrupt the talks.\(^5\)

A week later President Nixon, while visiting Thailand, declared that the United States would defend that nation against “those who might threaten it from abroad or within.” Pell and Tennessee Senator Albert Gore, Sr. criticized this decision and warned the President that such an agreement required Senate approval. Gore said that the United States should not “intervene in a domestic insurgency and civil strife in a small country.” Pell agreed with Gore and noted that such an arrangement went beyond America’s commitment to Thailand as described in the Southeast Asia Treaty and would risk involving the United States in another war like the one in Vietnam. The United States never undertook military operations in Thailand, but relations with that nation were important because the American B-52 aircraft which bombed Vietnam were stationed there.\(^6\)

In October 1969, as the peace movement reached its peak, Pell renewed his anti-war efforts through legislation. On October 14, Pell cosponsored, with New York Senator Jacob Javits, Senate Concurrent Resolution 40 which was designed to force America out of Vietnam. Javits, a liberal Republican, had worked closely with Pell on several issues, including the creation of the National Endowment of the Arts and


\(^6\)“Gore and Pell Hit at Nixon’s Pledge to Thais,” The Providence Journal, July 30, 1969, 22.
Humanities and served as a fellow member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The proposed resolution demanded the withdrawal of all American combat troops in Vietnam by the end of 1970. Furthermore, it declared that the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution would be terminated on December 31, 1970. The resolution also demanded the removal of all American support and training forces within “a reasonable time” after the withdrawal of the combat forces and advised the United States to work “with the United Nations or other international organizations to provide asylum for those in South Vietnam whose lives would be endangered by such action.”

While presenting the resolution before the Senate on October 14, Pell described it as a “responsible and realistic course of action for the United States in Vietnam.” Pell expressed his belief that America had no obligation for the continued defense of the Thieu government. The only obligation that he recognized was to prevent the slaughter of pro-American South Vietnamese after the United States completed its withdrawal. He claimed that the United States could meet this obligation by providing asylum for those who required it and by guaranteeing that the South Vietnamese Army would be properly trained and equipped to defend the nation before the American withdrawal. He concluded that this proposal offered an honorable peace for the United States and that the Senate and the Congress as a whole were responsible for leading the effort to end the war. He stated that Nixon’s announced rate of withdrawal would take seven to nine years, during which time thousands of American and Vietnamese lives would be lost. Pell claimed that it was the Senate’s duty to advise the President and also to create and enact legislation that was in the best interests of the United States and reflected the will of the nation.

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8U.S., Congressional Record, 91st Congress, 1st Sess. (October 14, 1969), 29800-03.
Following the introduction of the bill, Senator Lee Metcalf of Montana stated that Pell’s argument that the United States had to “protect our friends . . . and prevent a blood bath” during the nation’s withdrawal from Vietnam, impressed him, and he asked to be included as a cosponsor of the resolution.\(^9\) The proposal gained more support in February 1970, when Pell and Javits presented it before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee as part of a session on Vietnam Policy Proposals. Pell thanked Senator J. William Fulbright for providing the Committee as a forum to discuss the war and applauded the role it had played in changing the nation’s opinion about Vietnam. He stated that the key difference between the Pell-Javits resolution and the other anti-war proposals was that their’s ensured the United States responsibility for protecting its South Vietnamese allies. Pell based this part of the proposal upon his experiences as the vice president of the International Rescue Committee, particularly the Hungarian uprising of 1956. He knew that many people would want to leave a Communist Vietnam, and therefore the United States should have a program prepared to get them out in an orderly fashion. Pell advised assisting those who wanted to leave Vietnam and sending them to a region with a similar climate and specifically suggested Borneo. He admitted that such a program would be expensive, but even moving 250,000 people at a cost of $10,000 per refugee would only cost $2.5 billion or equal to the cost of conducting the war for one month.\(^10\)

During the questioning of Pell and Javits, Senators Frank Church and Clifford Case both noted that the resolution called only for the removal of American combat forces. This action would allow American support and supply troops and advisors to remain in South Vietnam, along with artillery and air units necessary to protect the remaining instillations. Pell and Javits recognized this fact, but stated that they designed their proposal to withdraw those soldiers “whose first mission is to kill” and to reduce the

\(^9\)Ibid., 29803.
number of American troops in Vietnam from over 450,000 to between 200,000 and 250,000. At this point the responsibility of combat would fall upon the South Vietnamese, and Pell said, “we are going to see what happens, particularly if the North Vietnamese step up their own military activities.” Depending on the North Vietnamese reaction, President Nixon would “be faced with a choice of escalating the war himself or of pulling out rather precipitously.” Pell and Javits believed that public opinion would make it difficult for President Nixon to send combat troops back into Vietnam once they had been removed.

The two senators realized that the remaining American troops would still risk attack and needed to defend themselves despite their classification as support and supply troops. Therefore, they were willing to allow limited American artillery and air power to be left in Vietnam to defend the remaining United States forces which could not be used in any offensive actions. They further noted that the resolution called for the removal of all remaining United States forces within a reasonable time, because they did not want to risk another situation like Korea, where a large American garrison remained after the truce had been signed. Both Church and Case appeared to be satisfied by these clarifications, and they gave their support to the resolution.11

The Pell-Javits Resolution was one of ten Senate end-the-war resolutions proposed in September and October of 1969. While each differed slightly, all of them provided a firm schedule for the withdrawal of United States forces from Vietnam. The war critics believed that if a firm schedule were in place, it would force the South Vietnamese government to reach a settlement with the Vietcong about the future of their nation. Other sponsors of similar bills included Senators John Sherman Cooper, Frank Church, Charles Goodell, and Mark Hatfield. While none of these bills passed, they reflected the growing dissatisfaction with the war both in the Senate and in the nation as a whole.

11Ibid., 109-16.
The Pell-Javits resolution was fairly moderate compared to some of the other bills, and the sentiment of the anti-war movement in general. Many anti-war activists wanted the immediate withdrawal of all American forces and were not willing to risk future escalation by allowing even support troops to remain for any length of time. The peace movement could rightfully point to the fact that originally there were only a few hundred American advisors in Vietnam and the military commitment had grown to half a million. The Pell-Javits resolution effectively reflected Pell’s position on the war at the time; it was necessary to leave Vietnam as quickly as possible, but in a way that would not endanger either the withdrawing American forces or their Vietnamese allies. Pell’s moderate position put him between the radicals who wanted immediate withdrawal and Nixon’s supporters who wanted to continue fighting, and both sides found flaws in his argument. His position, however, was a good reflection of the general opinions of the Senate “Doves” as a whole who, while viewed by many as leaders in the anti-war movement, were not radicals.

Another reflection of the growth of the anti-war movement was the national Moratorium against the war on October 15, 1969. The peace movement stayed fairly quiet for the first few months of the Nixon Presidency. This respite occurred in part to allow Nixon a chance to end the war on his own initiative. It also occurred because the anti-war movement had been exhausted by its efforts during the election of 1968, the violence of which had led to the arrest of many of its leaders. The violent and radical nature of the protests during the election had alienated many moderates who opposed the war, and also splintered the movement into several different factions. By the Fall of 1969, however, the failure of Nixon’s efforts as well as the return of students to college campuses revived the anti-war effort and led to the creation of the Moratorium movement.

The Moratorium Committee’s effort was unique because it attempted to organize moderates and recruit those who were not usually politically active to join
students in a nationwide protest against the war. Unlike the radical protests of 1968, the Moratorium was organized as a moderate, non-violent effort which sought to make a statement not with violence, but with overwhelming numbers. The planners scheduled the Moratorium on a weekday, and workers and students were asked to take the day off to protest the failed peace efforts. Several major universities closed for the day and millions of Americans took part in demonstrations in hundreds of cities across the nation including 250,000 who marched in Washington D.C.\textsuperscript{12} Nixon tried to down play the effect of the Moratorium and had some success in limiting the press coverage of the event. Despite these efforts, however, the Moratorium remained the largest single-day event of the anti-war movement, and the massive numbers and the somber, middle class tone of the protest indicated the growing sense of dissatisfaction with the war. The size and range of the protest also helped to convince Nixon to cancel his plans to escalate the war on November 1 to force the North Vietnamese to agree to terms, because he realized that the nation would not support greater American involvement in Vietnam.\textsuperscript{13}

Pell had a mixed reaction to the Moratorium. He declined to co-sign two letters of support sent by several Congressmen to the coordinators of the Vietnam Moratorium, one written by Senator Thomas Eagleton of Missouri and one from Representative Abner Mikva of New York. One of his reasons for declining was that he did not want to take part in what would be an all-Democrat effort, preferring that all peace actions be bipartisan. Furthermore, he believed that any such letter should be sent to the President and not to the Moratorium Committee. Pell decided instead to show his support for the effort with his own statement on the Senate floor.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{14}Letters to Pell from Thomas Eagleton, October 2, 1969 and from Abner Mikva, October 1, 1969, along with inter-office memorandum advising Pell on this subject, Papers of Claiborne Pell, 91st Congress: Foreign Relations, Viet Nam, 1969-1970.
In his statement, Pell endorsed the Moratorium as “a constructive step toward providing a peaceful outlet for legitimate protests.” He added, however, that if the protest became violent the Moratorium would “do more harm than good” and criticized the violent actions of the radical Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and the Students for Democratic Action (SDA). He hoped that this effort would be met with some success, so that the anti-war movement might cease its violent protests. He expressed sympathy for the students’ fear and anger about the war, because they were the ones who had to fight in it, and he asked his fellow Senators to appreciate the opinions of the younger generation. In conclusion, Pell called the Moratorium “an excellent idea” and hoped that it would be a “constructive day” as well and be successful in its efforts to educate people to work for a peaceful solution in Vietnam.15

Seeking to isolate the Anti-war movement in 1969, President Nixon appealed to Americans who were not identified with it. On November 3, Nixon delivered a nationally-televised speech in which he outlined his Vietnam policy to continue fighting until a negotiated settlement a could be reached or until the South Vietnamese army could defend its nation without the support of American combat forces. In conclusion, Nixon asked for the support of “the great silent majority” of Americans who he claimed were being overshadowed by the vocal radical minority. Nixon claimed that with the support of the silent majority, he would meet his goal of “a just and lasting peace” in Vietnam.16

This speech was perhaps the most effective of Nixon’s career. It galvanized the strong conservative faction in America and also attracted many moderates, who believed that the President was honestly striving for peace in Vietnam and were willing to give him some more time. Following the speech, Vice President Spiro Agnew attacked the anti-war movement and the liberal newspaper press which he claimed was giving unfair

negative coverage to the war and positive coverage to the anti-war movement. The strategy was successful, and it deflated the impact the second anti-war Mobilization on November 15, when 250,000 students marched in Washington. The march was one of the largest protests of the war, but it received little press coverage, and reports focused more on the few violent actions rather than the more numerous peaceful activities.\footnote{DeBenedetti, An American Ordeal, 259-60; Small, Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves, 187-192.}

Pell responded to Nixon’s speech in a constituent letter, stating that he appreciated the sincerity of the President’s efforts, but that he did not “share his optimism with regard to its success.” He also defended his opposition to the war, claiming that it was part of his responsibility to his constituents “to offer constructive criticism . . . on so critical an issue.”\footnote{Pell to Lester Wilkinson, November 13, 1969, Papers of Claiborne Pell, 91st Congress: Foreign Relations, Viet Nam, 1969-1970.} The callous lack of a response by the administration and Congress to the reports of the massacre of the South Vietnamese village of My Lai by American troops also angered Pell, who remonstrated that “when a great people loses its capacity for outrage, that people has permitted dry rot to start an erosion of the standards and principles which made that people great.” Arguing that the war in Vietnam and America’s acceptance of the needless violence there had caused this decay, he insisted that the United States needed to end its involvement in the war to save itself.\footnote{“Statement by Senator Pell,” November 20 1969, Papers of Claiborne Pell, 91st Congress: Foreign Relations, Viet Nam, 1969-1970.}

In addition, Pell protested Vice-President Agnew’s attacks against the “eastern establishment” of which he considered himself a member. On February 5, Agnew made a speech alleging that some members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee had “a vested interest in seeing that our policies in Vietnam don’t work” because of their criticism of the war. Furthermore, Agnew reported that these members were giving credence to North Vietnamese reports about the state of the war because it was “politically more important” to validate their predictions of American failure in Vietnam.
than to have “the United States work out an honorable peace and extricate itself” from Vietnam. Pell proclaimed himself a “proud member” of the Committee and included himself amongst those whom Agnew criticized. While he and other Committee members had been asking difficult questions about the war, he observed that “Mr. Agnew was still a silent Governor of the state of Maryland.” He firmly stated that some members of the Committee, including himself and Fulbright, had criticized the war during the Johnson administration as well, because he “believed that the interests of the American people came before the interests of my party on this vital issue.” In conclusion, Pell said that his “only interest and . . . motivation” for criticism was “to make certain that we are indeed moving toward a rapid dissolution of our unfortunate involvement in this war.”

At the beginning of January 1970, Pell took part in a seminar on the war conducted by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Providence. He stated that the current “smooth relations” between Nixon and the anti-war faction in the Senate would cease when the President’s planned troop reductions came to an end. He declared that the nation’s Vietnam policy would reach a “watershed” when the majority of American combat forces had been removed, leaving only “a residual force.” Although Nixon did not want a complete withdrawal until a settlement was reached, Pell predicted that once the combat troops were removed, the peace movement would press for a “complete pullout.” Pell noted that he had no “real criticism” of Nixon’s plan, but stated that he would continue to promote the Pell-Javits resolution and work to end America’s commitment to Vietnam.

Nixon’s plan for Vietnamization and the troop reductions increased popular support for his Vietnam policy. On January 28 the Gallup poll showed that 65% of Americans approved his policy, the highest approval rating yet. Questions arose, however, about Nixon’s plans to involve the United States militarily in other nations in

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20 U.S. Congressional Record, 91st Congress 2nd Sess. (February 6, 1970), 2763.
Southeast Asia. In February 1970, reports of the American-sponsored efforts in Laos came to light. According to these reports not only was the United States bombing the Ho Chi Minh trail through Laos, but also the Central Intelligence Agency had sponsored a guerrilla force there since 1962 and had occasionally provided American air support for it far from the Ho Chi Minh trail region. In a statement in the Senate, Pell declared that the American people had a right to “an official explanation of what we are doing there and why.” He also warned his fellow senators that the crisis in Vietnam had begun with a commitment similar to that in Laos. Pell said that the United States had to determine “just how vital are our interests in Laos and how much in lives and money are we willing to pay to preserve them.” These questions, however, Pell claimed could not be answered until the president made an official statement defining his policy for Laos.22

America did not expand its intervention in Laos, and Nixon promised that he had no intention to use American ground forces there. A similar promise, however, could not be made about Cambodia. Cambodian ruler Prince Norodom Sihanouk worked desperately to keep his nation neutral in the war in neighboring Vietnam, but it had proved impossible. The North Vietnamese used the regions of Cambodia bordering South Vietnam as part of their Ho Chi Minh Trail supply line, and Vietcong forces used Cambodia as a sanctuary to escape American ground forces who were legally prevented from crossing the border. In retaliation, the United States had been bombing these regions secretly for many years, devastating the area. Sihanouk knew of these actions, but did not complain because the areas involved were remote and he did not want to risk further destruction.

On March 18, 1970, however, while Sihanouk was out of the country, Prime Minister General Lon Nol overthrew his government. Lon Nol was pro-western and hoped that under his rule Cambodia would receive massive amounts of American

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22U.S., Congressional Record, 91st Congress, 2nd Sess. (March 5, 1970), 6128.
military and economic aid. Sihanouk refused to be defeated so easily, though, and announced an alliance with the Cambodian Communists to reclaim his throne. A civil war erupted between the two Cambodian factions, and the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong sent troops to help their fellow Communists defeat Lon Nol’s forces. On April 14, Lon Nol asked for American assistance. Nixon was willing to aid Cambodia, but worried about the reaction in America. In an effort to mollify the anti-war movement, Nixon announced on April 20 that 150,000 American soldiers would be removed from Vietnam by the end of the year. Then on April 30, he announced that South Vietnamese and American forces had invaded Cambodia in response to North Vietnam’s aggression and to eliminate the Vietcong sanctuaries there.

Nixon knew his decision to invade Cambodia would create a massive anti-war backlash and was quoted as saying that he was “going to get unshirted hell for doing this.”\footnote{Quoted in George C. Herring, America’s Longest War: The United States and Vietnam 1950-1975 (New York, 1986), 235.} The reaction, however, might have surprised even him by its intensity. The invasion of Cambodia touched off the most massive, most violent protest of the war, and galvanized the anti-war movement. Pell responded to the invasion immediately and with severity. He lambasted Nixon’s decision, not only because it expanded the war and threatened the peace talks, but also because Nixon began the war in Cambodia unconstitutionally without congressional approval. Nixon claimed that Lon Nol’s request for aid gave him the authority he needed, but Pell and many others were not satisfied with this answer. In a statement made in the Senate on April 30, Pell declared his opposition to the invasion which he feared would “turn what has been a Vietnam war into a larger Indochina one.” He advised that the matter should be brought before the United Nations, so that America could avoid making the same mistakes that it had made in becoming unilaterally involved in Vietnam and Laos. He claimed that no matter what ruling the United Nations made it would save American lives and money. If it declared
that Cambodia was the victim of outside aggression, then the “burden” of saving Cambodia would be “shared internationally.” If the United Nations ruled against intervention, it “would excuse this country from having to become involved” in Cambodia at all.24

Pell further claimed that the United States had “no important security reasons for coming to the aid of the present Cambodian government” and that unilateral intervention would only risk American lives and a lengthy civil war in Cambodia. He expressed hope that any debate in the United Nations would also include Vietnam. “The time has come,” he said, “for us to be willing to discuss and defend in any forum what we stand for and what we are seeking in Southeast Asia.” Pell concluded that “whatever course the debate may take” the United States would “gain in policy and stature by taking the responsible step of committing this new international problem to the world body.”25 A few days later, Pell renewed his call to bring the Cambodian crisis to the United Nations, calling the invasion of Cambodia a “tragic mistake” which he feared would become a second Vietnam.26

The invasion caused massive protests across the United States. The most tragic incident occurred at Kent State University, where National Guardsmen opened fire upon a group of students, killing four and wounding eleven. Across the nation, universities closed as students went on strike and polls showed that opposition to Nixon’s war policies had reached new highs. Pell spoke on the Kent State killings in a Senate debate on May 5. Some conservative senators claimed that while the killings were regrettable, it was the students who were to blame because they had threatened the Guardsmen. Pell disagreed with this view, and specifically questioned why live ammunition had been issued for riot control. Pell further noted that there was a lack of communication

25Ibid., 13595.
between the student protestors and his fellow senators and said the cause for this gap was
the war in Vietnam. It is a wrong war. Some of us have opposed it for
years. Usually we are calm and quiet, but my voice rises in anger and
anguish because I feel this war is based on wrong moral premises.

It is the war in Vietnam that is alienating the younger generation, in
fact, our whole way of life. It has resulted in increasing inflation, interest
rates, unemployment, violence crime, disturbances on campuses, and most
important, the death of 40,000 American youths as well as countless
Vietnamese.27

In the following days, Pell raised the Cambodia issue in the Senate on several
occasions. On May 11, he entered into the record a report by the Columbia Society of
International Law at the Columbia Law School, which concluded that the American
incursion into Cambodia had violated international law.28 On May 15, he took part in the
debate about the Cooper-Church amendment which would cut off all funds for American
troops in Cambodia after June 30, 1970. Pell supported the measure, proposed by two
fellow members of the Foreign Relations Committee, declaring that it was not only a
necessary step to prevent further warfare in Cambodia, but also a way to express the
Senate’s and the public’s displeasure with the war. Concerned about the violent
demonstrations caused by the Cambodian invasion, Pell feared that anger about the war
might lead to a serious crisis within the nation. He hoped that by passing the amendment
the Senate could show the protestors that they could still work within the political system
without using force to achieve change.29 Unlike most previous anti-war proposals, the
Cooper-Church amendment passed the Senate, although the House of Representatives
defeated it. Thus, while it had no actual effect on the war, the passage of the Cooper-
Church amendment showed the growth of the Senate’s anti-war opposition, and
expressed the wishes of its moderates who wanted no further expansion of the war in

27“Senator Pell Laments Vietnam War, Protest Results in Four Students
28U.S., Congressional Record, 91st Congress, 2nd Sess. (May 11, 1970),
14842-43.
29U.S., Congressional Record, 91st Congress, 2nd Sess. (May 15, 1970),
15735-36.
Southeast Asia.

On May 18, Pell met with a group of students at Providence College to discuss the Cambodian invasion and the anti-war movement. Pell advised the students to continue to work for change within the political system, warning them that violence would be “counter-productive.” The Providence students gave a mixed response to him. Some claimed that Pell offered only “symbolic” actions to stop the war and that he favored “political expediency over moral expediency.” This harsh criticism reflected the frustration of the students about the war and the lack of success that the Senate critics had had in their anti-war efforts. Despite consistent Senate criticism of the war since 1965, no one had proposed serious anti-war legislation until October 1969. One reason for not trying to end the war until then was because the anti-war Senators realized that they were in the minority and feared that the defeat of such a proposal would be viewed as Senate approval of the war. By 1969 and 1970, the frustration of the Senate critics had moved them to introduce these proposals as a means of official protest, even though there was still not enough support in the Senate to adopt any of them.

Admitting that he had not “said all the things you would have liked me to say,” Pell pleaded that the anti-war senators needed the students’ help to end the war and declared that violent or radical action would “make our task more difficult.” He advised the students to go door-to-door to increase awareness about the war and further suggested that they cut their hair in order to make a better impression on “the average middle American.” This statement and other similar ones drew criticism from the students, but Pell was adamant in his belief that it was crucial to recruit the middle class to the anti-war movement in order to force the Nixon administration to change its Vietnam policies. While Pell’s opinions about Vietnam were not very different from their own, students regarded his approach as too conservative to achieve a complete and immediate withdrawal from Vietnam. While appreciating the opinions and concerns of the students, Pell feared that their radical actions might destroy the American political and social
On May 25, Pell, along with Senator Javits, once again introduced a legislative proposal to end the war. Their bill, Senate Joint Resolution 204, like their proposal in 1969, called for the removal of all American combat troops by December 31, 1970 and provided asylum for all South Vietnamese whose lives would be endangered by the withdrawal. The proposal went further, though, by stating that all funding for offensive operations by American forces in Vietnam would be ended at the same time. Influenced by the Cooper-Church Amendment, Pell tried to use the congressional power of the purse to stop the war in Vietnam as did other anti-war senators. He stated that almost everyone, including the President, wanted to end United States military involvement in Vietnam, without agreeing on the questions of “when and how.” He declared that the timing should be “as soon as possible” and the method should be “simply to start doing it.” Pell believed that this proposal would end the war and at the same time protect America’s South Vietnamese allies and ensure the safe withdrawal of United States troops. Like their previous effort, this version of the Pell-Javits resolution did not pass the Senate, but it gained more support then before, showing the growing dissatisfaction with the war.

The Nixon administration was able to ride out the storm of public outrage over the Cambodia invasion and the Kent State slayings by calling upon conservatives across the nation to support their president and prevent their government from being pressured by the radicals. By the beginning of June, the major protests had ended because most universities closed, which dispersed the radical student population and thereby weakened them. The Nixon administration also launched another series of attacks against the peace movement, which inspired a conservative backlash against the radicals. The most famous example of this reactionary backlash occurred in New York City on May 20.

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when a group of construction workers attacked an anti-war demonstration. The increasingly violent tactics of the radical protestors caused more rifts in the anti-war movement as a whole and alienated the moderate and middle class members of the peace movement who would be crucial in forcing Congressional action to stop the war. The growing anger and frustration caused by many years of failure had shattered the unity of the anti-war movement, which had reached its peak in 1968, and by 1970 its energy was spent. Many of the movement’s leaders recognized that their efforts had little if any effect upon the nation’s policy making process. While certain events, such as the Cambodian invasion, sparked renewed action, many in the anti-war movement were now content to concentrate their efforts on localized activities as opposed to massive protests that attracted national attention. Thus while polls showed that a majority of Americans favored a quick withdrawal, the massive anti-war demonstrations were a thing of the past.31

Realizing that the activities of the anti-war movement had declined, and sensing the nation’s general weariness with the war, the peace faction in the Senate began a legislative offensive against the war lasting from mid-1970 through the end of the war. By mid-1970 the Senate had about thirty-five to forty “Doves,” though the number supporting particular anti-war proposals would often fluctuate depending upon how each was worded. While some of the early leaders of the peace movement, such as Gruening and Morse, had left office, many still remained, like Pell, Fulbright, Javits, Mansfield, Frank Church, Eugene McCarthy, George McGovern, and Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin. A few newer members, like Mark Hatfield of Oregon, also joined the faction along with former supporters of President Johnson like John Pastore and Stuart Symington of Missouri. The “Doves” were still a minority, but their numbers had more then doubled since the beginning of the war and had become a significant voice of dissent within the government.

On June 29, 1970, Pell renewed his opposition by making a major presentation before the Senate on the war during the debate on an “End the War” resolution proposed by Senators George McGovern and Mark Hatfield. Pell claimed that there were now two choices facing the United States about Vietnam. The first was Nixon’s Vietnamization plan, but Pell believed that the South Vietnamese Government would never have the popular support necessary to defend itself. Thus South Vietnam would require continued American economic and military aid to survive, which would lead to “an indefinite drainage on our resources and a continued tearing apart and corrosion of our social fabric.” Thus, he declared, America must ask itself “whether the price, in terms of our national interest, is worth paying” for Vietnamization. The second option, Pell proposed, was to leave Vietnam and to let “the people of South Vietnam arrive at their own solution, a solution reflecting the realities and political forces in being there, knowing that the result could well eventually be a unified Vietnam under the leadership of Hanoi.” Pell believed that as long as asylum was provided for those South Vietnamese who required it and all American prisoners of war were returned, the United States’ best interest would be served by pulling out of South Vietnam.\(^{32}\)

His statement emphasized the long United States commitment to Vietnam and argued that the war was now waged for American rather than Vietnamese interests. Pell asserted that America’s best interest would be served by a withdrawal and Vietnam’s best interest would be served by a peaceful solution to the war, even if it led to Communist rule. He agreed that the United States had a commitment to South Vietnam and that it was important to fulfill it to show other allies that America would meet its other defense obligations. Pell declared, however, that “after spending 100 billion dollars, and having 50,258 Americans killed . . . I believe that our obligation has been more than met.” He concluded:

\(^{32}\)U.S., Congressional Record, 91st Congress, 2nd Sess. (June 29, 1970), 21905.
I believe that there is only one way to get out of Southeast Asia and that is to accept the fact that the damage caused by our continued military presence there to our true national interests and to our economy and social structure far outweighs the questionable advantages that result to our national interest by maintaining the corrupt, inept Thieu-Ky government in South Vietnam or even of maintaining the division of Vietnam into two countries. When we have accepted that fact, we should firmly carry out the resulting decisions as best we can, recognizing the fact, as France did in 1954, that the decisions may well result in a unified Vietnam under Hanoi.

If the President and the Executive Branch will not make this decision, then I believe we in Congress should make it and require the Executive Branch to implement it. It would be more orderly if the President made it himself, but if he does not, then we in Congress who feel as I do have no alternative but to support the McGovern-Hatfield “End the War” Resolution or a similar one.33

Pell recognized the reasons that were presented for continuing the fight in Vietnam: the United States obligation to South Vietnam sustaining America’s national pride, the necessity of containing Communism, and the importance of maintaining commitments. He believed, however, that these reasons, while valid, were far outweighed by the advantages gained by withdrawing from Vietnam. The war in Vietnam not only cost American lives and money, but also threatened the nation’s prosperity. Not only was the government spending billions of dollars on the war at the cost of new taxes and cuts in other programs, but there had also been massive growth in the inflation rate. Pell also believed that while Communist rule of a united Vietnam might be harsh, it would be a better alternative than continued warfare. Pell disagreed with the premise that Nixon’s Vietnam policy must be followed merely because he was president. He believed that the threat to America’s national interest was too important to be hampered by tradition or pride.

Despite the efforts of Pell and his fellow anti-war Senators, the McGovern-Hatfield resolution was defeated by a 55 to 39 margin.34 The opposition Senators,

33Ibid., 21905-08.
34U.S., Congressional Record, 91st Congress, 2nd Sess. (September 1, 1970), 30683.
however, were heartened by their gains, and Pell in particular received praise for his defense of the proposal. The Providence Journal declared that the speech was “the strongest” Pell had made on the Vietnam war, noting that he had “opposed it for some time, but many of his earlier statements were more cautiously worded.” The article also declared that the speech “stood out among the many made by liberal opponents of the war in two crucial respects.” First was Pell’s “complete rejection . . . of the Nixon administration’s policy of Vietnamization as a relatively comfortable middle ground between complete withdrawal and a military victory. Second was Pell’s acceptance of the fact that “complete withdrawal could lead to a military victory for the North Vietnamese.” The Journal also complimented Pell’s “lengthy historical analysis” of America’s military commitment to Vietnam which supported his arguments for a withdrawal.\(^{35}\)

His views also received national attention. He appeared on NBC’s “Today Show” to discuss his speech, resulting in a massive influx of mail to his office from across the nation. While some criticized his opposition to the President, most were supportive and many thanked him for his efforts and asked for copies of the speech. He also received a letter from Stuart Symington congratulating him for his “courageous” statement.\(^{36}\) Professor John P. Roche, however, wrote a critical article which was reprinted in the Congressional Record. A former speech writer and aide to President Johnson who had long supported the war, Roche stated that Pell’s theory that a nationalist Communist Vietnam would be able to contain China was flawed. He claimed that the only reason that Yugoslavia had not been overrun by the Soviet Union was that it feared the United States response. He also criticized Pell for his willingness to use this theory in Vietnam but not in other regions. According to Roche, if Pell followed his theory in the Middle


East, he would be willing to let Israel be defeated as long as an Arab-dominated region provided a buffer to Soviet expansion.37

Roche’s argument, while well presented, completely ignored Pell’s approach for the formation of a foreign policy which specifically called for flexibility in response to different situations and different regions. The practice of using universal standards in the creation of policy for different regions was one of the reasons that America intervened in Vietnam, because the creators of foreign policy could not differentiate between Soviet Communism and the nationalist movement of Ho Chi Minh. Also, Roche’s comparison of Southeast Asia and the Middle East was misleading, because the oil resources of the Middle East made it much more important to the national interest of the United States and its allies. Furthermore, Israel had a strong government that enjoyed popular support and had proven in 1967 that it could defend itself without American assistance, two crucial tasks that the South Vietnamese government had yet to prove capable of accomplishing.

On August 5, Pell spoke again before the Senate, this time turning his attention to the American prisoners of war being held by North Vietnam. The return of all American prisoners of war was one of the requisite terms that the United States demanded be part of any peace settlement in Vietnam. Many Americans considered the prisoners of war to be hostages held by the North Vietnamese to pressure the United States into a settlement. Others expressed concern that the prisoners were being mistreated and that North Vietnam had not met its obligations as a signatory nation of the Geneva Convention on the rules of warfare. Pell had long shared these concerns about the treatment of prisoners, especially those from Rhode Island. He expressed his hope that the North Vietnamese would cease their practices of refusing international inspection of prison camps and not informing the families of prisoners about their capture. He also noted

several reasons why the humane treatment of prisoners was in the best interest of the North Vietnamese. First, soldiers who heard reports of mistreatment were inspired to fight harder in order to avoid capture. Second, the mistreatment of prisoners might inspire America to continue fighting and would also lower North Vietnam in the judgement of the international community.\textsuperscript{38}

Pell did not have a unique view of the prisoner-of-war issue, but he had the opportunity to take his position to an international authority when President Nixon appointed him, along with Senator Javits, to be a delegate to the General Assembly of the United Nations.\textsuperscript{39} Pell returned proudly to the organization that he had helped to form twenty-five years before, and he used the opportunity to present some of his opinions about Vietnam before this international body. He appeared before the Social Humanitarian and Cultural Committee on November 6, 1970 to make a presentation about the treatment of prisoners of war. His statement at this time repeated many of the same points made in his previous speech, requesting that North Vietnam recognize its duties as a signatory of the Geneva Convention of 1949 and allow international inspection of prison camps and permit prisoners to correspond with their families.\textsuperscript{40}

His speech attracted international attention, and on November 15 Pell met with the senior North Vietnamese diplomat in Paris, Mai Van Bo, to discuss the prisoner issue. After Mai requested that he not inform the press about their meeting, Pell kept a record of their meeting in his private files. He told Mai that the issue was prolonging the war and united moderates with the pro-war faction. Mai replied that “the Geneva Convention did not apply” in this case because the North Vietnamese claimed that the Americans,


\textsuperscript{39}Members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee were traditionally sent to the U.N. and Fulbright suggested Pell and Javits since both had expressed interest in serving. Copy of letter from Fulbright to Mansfield and Scott, July 1, 1970, Papers of Claiborne Pell, Senatorial Correspondence: 1968, L-S.

especially the air crews, were committing atrocities in Vietnam. Despite this claim, however, Mai stated that the prisoners were being well treated. Mai also criticized Pell’s United Nations speech. Pell defended his statement, reported known incidents of the mistreatment of prisoners by the North Vietnamese, and again asked for an independent inspection. He even offered to go himself on an inspection tour and volunteered to be blindfolded whenever the North Vietnamese thought it was necessary for their security. He also asked Mai to pass on two letters to Minister Xuan Thuy, the chief North Vietnamese negotiator in Paris, along with copies of his Vietnam speeches from the Senate. The meeting was friendly and lasted for an hour and a half, but Pell left “without much sense of accomplishment.”

Although nothing resulted from Pell’s efforts in Paris, this meeting along with other correspondence between Pell and representatives of both the North Vietnamese government and South Vietnamese opposition parties showed that the Vietnamese considered the Senate’s peace faction to be a powerful force with whom to negotiate. While the Vietnamese probably over-estimated the extent of influence that Pell and his fellow senators had in creating foreign policy, these contacts provided the senators with a source of information that was not filtered by either the South Vietnamese government or the White House. They also provided an opportunity for the senators to express opinions directly to the Vietnamese and receive instant feedback, as opposed to relying on the enemy to read their statements in the press or the Congressional Record. Finally, these contacts provided for the exchange of ideas between the two sides without the pressure of making official government policy. In this way, new policy ideas or topics for negotiation could be informally introduced.

The new concern about the prisoner issue was just one of the changes made in America’s Vietnam policy during the first two years of the Nixon presidency. By

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December 31 only 334,600 American soldiers remained in Vietnam, a reduction of 140,000 from a year before. The American casualty rates were also declined drastically. American battle deaths for the entire year of 1970 were only slightly higher than those for the last six months of 1969. American opposition to the war also continued to grow. In January 1971 a poll showed that 72% of all Americans supported the withdrawal of United States forces from Vietnam, although not all called for an immediate pullout. Americans realized that the nation’s role in Vietnam was ending; the only question was the timing, and more and more people wanted the pull out to occur sooner rather the later. American soldiers serving in Vietnam also recognized the shift in policy, which resulted in a severe drop in their morale. No one wanted to be the last American casualty in Vietnam, and it was difficult for officers to get their men to fight for what many viewed as a lost cause.

Over the next two years, Pell and the other war opponents in the Senate attempted to force President Nixon to speed up the peace process which he was reluctant to conclude. The anti-war senators also worked to regain Congressional control over their constitutionally-granted war making powers with legislation, especially the War Powers Act. They now focused upon the presidential election of 1972 when Nixon had to defend his record against the anti-war platform of Senator George McGovern. Between 1971 and 1973 Pell continued his efforts to work with other senators in the anti-war effort. As the Congress tried to create a firm anti-war coalition, moderates like Pell tried to bridge the gap between the two parties and to encourage moderate and liberal Republicans to vote against their president on a major foreign policy issue. Pell’s previous partnership with Republican Jacob Javits proved to be an important part of the coalition-building process. He also began another re-election campaign in 1972 when he would face former Rhode Island Governor and Secretary of the Navy, John Chafee, who, because of his position, defended the president’s Vietnam policy. His worry was that the continued

popularity of Nixon and Chafee would make the election of 1972 his most difficult race yet, but hoped that his continued anti-war stand would contribute to his victory.

Therefore, Pell was now encouraged by political reasons to increase his efforts against the war in 1971 and 1972.
V: ENDING THE WAR

By the beginning of 1971 the crisis in Vietnam had entered a new phase, and once again Pell found himself promoting a moderate “Dove” position that was assailed by both anti-war and Nixon supporters. All signs pointed towards an American withdrawal; the number of United States soldiers fighting in Vietnam reached its lowest point since 1966 and the President promised further cuts. Senate peace initiatives had gained more support, and polls showed that an overwhelming majority of Americans wanted their nation to withdraw from Vietnam. The only questions remaining were when and how the settlement would be reached. Anti-war radicals demanded an immediate pull out of all American troops, an idea that was beginning to gain support in Congress. President Richard Nixon, however, still defended his Vietnamization plan of a gradual withdrawal of American forces as they were replaced by well-trained South Vietnamese soldiers. Pell, on the other hand, supported the position presented in the resolutions that he co-sponsored with Senator Jacob Javits, calling for the immediate withdrawal of all American combat forces followed by the removal of all support troops as soon as possible. Pell believed that the total withdrawal had to be contingent on the release of all American prisoners of war and the guaranteed safety of the South Vietnamese allies of the United States. Pell acknowledged the need to maintain United States naval forces off the coast of Vietnam and air stations in Thailand as a sign of the nation’s power in the region and support for the South Vietnamese, but he wanted the actions of these forces to be strictly regulated by Congress.

Despite the opinions of Pell, his fellow Senate critics, and other anti-war protestors, however, President Nixon still dictated America’s Vietnam policy. In February 1971, Nixon decided to test his Vietnamization program and approved an
invasion of Laos by the South Vietnamese Army. While this action did not involve
American combat troops, the United States provided air support, a decision which
openly involved the nation in a war in yet another country without congressional
approval. The Laos invasion caused another series of anti-war protests, but these were
much smaller than those that occurred following the Cambodian invasion. On February
8, when the invasion began, Pell expressed his concern about the “news blackout
imposed by the Administration on our major military activities in Southeast Asia.” The
Defense Department claimed that the blackout was necessary to protect the soldiers
involved in the fighting. This policy, Pell noted, contrasted to what occurred during the
Cambodian invasion when President Nixon made a televised speech to announce the
American involvement there. Pell stated that he did not want to release any information
which would endanger American or South Vietnamese soldiers, but declared that the
Administration should either lift the blackout or specifically present to the American
public the reasons for its action.1

The main concern of this effort, though, was to maintain the unrestricted press
coverage of the war in Vietnam. Pell realized the important role that the daily television
coverage of the war had played in turning American public opinion against involvement
in Vietnam, and he wanted it to continue. He also feared that without press coverage,
Nixon might attempt to change the nation’s Vietnam policy secretly, further involving
America in the war. In a series of letters responding to constituents’ correspondence
following the Laos invasion, Pell pledged not only to “support efforts to terminate our
military involvement in Southeast Asia at the earliest possible time,” but also “to insure
that the American people are as fully informed as possible of our nation’s activities and
policies there.”2

1“News Blackout on Southeast Asia Military Activities,” U.S.,
Congressional Record, 92nd Congress, 1st Sess. (February 8, 1971), 2044-45.
2See, for example, Pell to Mrs. Jean A. Smith, February 16, 1971, Papers
of Claiborne Pell, 92nd Congress: Foreign Relations, Viet Nam, 1972-1971
(Special Collections, University of Rhode Island Library).
Pell believed that he and his fellow war opponents in the Senate were acting in the best interest of the nation as they attempted to pressure the President to change his Vietnam policy and to keep Americans informed about activities in Southeast Asia. Nixon’s supporters, however, disagreed and saw their efforts as a threat not only to the presidency but also to the United States. Pell received a letter on this topic from Alan Brown, an acquaintance of his, in February 1971. Brown worried about the possible damage that statements made by Senate war critics caused both at home and abroad. He accused them of using the Vietnam issue to promote their own political aims. He further accused the critics of giving “aid and comfort to our current enemies” by adding justification to their cause and by creating dissent in the United States. While he specifically excluded Pell, Brown declared that Senators J. William Fulbright, Eugene McCarthy, Mike Mansfield and others were guilty of these crimes and had dishonored their country.  

Pell denied these accusations and defended his Senate colleagues. He declared that the anti-war critics gave no thought to political consideration when they attacked Nixon’s policy but rather they had often worked “against the mainstream of public opinion.” He admitted that anti-war statements by senators were “often misused and exploited abroad,” but asserted that they had to speak their minds to avoid “even more disastrous results.” Furthermore, it would be irresponsible for the senators “not to speak out,” even at the risk of causing dissent and opposing the president and that it would be dishonest if they had “kept our mouths shut” in order “to save our political hides.” Pell agreed that anti-war dissent should have “nothing to do with political parties,” but claimed that he and other Democrats had begun to attack the nation’s Vietnam policy during President Lyndon Johnson’s administration and that several Republican had joined them during the Nixon administration when it was against their political interests.

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Such criticisms did not stop Pell’s peace efforts, and he continued to lobby his fellow senators into supporting anti-war legislation. In a newspaper article published on March 15 he said that American involvement in Vietnam could end “whenever the majority in Congress wants to stop this war.” He also criticized Nixon’s support of the Laos invasion, especially since the President claimed to be working towards a peaceful solution to the war. “In order to get out of the war in one country,” Pell stated, “we have invaded two other countries and are bombing four other countries.”

One of Pell’s greatest fears was that to defend South Vietnam with fewer ground forces, Nixon would use American air and naval power over a wider range, spreading the war throughout the entire Southeast Asia region, and possibly even into China. Therefore, he quickly protested any attempts by Nixon to expand the range of the war, as he did in Cambodia in 1970 and Laos in 1971.

Later in March 1971, Pell co-sponsored a bill with Senator Javits to strengthen the constitutional power of Congress to declare war. Their bill would have permitted “the President, as Commander in Chief” to respond to crises but required “Congressional action within 30 days” to authorize “further United States involvement in hostilities.” On March 24, Pell testified in support of the bill before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, stating that its purpose was “to make sure that in the critical decisions involving war-making” the legislative branch would create policy, not the executive branch. Pell noted that the executive branch had gained dominance in “the decisions that mean war or peace” for the United States during the twentieth century. The time had come, he believed, for Congress to reassert its constitutional power and share the responsibility for making decisions “that affect both our national security and the personal lives of all Americans.” Pell declared that this bill was not directed specifically

at President Nixon, but was instead written to create a greater consensus for all military action. He further noted that this bill “would not apply to military hostilities already underway” and therefore should not be viewed as a direct attack upon Nixon’s Vietnam policy, but rather as something that “looks constructively to the future.”

While the bill would not have affected American actions in Vietnam, it would have limited Nixon’s ability to engage in further military actions in either Cambodia or Laos. The bill’s passage would have also signified growing senatorial dissatisfaction with Nixon’s Vietnam policy and, in effect, served as a vote of no confidence in the president’s ability to make crucial foreign policy decisions. Nixon realized the importance of this threat and marshalled his supporters to defeat the bill, but he was finding it harder and harder to gain the necessary votes in the Senate. On April 13, 1972, the Senate passed a version of Javits’ bill, now combined with similar bills proposed by Senators John Stennis and Thomas Eagleton, by a vote of 68 to 16, but the House of Representatives refused to pass it. This defeat was frustrating, but supporters of the bill were encouraged by the Senate vote, and by the leadership of Senator Stennis, a conservative Democrat who chaired the Senate Armed Services Committee. When the new Congress convened in 1973, it considered several new versions of the War Powers Act, and Pell was among the core of supporters who worked for their passage.

In April and May 1971, the Foreign Relations Committee held another series of hearings to discuss further anti-war legislation. The Committee considered four bills for the withdrawal of American forces from Vietnam, one bill prohibiting the invasion of North Vietnam by American troops without congressional approval and another one establishing a commission to analyze the next elections in South Vietnam. The last bill further stated that the United States would not support any South Vietnamese

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7Ibid., 405-409.
government which came to power as the result of a coup or military action. At these hearings not only did government officials testify, but also civilians like members of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War and student peace activists as well as the Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars presented their views on the war. Pell’s participation in these hearings was limited because he was simultaneously chairing an Education subcommittee hearing, but the transcript recorded his interaction with various witnesses on the Vietnam issue.

One of those witnesses was John Kerry, who represented the Vietnam Veterans Against the War. This group came to Washington to protest the war but had been refused permission to set up a camp on the Washington Mall by the Supreme Court. Kerry, a decorated combat veteran, testified about the war atrocities committed by both sides. He also attacked Nixon’s Vietnamization policy and its effect on defusing the anti-war movement. He claimed that the American public should not be satisfied merely with a reduction in troops levels, but should continue to protest until all American soldiers were out of Vietnam. As an example of the lowered public concern, he noted that the invasion of Laos had not attracted much attention in the United States because American ground forces had not been employed. He emphasized, however, that American aircraft had been used to support the invasion, causing a great deal of devastation in Laos and the deaths of some American airmen, a fact that had been glossed over in reports of the incident. He concluded that his group had come to Congress to petition for action to end the war, but he also expressed doubts about the willingness of congressmen to act.8

Pell applauded Kerry’s statement and the efforts of the Veterans group to promote peace.9 He admitted that Congress could have ended the war, “whenever we wanted to . .

9 Pell also, somewhat prophetically, expressed hope that one day Kerry would be “a colleague of ours in this body.” (ibid., 191) Kerry is now the junior Senator from the State of Massachusetts, and a large part of his political success was due to his record as a leader in the anti-war movement.
. If the majority of us had used the power of the purse strings,” and expressed the hope that the veterans organization would be successful in its efforts. Pell also endorsed Kerry’s concern about the future treatment of America’s South Vietnamese allies after the United States withdrawal. Pell and Kerry then discussed the recent conviction of Lieutenant William Calley in connection with the massacre at My Lai. Kerry claimed that Calley’s guilt should be shared by the military and civilian leaders who had created the war and encouraged brutality by placing so much importance on the body counts of the enemy casualties. Pell agreed with Kerry and noted that every member of Congress, including the war critics, had to share the guilt of the My Lai massacre and the Vietnam war as a whole.10 Pell appreciated the efforts of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War and believed that they offered a valuable insight into the war. He showed his appreciation by holding a fund raiser for the group along with Senator Philip Hart of Michigan to help it offset the legal and other expenses in visiting Washington, one of the few times that he offered financial assistance to a protest group.11

Pell also attended a session when a delegation from the Students and Youth for a People’s Peace made a presentation before the committee. This group of radical anti-war protestors included several who had served jail terms for their anti-war actions. While the students made a restrained presentation, the antagonism between them and some of the senators, especially Republican Senators George Aiken of Vermont and Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania, eventually led to bickering between the two sides. Both the students and the conservative senators began to interrupt each other and the debate began to break down as the students became more angry and the conservative senators began to patronize them. The students also criticized the anti-war senators on the committee for not doing enough to end the war. Pell did not take part in this argument, but instead expressed “sadness” about the inability of the two sides to communicate successfully. He

10 Ibid., 191-94.
noted the early role that Senator Fulbright and others on the committee had played in protesting the war and was upset that the student radicals and the Senate war critics could no longer agree upon one peace agenda. “I don’t think we are all that different in our objectives,” he said, “and yet the chasm between us is huge.” He told the students that their radical tactics made “the job of leadership of those of us who believe and have believed this war is wrong, ill-based and has nothing to do with our national interest more difficult.”

The final witness that Pell questioned during these sessions was W. Averell Harriman, who appeared before the Committee on May 25. Harriman, a long-time government official who had served as the chief United States negotiator at the Paris peace talks under the Johnson administration, testified about the viability of a “policy of responsible prompt withdrawal” and urged Congress “to use its power over the purse to compel a responsible withdrawal of all of our forces from Vietnam, preferably by the end of this year.” Pell asked his opinions about how to negotiate with the North Vietnamese and the issue of asylum for South Vietnamese. Harriman insisted that the United States could negotiate while withdrawing, and he also proposed an agreement which guaranteed the safety of adherents of all sides. He further suggested that the United States concentrate upon combining all of the non-Communists factions in South Vietnam into one coalition rather than supporting the “unpopular oppressive military junta.” His proposal resembled the coalition idea that Pell had first proposed in 1965, except that he was willing to include the Communists because of their popularity.

Pell himself took an active role part in this legislative effort to end the war by by co-sponsoring several of the bills. One which he supported was the Vietnam Disengagement Act written by Senators Hatfield and McGovern, declaring that no United States funds could be spent after December 31, 1971 to support American forces in

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12Committee on Foreign Affairs, Legislative Proposals Relating to the War in Vietnam, 242, 248-49.
Vietnam or to continue military actions there. On June 11, Pell spoke before the Senate in favor of this bill and also to criticize Nixon’s Vietnamization plan. While he supported the president’s decision to reduce the number of American soldiers in Vietnam, he declared that the mere replacement of United States combat forces with South Vietnamese troops was not acceptable. Pell declared that the Nixon administration should concentrate its efforts on creating a permanent solution to the war that would end American involvement, lead to the return of all United States prisoners of war, and provide asylum for those South Vietnamese who would be threatened by new government, “rather than planning on pouring additional billions of dollars into Vietnam for military assistance in the hopes of propping up indefinitely a regime whose support by the U.S. government does not appear matched by support from her own Vietnamese people.”

The support of the current South Vietnamese government became a major point of contention between Pell and Nixon. Pell wanted to find a solution which truly reflected the political realities of Vietnam, even if that meant creating a Communist government in South Vietnam. Nixon, on the other hand, wanted to continue supporting the anti-Communist regime in South Vietnam to prevent Communist expansion, even at a cost of prolonged warfare and billions of dollars. Although Nixon eventually negotiated important treaties with both the Chinese and the Soviet Union which led to an era of detente between the super-powers, he was still determined to prevent the spread of Communism in Southeast Asia. Because of his determination not to be “the first President of the United States to loose a war,” this sense of personal pride was perhaps even more important than national pride in the president’s formulation of his Vietnam policy. Pell, however, recognized no such personal considerations and thus continued to work for a peaceful solution to the war and to criticize what he viewed as a lack of

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responsible leadership by the President.

Pell disclosed some of these differences in a speech given at a Thanksgiving Eve Memorial Service at St. Mark’s Church in Cranston, Rhode Island. He expressed thanks that the number of Americans in Vietnam had been greatly reduced. Despite this progress, though, he noted, “a gnawing sense of unrest and frustration that the war does continue . . . long after the great majority of Americans have made it clear that they want their government to end the war.” Furthermore, he declared that there was “a widespread feeling among Americans” that the government had “not been fully responsive to the wishes of the people” on the issue of ending the war. He stated that America’s withdrawal from Vietnam was “far too slow” and that during the disengagement process Nixon had “undertaken some risky, dangerous and ill-conceived adventures, namely in Cambodia and Laos” at a time when it should have been concentrating on a peaceful solution to the war.16

Despite these disappointments, Pell was hopeful because opposition to the war had begun to alter the nation’s Vietnam policy. As an example, he pointed towards the Senate’s passage of the Mansfield Declaration which called for the creation of a policy which fixed a withdrawal date. He admitted, however, that this victory had been marred because the House had altered the bill and the President announced that he would not be bound by congressional declarations. He also cited the congressional action after the invasion of Cambodia that prohibited the use of American ground forces in either Cambodia and Laos. This legislation, he argued, was successful and had prevented the use of American troops in the February invasion of Laos. He also attacked Nixon’s Vietnamization plan, claiming that, while American casualties had decreased, the death toll for the Vietnamese had increased at a staggering rate. He believed that any solution to America’s intervention in Vietnam also had to include a means to end the war there.

Therefore, Pell declared “we have a clear responsibility, in my view, to seek earnestly a negotiated settlement -- one which will bring our servicemen and the American prisoners home in peace, and one which will also end the violence and killing in Southeast Asia.”

In January 1972, the new congressional session began with the introduction of another round of anti-war legislation. Senate war critics were confident that with the growing public dissent about the war, they would now be able to enact some of their legislation. They also believed that the pressures of an election year might force some moderates to join their cause, though they recognized that it might also force others to remain undecided. A serious debate developed about the upcoming election, and as in 1968 the war in Vietnam was certain to be a key issue. Several anti-war Senators were likely candidates to challenge Nixon, including George McGovern of South Dakota and Edmund Muskie of Maine who had been Hubert Humphrey’s Vice Presidential running mate in 1968. Humphrey was also as a possible candidate, but Pell expressed doubts about his chances for victory since he had already run once and lost. Pell received some consideration as a potential vice-presidential candidate, because of his stance on Vietnam as well as several domestic issues, especially education. Democrats viewed him as an attractive match to any candidate from the Midwest or West because he was a New Englander and had ties to the Kennedy family. This idea, however, never went beyond the initial discussions, and Democrats never asked him to be a vice-presidential candidate.

In 1972, Pell paid little attention to these rumors because he was concerned about his own re-election campaign for the senate. He campaigned against former Rhode Island Governor and Secretary of the Navy John Chafee, who had narrowly lost the gubernatorial race of 1968 but still had a strong base of support throughout the state. Chafee presented Pell with his stiffest challenge since the Democratic primary of 1960. Though he was a Republican in a strongly-Democratic state, Chafee had successfully

\[17\] Ibid., 3-8.
gained office by running with the slogan “vote for the man, not the party” and promoted his own skills and abilities rather than a standard party platform. Chafee also benefited from family ties to the publishers of Rhode Island’s major newspaper, the Providence Journal-Bulletin, who gave him favorable coverage while down-playing the role of Senator Pell. Pell decided to counter these advantages by campaigning in much the same way that he had in 1960, paying for high profile advertising on radio and television and by bringing his message directly to the voters in door-to-door campaigns and speaking before small local groups. He realized, though, that while it was necessary to campaign to remain in office, he could not neglect his current duties as a senator and his continued opposition to the Vietnam war.

Just prior to his campaign, Pell wrote a book entitled Power and Policy: America’s Role in World Affairs. The book presented his opinions on foreign policy to his constituents. He believed that his diplomatic skill was one of his strengths as a senatorial candidate, and therefore wanted to display it to as wide an audience as possible during the campaign. Power and Policy is crucial to the understanding of Pell’s position on Vietnam. It is the clearest presentation of Pell’s theories about foreign policy and the influences that led to these opinions. This book shows that Pell’s opposition to Vietnam was not merely a reaction to the pressure of the anti-war movement, but the result of a carefully-crafted philosophy about how the nation’s foreign policy should be created. While others campaigned against the war on moral grounds, Pell concentrated his opposition on the fact that America’s intervention in Vietnam was not in the nation’s best interests and was the result of flawed policy. Pell admitted that his stance against sentiment in foreign policy was somewhat cold, but claimed that approval of his methods would reduce the loss of American lives and money in the pursuit of foreign affairs. Indeed, Pell was by no means an isolationist, but wanted the nation’s commitments to be based on carefully reasoned policy and not sentiment or idealistic dogma.

In one passage, Pell compares the American intervention in Vietnam and the war
with Spain in 1898. There are several important distinctions between the two conflicts, he wrote, specifically that the war with Spain was one of the most popular in American history, and the Vietnam war was the least. In both wars, however, a misplaced sense of idealism had, in his view, overwhelmed America’s true national interests. According to Pell the war with Spain “arose from a popular passion to liberate an afflicted people,” spurred on by business interests. The war in Vietnam arose from “a cold calculation by government officials that freedom is indivisible” and that unless America fought totalitarianism everywhere “we will ultimately succumb to it ourselves.” He further claimed that neither war would have happened “had we based our policy on those true interests, to the exclusion of ‘sentiment, nostalgia, or evangelical fervor.’” Admitting that such a stance was hard to defend, his book said that it was the “inevitable conclusion for one who troubles to compare the costs in blood and treasure of pursuing the course of genuine, purely selfish national interests on one hand, and altruism or evangelism on the other.”

Throughout the rest of the book, Pell presents several of his opinions about Vietnam, the great majority of which are taken from previous statements about the war. One particular passage expresses his belief that “foreign policy cannot be designed by a committee - and here I include the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.” Pell believed that foreign policy had to be formulated by the president, assisted by the “State Department, National Security Council, and all the other agencies of the executive branch.” The role for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, therefore, was to “launch new concepts and policies for our nation to follow” and to “try to make sure that the people are kept informed about their government’s activities” In Pell’s opinion, the Committee had fulfilled its role in the Vietnam crisis by using its hearings to “lay the groundwork for our change of policy,” and now it was time for the Congress as a whole

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to take action to further influence the president’s policy decisions.\textsuperscript{19}

As Pell began his campaign in 1972, the effort continued to find a solution to the Vietnam crisis. On January 25, 1972, President Nixon announced that National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger had been involved in secret negotiations with the North Vietnamese and had nearly reached a settlement. Pell responded to Nixon’s announcement by entering into the \textit{Congressional Record} an article by Hamilton Davis of the \textit{Providence Journal} which criticized the president’s action. In the article, entitled “Nixon Avoids A Key Issue,” Davis declared that the president’s revelation of the secret peace talks was “sad” because he had not made clear whether the United States would continue to support the government of South Vietnam following the withdrawal. Davis noted that according to Nixon’s schedule only about 70,000 American soldiers would remain in Vietnam by May 1972 and only a handful of them would be combat troops. However, as long as air power, stationed in Thailand or on aircraft carriers, continued to support the South Vietnamese, the war would not end and the American prisoners of war would not be returned. The question for Nixon therefore still remained, “do you care more about propping up the South Vietnamese than you do about getting the prisoners back.” Davis claimed that until Nixon accepted the need for a complete American withdrawal from the area, even at the probable cost of losing South Vietnam to the Communists, the war would continue, more United States service men would die, and the prisoners would not be released.\textsuperscript{20}

Many Rhode Islanders shared these concerns with Pell about the continuing war in Vietnam. In 1972, their concerns, along with the upcoming election, brought more mail to Pell’s office. A large percentage of this mail called for ending the war. In response, Pell composed a letter which reported his long opposition to the war. He noted his support of several pieces of legislation “designed to require a complete withdrawal of

\textsuperscript{19}\textit{Ibid.}, 34.
our military forces from Southeast Asia by a fixed date, contingent upon satisfactory arrangements for the release of Americans held as prisoners of war.” He admitted, however, that these actions had either been defeated or “weakened to a point of ineffectiveness.” Pell also underlined his long opposition to the bombing of North Vietnam other nations in Southeast Asia. He concluded by assuring his constituents that he would do everything possible “to end our involvement in the war at the earliest possible time.”

On April 15, President Nixon, angered by the lack of success in the negotiations and a North Vietnamese military offensive, decided to increase the pressure on the North Vietnamese by escalating the war. Therefore, he authorized the bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong for the first time since 1968, and later he approved the mining of Haiphong harbor and a wider range of massive bombing throughout North Vietnam. This action incensed Pell and the other senator critics. In a speech before the Senate on April 17, Pell declared, “I strongly oppose the current escalation of U.S. military involvement in the war in Southeast Asia.” He claimed that while Nixon had done a good job in reducing the number of American soldiers and deaths in Vietnam, the overall casualty rates had remained constant, because of the increased involvement of South Vietnamese soldiers. Now, he noted, the number of Southeast Asians killed “is being sharply escalated.” Furthermore, Pell stated that he did not see how the renewed bombings would “lead to an earlier end of the war” nor to the release of the American prisoners.

Pell continued his criticism of the Vietnamization policy, claiming that it had been presented as a means to get America out of Vietnam. Instead, it had become “the excuse and rationalization for continued U.S. participation in the air and sea as we continue to underwrite the inept, corrupt, and unrepresentative Thieu regime.” Since the initiation of the Vietnamization program, the United States had invaded two more nations.

and now was beginning a massive build up of air and naval forces in the region which he feared would only lead to a continued American military presence in Southeast Asia. Pell reported that he was “saddened and sick at heart” to repeat his plea from seven years before to “stop the bombing,” and he concluded that “this is not our war. Let us return the conduct of this war to the Vietnamese, on the ground, in the air, and on the sea.”

In a newspaper article on May 9, Pell continued opposing to the renewed offensive. Although sympathizing with Nixon’s difficult position, he did not “agree with escalation as a solution.” Instead, he advised Nixon to set a firm date for withdrawal and then leave, “provided our P.O.W.s are returned and sanctuaries are provided for those Vietnamese who would suffer as a result of our departure.” He repeated these ideas in a speech on the Senate floor two days later, adding that the president’s action risked a precedent for further confrontation and escalation. Pell praised Nixon’s proposal for a withdrawal within four months of a settlement, but criticized him for choosing to “wield a club of military escalation with one hand, while offering a plan for U.S. withdrawal with the other.” The escalation, Pell claimed, had “shaken the confidence of the American people” who now wanted only one thing, “an end to the killing.” He claimed that the long American involvement had given South Vietnam a chance to defend itself successfully and that the time had come for them to do so without the military backing of the United States.

The renewed escalation inspired more people to write to Pell about the war. One letter writer, R.L. Hannaford, a forty-year-old father of six, declared that he was almost ready to engage in acts of civil disobedience to protest the war. Hannaford stated that he used to believe that writing letters to Congress to express his opinion was enough, but it was no longer true. He asked if Pell had any suggestions “as to how the President can be

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23Ibid., 13343.
forced to listen to the American people” short of acts of civil disobedience. Pell replied that he knew of no certain way of affecting Nixon’s policy and could only express hope that the continued persistence of the anti-war movement would have an eventual impact.26 Hannaford’s letter illustrates how even moderate, middle class Americans had grown weary of the continuing war. Pell believed that it was necessary to get the middle class actively opposed to the war to achieve change, and thus encouraged Hannaford to continue in his efforts.

By the beginning of the summer, Pell’s race against Chafee was beginning to take up more of his time. Early polls had showed Chafee was ahead by a two-to-one margin, but Pell’s support began to solidify and the race became closer. The core of Pell’s support came from the state’s strong Democratic party, along with the added support of organized labor who endorsed him. While it was not the most important issue of the campaign, the Vietnam war played a definite role. On June 27, the state Republican Chairman, Thomas Wright, accused Pell of trying to hide the fact that he had voted for appropriations for Vietnam during the Johnson administration. Pell claimed that those votes were to provide supplies for the American soldiers already stationed in Vietnam, not to increase their number, and contended that he had always voted to stop the escalation of troops.27

Pell continued to attack Nixon’s Vietnam policy as the campaign neared its end, attempting to define carefully the differences on the issue between himself and Chafee. Chafee, on the other hand, tried to neutralize the issue by down-playing its importance in a state-wide race and by minimizing the differences between the two men. In early October, news came that an agreement had been reached in Paris through another series of secret talks between Henry Kissinger and the North Vietnamese. Pell declared in a

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Senate speech that the secrecy surrounding the negotiations added to the frustration of the American public who no longer knew what to believe about the war. He said he hoped that the reports were true, but feared that they represented just another unfounded peace rumor. He remarked that if peace were as close as rumored, then Nixon ought to ignore secrecy and give the effort his full and open attention until the settlement was signed. Pell also stated that while he had firmly supported a negotiated settlement for seven years, he found “the record of my opponent on this crucial issue clearly inconsistent” and noted that in the past Chafee had stated that “any hope for negotiations was merely a dream.”

Unfortunately, this agreement did not become official, because the South Vietnamese government refused to sign it realizing that it could not stay in power after the end of American support and Nixon was not willing to sign an agreement without them.

On October 17, Pell and Chafee debated at Bryant College in Smithfield, Rhode Island, and Vietnam was one of the key issues. Pell caused a stir when he announced that he disagreed with Democratic Presidential candidate George McGovern’s proposal for an unilateral withdrawal in the hope that the North Vietnamese would follow suit and and release the American prisoners of war. Pell stated that his solution was “to set a date for withdrawal of all forces and leave with the sole condition of the prisoners of war being released and those missing in action being accounted for.” In order to assure compliance with these conditions, Pell suggested that American forces be maintained in Thailand and Navy vessels be stationed off the coast of Vietnam until the prisoners were returned. Chafee disagreed with this proposal and stated that he would require that the prisoners “be returned simultaneously with our withdrawal” and emphasized the importance of leaving American troops in Vietnam until their release.

Chafee admitted that he differed with Nixon’s determination to protect the South
Vietnamese government in the settlement process. He said that “what type of government is in Saigon is of no concern to me” and stated that America had already met its obligations to protect South Vietnam. Pell declared that his desire for an immediate withdrawal was a key difference between himself and Chafee, but announced that the United States should continue to send economic aid to South Vietnam, equal to the amount sent to North Vietnam by the Soviet Union and China, because he did not see the need to sever all ties between the United States and South Vietnam. The two also debated the other key issues of the election which included their opposing stances on federal aid for education, busing, and other budgetary topics. At this point, less then a month before the election, polls showed that Chafee was still ahead, but Pell expressed confidence in his campaign.30

On October 22, the Sunday Journal published an article comparing the two candidates’ stands on different issues including Vietnam. It described Chafee as a supporter of the Vietnamization program, noting that he would “withdraw immediately” if North Vietnam agreed to release the American prisoners. The story also observed that Chafee was not as critical of the Thieu government as Pell, but saw no need for continued American support of it. He also disagreed with the decision to mine Haiphong, which had occurred a few days after his resignation as Secretary of the Navy, and said that if Nixon “had asked my advice, I would have said otherwise.” Chafee also proudly pointed to the fact that the Marines had made almost a complete withdrawal from Vietnam while he was in charge of the Navy. The article described Pell as a “longtime critic of American involvement in what he regards a basically a civil war,” and cited his support of several “end-the-war” amendments. It further noted that he considered the “Saigon government dictatorial” and had stated that “even a Communist-led regime would be preferable to the continuation of the war.” Finally, the report stated that Pell considered the escalation of bombing as “counterproductive” and that he viewed the war

30Ibid., 1, 33.
as the “principle cause of domestic inflation and a contributor to the nation’s growing
drug abuse problem.”

As election day grew nearer, the race between Pell and Chafee grew closer. Most polls declared Chafee to be ahead, but the estimated margin of victory was slight. Pell responded by campaigning harder than ever before. A key to his strategy was building a coalition of the leaders of many groups, including unions, parent-teacher associations, elderly associations and fraternal organizations, and using them to campaign for him among their membership. Perhaps the most important of these groups was the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL/CIO) which contributed over $100,000 and significant personnel to Pell’s campaign. Pell, however, could not count on much assistance from Democratic presidential candidate George McGovern who was running far behind Nixon, even in traditionally democratic Rhode Island. Pell realized that McGovern was going to lose, and did not want to hamper his own re-election chances by tying himself to McGovern. Pell did not have to worry about getting the Democratic vote in Rhode Island, but instead had to concentrate on the Independents, and he did not want to alienate any of them by associating himself too closely to McGovern. On election day, November 7, 1972, Pell’s strategy succeeded. He defeated Chafee by a vote of 221,942 to 188,990 receiving 53.7% of the vote. By a margin of 32,952, Pell was re-elected to the Senate for his third term. It was the closest race he would ever face in his political career. Chafee successfully ran for the Senate again four years later and replaced the retiring Senator John Pastore, and he continues to serve in the Senate with Pell to this day.

The victory over Chafee proved to be a tremendous boost to Pell’s senatorial

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34Ibid., 684.
career, not merely because it allowed it to continue for another six years. Winning a third term increased Pell’s seniority in the Senate. More importantly, by defeating Chafee, Pell proved himself to be a viable politician and a veteran campaigner who was able to come from behind to win a hard fought race. While his previous victories in 1960 and 1966 had been against lesser opponents, or ones who had been damaged by political scandal, Chafee had posed a serious threat to Pell, especially when combined with Nixon’s victory in Rhode Island. Former Pell aide Livingston Biddle noted that following the victory in 1972, Pell gained a “new sense of respect” from his fellow senators. No longer was he viewed as an “eccentric” patrician, but as a veteran legislator regarded for his “integrity,” experience and intelligence.\(^{35}\) His campaign against Chafee was the hardest he ever faced, and he won re-election with relative ease subsequently in 1978, 1984, and 1990. Today he ranks third in senate seniority and serves as Chairman of both the Foreign Relations Committee and the Subcommittee on Education, Arts, and Humanities, as well as Co-Chairman of the Senate Arms Control Observer Group.

President Nixon was also a victor on election day, re-elected in a landslide victory over George McGovern. Once he was safely returned to the White House, Nixon resumed the negotiations with North Vietnam. On November 20, Kissinger met again with North Vietnam’s chief negotiator Le Duc Tho. They used the agreement reached in October as a base, but Kissinger added sixty-nine amendments proposed by Thieu, who hoped to disrupt the process. Many of Thieu’s demands were ludicrous, and the talks quickly broke down. Nixon became frustrated by the stalemate, and on December 18, he ordered the bombing of the areas around Hanoi and Haiphong. For the next eleven days, American B-52 bombers pounded North Vietnam in the most massive series of raids of the war.\(^{36}\)

People in America and around the world were aghast at the severity of the air


raids, and Pell shared their anger. He denounced Nixon’s decision and urged Congress to take prompt action to end the war.\(^{37}\) Nixon’s tactic, however, met with some success and the North Vietnamese agreed to resume talks as soon as the bombing ended. On January 8, 1973 talks resumed, and most problems were settled by the next day. Nixon now warned Thieu that he had to sign the agreement, or else the United States would do so unilaterally and leave South Vietnam to fend for itself. Finally, on January 27, 1973 the United States and North Vietnam signed the peace agreement in Paris. On March 29, the last American troops left Vietnam, and on April 1, Hanoi released the last American prisoners.

Technically, the war had ended, but many questions and problems still remained, most importantly the nature of the United States response if North Vietnam invaded South Vietnam. Pell, now secure for another six years, and also with increased seniority, played an important role in the Congressional attempt to guide America’s future policy towards Vietnam. In February, Pell sponsored a bill to halt American aid to any nation which violated the peace agreement in Vietnam. He also co-sponsored a bill proposed by Senators Case and Church which would prevent further United States military intervention in Southeast Asia without Congressional approval. He stated that this bill was necessary for two reasons. First, he believed that the continued American air support for the anti-Communist forces in Cambodia was “a dangerous, costly and unwise policy” which risked further United States military intervention in Southeast Asia. Second, he believed that the bill was important “as an assertion of congressional authority and responsibility for engagement of U.S. forces in war.”\(^{38}\)

The Nixon administration had defeated similar proposals before, but the President found his power in Congress weakened following the end of the war due to the Watergate


scandal. Thus he was unable to stop the passage of the Case-Church act, though he claimed it would weaken his options for Vietnam. The introduction of the “War Powers Act,” which strictly regulated the President’s ability to use the armed forces without a declaration of war, further undermined Nixon’s influence. While the president was still allowed to use the military in response to crises, the armed forces could not be used for longer than thirty days without congressional approval. Pell spoke in support of this act just before it came to a vote. He declared that the time had come for Congress to regain its constitutionally-granted war-making powers. He expressed hope that the nation and the Congress had learned from the mistakes made during the Vietnam war. Pell suggested that had a similar act been in place when American first became involved in Vietnam, the congressional debate on the subject would have led to a “clearer understanding” of the nation’s “purposes and objectives” in Southeast Asia and probably a more restrained policy saving many American and Vietnamese lives. The Senate passed the War Powers Act by a vote of 72 to 18 and effectively ended any future American intervention in Vietnam.39

Pell also remained an outspoken advocate for the Vietnamese people. He wanted the United States to provide humanitarian aid to help South Vietnam recover from the devastating effects of the war, but urged that America maintain oversight of the use of its funds to prevent misuse. Pell also called for continued reforms of the South Vietnamese government and wanted the United States to secure them by threatening to cut off economic aid that the nation needed to survive. Finally, Pell continued to work with the families of soldiers still listed as missing in action and attempted to use his office to assist their search.

The flurry of successful anti-war legislation in 1973 showed the power that the Congress could have over the president if it were united. The success of these bills must in some part be attributed to the weakness of the Nixon administration during this period

and not merely to an increased determination by Congress. These eventual successes, however, do not justify the many years of ineffectual congressional control over the Vietnam war. It was not until 1972 that the Senate and eventually the House of Representatives enacted serious anti-war legislation. Also, while several individual Congressmen were outspoken critics of the war, no anti-war opposition developed in the House comparable to that in the Senate until 1972. This lack of opposition was in part due to the more conservative nature of the House, which was usually more concerned with domestic bills than foreign affairs. Furthermore, the House lacked strong anti-war leadership like that of Senators Fulbright and Mansfield.

Despite its outspoken leaders, however, the Senate also had very limited success in passing anti-war legislation until 1972. The obvious center of the Senate opposition was the Foreign Relations Committee, which Chairman Fulbright used as a forum to discuss the war. Unlike most other committees, the Foreign Relations Committee members often asked tough questions about the nation’s Vietnam policy and pointed out flaws in explanations provided by the Johnson and Nixon administrations. Fulbright directed this criticism with the support of other committee members. Although the committee’s membership changed, several key Senators remained with it, including Senators John Cooper, Frank Church, Albert Gore, Mike Mansfield, Jacob Javits, George Aiken, Stuart Symington, and Pell. Pell acknowledges today that as a whole the Senate was not very effective in its opposition to the Vietnam war and believes that the Foreign Relations Committee did the most to educate the public about the war and to act as leaders in the peace movement, an opinion shared by most analysts of the period.⁴⁰

His own role in this movement is also open to criticism. Pell was an experienced expert in the field of foreign affairs, and yet he did not take an early role leading the

⁴⁰Telephone interview with Pell, July 23, 1993. Perhaps the best work on the effectiveness of Senate’s role in the anti-war movement is Melvin Small’s Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves. William Berman’s William Fulbright and the Vietnam War: The Dissent of a Political Realist is another valuable work describing Fulbright’s efforts and the role of the Foreign Relations Committee.
opposition to the war, a decision which he later regretted on several occasions during the last years of the war. He also supported the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution and several other pieces of war legislation in 1964 and early 1965 despite reservations about America’s role Vietnam that he had expressed as early as 1962. Pell’s failure to become a leader in the Senate anti-war movement during this period can be in part explained by his position as a first-term Senator. However, despite his lack of Senate seniority, he could have played a more active role as a follower under Mansfield and Fulbright, or even Morse. Secondly, Pell’s own theories of foreign policy recognized the need for the United States to use limited military power to contain Communism, and thus it was easy for him to accept the arguments of President Johnson that America needed to fight in Vietnam, despite his own concerns about the stability and quality of the South Vietnamese government. Finally, as he stated several times in 1964 and 1965, he believed in the importance of supporting the decisions of President Johnson, not only for political reasons, but also out of respect for the president’s traditional role in forming the nation’s foreign policy.

In Pell’s defense, it must be noted that he came out firmly against the bombing of North Vietnam and the sending of more American troops as early as 1965. At that time, he recognized the necessity of negotiating with the Vietcong to reach a settlement in Vietnam, a realization that most senators would not make for several more years. It took courage for Pell to speak out against President Johnson’s Vietnam policies, especially since he faced re-election in 1966. Furthermore, from November 1965 through January 1973 he remained one of the most consistent critics of the war in the Senate.

During the war, Pell received some criticism from members of the anti-war movement because he did not participate in peace activities outside the Senate. Unlike Senators Fulbright, Morse and others, Pell was reluctant to make public speeches before anti-war rallies, or to sign petitions, or participate in other peace activities. This failure, however, was not due to a lack of commitment, but instead because of his personality.
Pell still is a retiring man, even shy, especially for a politician. During his debate with Chafee, he described himself, very accurately, as “a workhorse, not a show horse.” Pell is a liberal man in his beliefs, but a conservative man in his tastes and actions. Although believing that public opposition was important and recognizing the value of the peace movement in the effort to change the nation’s Vietnam policy, Pell was always more comfortable working within the Senate than in the public.

Also, as the anti-war movement became more radical in the later years of the war, Pell repudiated its violent actions and chose not to be associated with it. His statement about the Moratorium in October 1969 effectively reflects his opinion of the anti-war movement. Pell applauded the Moratorium for “providing a peaceful outlet for legitimate protests,” but he warned that “if violence or unlawful action occur, the Moratorium will do more harm than good.”

While many student protestors hoped that their actions could change the nation’s policy, Pell believed that their best contribution would be to educate and encourage the rest of the nation to oppose the war. Student protests alone would not force Johnson or Nixon to end the war, but if opposition to Vietnam spread from the campuses to the rest of America, he believed that a change in the policy could result. Pell thought it was necessary to increase middle class opposition to the war and feared that the students’ rowdy behavior “turned off” many moderates who opposed the war, but did not feel comfortable joining the protests. Also, both the Johnson and Nixon administrations were able to use violent or destructive actions by the protestors to rally middle class support for the Presidency and the war against people who were portrayed as dangerous and radical students threatening the nation. Pell believed that such radical activities made his task as a Senator opposed to the war more difficult, because it galvanized support for the war.

Pell’s moderate and peaceful stance led to some criticism by the radical anti-war

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42These ideas are supported in several works, including Small, Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves, and DeBenedetti, An American Ordeal.
movement that he was too restrained in his opposition to the war in Vietnam. He was, however, consistent in his criticism of the war after 1965. His speech of November 1965 outlined his basic Vietnam policy: limit American military involvement, cease bombing North Vietnam, begin negotiations with the Vietcong, and end the conflict in Vietnam through a negotiated settlement and not military force. Pell continued to promote this policy, with a few minor variations, throughout the war. While Pell’s position on Vietnam remained stable, American’s opinion about the war changed drastically as the conflict wore on. While the majority of American’s supported Johnson’s Vietnam policy in 1965, polls showed that 72% called for the United States to withdraw in January 1971. Thus, while Pell’s position was progressive in 1965, by the late 1960s it was conservative compared to the rest of the anti-war movement. Unlike some of his fellow colleagues in Congress, however, Pell was not pressured by the anti-war movement into supporting radical end-the-war proposals, but instead stood by his carefully constructed, moderate Vietnam policy.

One factor that influenced Pell’s opposition to the war was his determination to solve the crisis by political and not military means. Pell was not alone in recognizing that the inefficiency and corruption of both the Diem and Thieu regimes in South Vietnam were the cause of many of that nation’s problems. The Johnson and Nixon administrations recognized this fact, but believed that it was necessary to use the American military to defeat the Vietcong and stabilize the nation before political reform could be made. Believing that the war could be settled by creating a popular and responsive government, Pell was willing to do so even if Communists were admitted into the government. Pell realized that the crisis in South Vietnam would not be solved until a popular government was installed, and recognized the senselessness of continuing America’s military commitment unless crucial reforms were made.

Another key to Pell’s opposition to the Vietnam war was his theory about the

formation of foreign policy. Pell believed that the United States should not undertake unnecessary commitments merely because of national pride or an outdated dogma, such as the fear of Communism. He recognized the flaws of Communism and the need to spend part of America’s wealth and military power in order to prevent its spread, which explains his early willingness to follow Johnson’s Vietnam policy. Unlike most other Senators, however, Pell did not believe in the existence of a monolithic Communism and thus he could differentiate between Vietnam and the Soviet Union. He recognized rather early that Vietnam had no impact on the United States’ vital interests or national defense, and that America had over-committed itself in Vietnam. Therefore, Pell insisted that America’s commitment to Vietnam had to be re-evaluated and recast according to that nation’s true value to the national interest of the United States.

Pell believed that the United States had a responsibility to give economic and military aid to South Vietnam, but thought that America’s combat role there should be severely limited, especially in the absence of any international approval for the action. By 1966, however, Pell recognized that because of the growing American involvement, the responsibility for fighting the war was falling upon the United States, not South Vietnam. At the same time, Pell realized that the American use of heavy fire power, especially bombing, caused such a high level of devastation and destruction that it outweighed any military advantages. Therefore he began to call for a bombing halt and the withdrawal of American combat forces in Vietnam, because he believed that the United States had over committed to South Vietnam, and therefore the nation’s losses had to be reduced before becoming bankrupt.

His use of business terms in describing the relationship between the United States and South Vietnam reflected the impact of the war on Americans. As he had feared, America’s long-term military commitment in Vietnam did have a detrimental effect on the United States. Not only were 58,000 soldiers killed and billions of dollars spent, but the Vietnam war also gravely affected the nation’s political and economic system and
caused a wave of social unrest that threatened to tear it apart. The effect of the Vietnam war upon the United States saddened Pell, and he fought hard to end it. While others were concerned about the “loss of face” and national pride, Pell realized the serious effects of the continued warfare upon the nation; while pride can be easily regained, the public’s trust and confidence in its government are very difficult to restore once they have been lost.

The statements and speeches Pell made about the Vietnam war show that he understood many of the problems that continued American commitment would cause. They also show him to be a humanitarian who was more concerned about the plight of the people of Vietnam than the possible humiliation of the United States. Furthermore, they prove that he had a clear understanding about the intricacies of international relations the creation of foreign policy. The actions that he took, and their results, however, show that it is often easier to create theories and proposals than it is to enact policy. In retrospect, Pell’s opinions on Vietnam were intelligent and his opposition to the war wise, but he was not able to change the nation’s Vietnam policy. The failure to change policy is not unique to Pell, as it can be said of nearly every other member of the Senate’s anti-war movement. It was not until the end of the war that the Senate was able to create effective legislation that halted the nation’s continued involvement in Southeast Asia. Yet Pell did have some success in educating the American public and changing opinions about Vietnam. Thus, while Pell and the other Senate war critics failed in their effort to end the war through legislation, they were able to effect change by educating the public about the fallacies of the war and inspiring protest by serving as a voice of opposition within the government. Pell was not the most famous Senate “Dove,” but the role he played as a consistent critic of the war - using his diplomatic skills to point out carefully the flaws in the nation’s Vietnam policy, writing anti-war legislation, and attempting to build a majority coalition against the war in the Senate - was a key addition to the Senate opposition in its efforts to end the United States intervention in Vietnam.
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The most important source for this work was the Papers of Senator Claiborne Pell in the Special Collections of the University of Rhode Island Library. This archive includes most of Pell’s senatorial papers from 1960-1990 as well as some of his earlier papers. The majority of this collection comprises of Pell’s correspondence with both his constituents and other public officials, his speeches and public statements, press clippings relating to his career, and other official and private documents. These papers are not catalogued and will not be until the Senator’s retirement, but with the assistance of a finding key and archivist Kevin Logan most documents can be found without difficulty.

The strength of this collection is the correspondence of Pell’s constituents. These files provide a sense of Rhode Island residents’ opinions about the war and their view of Pell’s opposition to it. Pell’s replies to these letters record the development of his opposition to the war. Also, a surprising number of out-of-state letters show that Pell’s influence as a war protestor spread beyond the boundaries of Rhode Island. His speech file is also a valuable resource, because several of his most important speeches were made outside of the Senate, and therefore no public record exists of them.

Another valuable resource is Pell’s book Power and Policy: America’s Role in World Affairs. He wrote this book as part of his 1972 campaign for re-election in an attempt to inform his Rhode Island constituency about his opinions on America’s role as a superpower. The book describes his theory on the best way to create foreign policy. Pell identified several American foreign policy crises, including the Vietnam War and analyzed the decision-making process that created the nation’s policy in each case. His
book is the best source on Pell’s approach to foreign relations, and it also serves as a brief autobiography of his foreign service career.

Pell generously made himself available for interviews with this author. In these interviews Pell discussed several key questions which were not answered by the public record and provided his critical insights about some of the key issues of the Vietnam war. He also shared his opinions about the role that the Senate played in the anti-war movement, and the effectiveness of its efforts.

The most important published resources for this study were United States government publications, including the Congressional Record and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee’s printed hearings. The Congressional Record provided the official versions of most of Pell’s Vietnam speeches, as well as letters and articles on the war that he had read into the official record. The Record also shows the role that Pell played in several Senate debates on Vietnam and his interaction with both senatorial supporters and opponents of the war. The often massive hearing records display Pell’s exchanges with witnesses testifying about their opinions on the war. These witnesses ranged from Secretary of State Dean Rusk who helped create the nation’s war policy to radical student protestors who viewed the war as morally repugnant. Pell’s interrogation of these witnesses demonstrates both his own opinions about the war and also some of the people who influenced them. The Pentagon Papers and Gareth Porter’s Vietnam: A History in Documents were also valuable sources of primary documents, though these works concentrate on the documents of the Defense Department and the Executive Branch and do not relate specifically to Pell.

Among the other primary sources several volumes stand out. Jacob Javits’ autobiography devotes an entire chapter to his effort to pass the War Powers Act and provides more evidence of his close relationship with Pell. The books of fellow Senators J. William Fulbright and Ernest Gruening reveal the opinions of these two early war opponents written during the development of the anti-war movement. While not
specifically about Vietnam, Our Government and the Arts by Livingston Biddle is a crucial book to understanding Pell. Biddle, a former aide to Pell wrote about the formation of the National Endowment of the Arts and Humanities, a bill which Pell sponsored and personally pushed through Congress. This book describes in great detail Pell’s efforts to promote the bill and his relationships with other Senators and also provides valuable insights about Pell himself and how he worked within the Senate.

Other important biographies focus on the Senate “Doves,” particularly on George McGovern, Eugene McCarthy and Robert Kennedy who ran for president. The majority of these works treat their subjects sympathetically, and describe in detail the role that each man played in the anti-war movement. Particularly helpful were Douglas Ross’s Robert F. Kennedy: Apostle of Change and William C. Berman’s William Fulbright and the Vietnam War. Ross’s book, apparently written in conjunction with Robert Kennedy’s presidential campaign of 1968, is a collection of the candidate’s statements about several important issues with annotation and analysis by the author. It includes a long section on Vietnam which details Kennedy’s evolution from a supporter of his brother’s Vietnam policies to a leader in the anti-war movement. Berman’s work describes Fulbright's role as a leader in the Senate anti-war movement and particularly notes how this position destroyed his personal friendship with Lyndon Johnson. Also invaluable were the biographies of Herbert C. Pell by Leonard Baker and Michael Steward Blayney, both of whom provide insight about the man and his relationship with his son.

Amongst the special studies on Vietnam and the anti-war movement, several stand out. The most valuable is Melvin Small’s Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves which discusses the formation of the anti-war movement and the effect that it had on the shaping of the Vietnam policies of both presidents. This work shows the role of the Senate’s anti-war movement in influencing policy and inspiring opposition to the war. Another important work is William Conrad Gibbons’ series on The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War. His books describe the relationship between the executive and
legislative branches during the Vietnam War. They are actually reprints of a series prepared by Gibbons, a researcher at the Library of Congress, for the Foreign Relations Committee. The committee has scheduled five volumes, but so far three are in print. Bruce Altschuler’s *LBJ and the Polls* reports the President’s dependence on public opinion polls in making decisions and includes an excellent chapter on how polls affected his Vietnam policy. David Barrett’s *Uncertain Warriors* describes the difficulty that Johnson and his advisors faced in trying to create a Vietnam policy that would satisfy the entire nation and their sense of commitment to Vietnam.

The continuing interest in Vietnam has produced a number of books on the topic. The great majority of these works deal strictly with the military aspects of the war, but several also analyze the political and foreign relations aspects of the war as well. One of the most comprehensive works on the war is Stanley Karnow’s *Vietnam: A History*, written in 1983 in conjunction with a PBS documentary on the war. In this immense work Karnow, a former Vietnam correspondent for *Time* and the *Washington Post*, provides a detailed history of the nation of Vietnam from its days as a French colony and concentrates on the years from 1945-1975. The other work generally regarded as a definitive history of the Vietnam War is George Herring’s *America’s Longest War*. This work, much shorter in scope than Karnow’s, concentrates more on the war itself and the decisions made in Washington than the personal views of Vietnam that Karnow provides. Another important work on the subject is David Halberstam’s *The Best and the Brightest*. While sometimes weak, Halberstam provides a fascinating view of the decision makers within the Kennedy and Johnson administrations.
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