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Mortgaging the Future: Barry Goldwater, Lyndon Johnson, and Vietnam in the 1964 Presidential Election

By Andrew L. Johns

At the end of the criminally underrated film *Go Tell the Spartans*, a title card appears that simply reads “1964.” It is intended to convey to the audience that even this early in the U.S. involvement in Vietnam, the trajectory and tragedy of the war was apparent. The historical record clearly demonstrates, however, that the decisions that led to the Americanization of the conflict in early 1965 had not yet been made in 1964, the extensive administration discussions of an expanded military presence in Southeast Asia notwithstanding. Indeed, the missed chances to prevent the Vietnam debacle feature prominently in much of the scholarship on the war.¹ The 1964 presidential campaign between Senator Barry Goldwater (R-AZ) and President Lyndon B. Johnson represents one of those lost opportunities. This article explores the importance of the Vietnam conflict and domestic political considerations in the presidential campaign between Goldwater and Johnson and argues that the failure of the two candidates to engage in a robust, serious, and open debate on the conflict should be considered a significant contributing factor to the devastating events in the decade that followed.

¹ See, for example, Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam* (Berkeley, Calif., 1999).

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John F. Kennedy's assassination changed the dynamics of the 1964 presidential election. Kennedy had hoped that he would run against Goldwater, who faced a double-digit deficit against the president in opinion polls in October 1963, in his bid for a second term. While Kennedy liked Goldwater personally—the two famously planned to hold joint appearances and travel on the same plane during the campaign—the president and his advisers thought Goldwater to be unelectable and too politically extreme for most Americans. Kennedy's assessment was accurate on both counts. An outspoken conservative from Arizona, Goldwater came to the Senate in 1952 as an ardent opponent of Harry Truman's foreign policy, which he labeled as little more than appeasement.² In the 1950s, Goldwater criticized the Eisenhower administration for its quixotic pursuit of peaceful coexistence with the Soviet Union and considered containment to be an insufficiently aggressive strategy that would not succeed in the long term. His negative appraisal of U.S. foreign policy continued in the early 1960s, as he regularly assailed the Kennedy administration as weak and indecisive in dealing with Cuba, Laos, Vietnam, the Soviet Union, China, and other communist threats. Goldwater's militant anti-communism garnered significant support within the GOP, particularly with the emerging and increasingly influential conservative wing of the party, but would ultimately cripple his presidential ambitions.³

In the wake of Kennedy's death, Goldwater would face a much different opponent in Lyndon Johnson. As a Texan, Johnson could blunt Goldwater's appeal in the increasingly important political battleground states in the Sun Belt. Moreover, the memory of the martyred JFK would serve as an electoral aegis for the new president. Like Kennedy, LBJ approached the 1964 campaign with the intent of claiming the moderate center of the political spectrum, confident that he could defeat any of the potential Republican

² On Goldwater, see, for example, Lee Edwards, *Goldwater: The Man Who Made a Revolution* (Washington, D.C., 1995); Barry M. Goldwater, *The Conscience of a Conservative* (Shepherdsville, Ky., 1960); Barry M. Goldwater with Jack Casserly, *Goldwater* (New York, 1988); and Robert Alan Goldberg, *Barry Goldwater* (New Haven, Conn., 1995).

³ On the evolution of GOP foreign policy and rise of conservatism, see, for example, Colin Dueck, *Hard Line: The Republican Party and U.S. Foreign Policy since World War II* (Princeton, N.J., 2010), especially chapter 4 on Goldwater; Sandra Scanlon, *The Pro-War Movement: Domestic Support for the Vietnam War and the Making of Modern American Conservatism* (Amherst, Mass., 2013); Mary C. Brennan, *Turning Right in the Sixties: The Conservative Capture of the GOP* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1995).

candidates—whether the conservative Goldwater or the more establishment candidates like Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge Jr. or Governor Nelson Rockefeller (R-NY). Johnson focused primarily on his domestic agenda—notably the Great Society (formally announced in a speech on May 22 at the University of Michigan) and his signature Civil Rights Act (which would be enacted on July 2) in 1964. For LBJ, foreign affairs as an electoral issue would be useful “insomuch as they emphasized the president’s leadership qualities” but were “not envisaged as forming an integral part of the campaign.”⁴

Vietnam loomed as the one international issue that could explode in Johnson’s face and on which the GOP could potentially capitalize. But that scenario did not seem overly concerning to Johnson. On January 8, 1964, LBJ spoke to *New York Times* columnist James Reston following the State of the Union address. The president boasted that he had successfully occupied the political center, leaving Republicans with no issues to exploit in the fall. LBJ joked about what the young Republican said to the old Republican senator: “‘Senator, he didn’t leave much for us Republicans, did he?’ And the old Senator said, ‘Oh yes, he did . . . We can always declare war.’”⁵ Of course, contained in the anecdote were kernels of truth. While remaining rhetorically committed to the independence of South Vietnam, Johnson only took actions in 1964 that either evaded public notice or did not measurably increase the country’s involvement. Knowing that he would do nothing to escalate the conflict before November without clear provocation, LBJ believed he had painted his partisan opponents into a corner.

Nevertheless, the politically astute Johnson recognized that Vietnam could evolve into a potentially damaging problem, both in terms of U.S. foreign policy and his electoral prospects. His awareness of Vietnam as a prospective concern was exemplified in a conversation he had with John S. Knight, the chairman of the board of the *Miami Herald*, on February 3, 1964. The president told Knight

⁴ Thomas Tunstall Allcock, “The Virtues of Moderation: Foreign Policy and the 1964 Presidential Election,” in Andrew Johnstone and Andrew Priest, eds., *U.S. Presidential Elections and Foreign Policy: Candidates, Campaigns, and Global Politics from FDR to Bill Clinton* (Lexington, Ky., 2017), 157. For a recent assessment of the political ideas at stake in the 1964 election, see Nancy Beck Young, *Two Suns of the Southwest: Lyndon Johnson, Barry Goldwater, and the 1964 Battle between Liberalism and Conservatism* (Lawrence, Kans., 2019).

⁵ Quoted in Michael R. Beschloss, ed., *Taking Charge: The Johnson White House Tapes, 1963–1964* (New York, 1998), 153–54.

that the country had three choices. One was to “run and let the dominoes start falling over. And God Almighty,” Johnson observed, “what they said about us leaving China would just be warming up, compared to what they’d say now. I see Nixon is raising hell about it today. Goldwater too.” The other two options were neutralization of South Vietnam, which Johnson dismissed as “totally impractical,” or “getting in” to the fighting with American troops.⁶ Clearly, the president had given the final option a great deal of consideration, and the documentary record bears this out—contingency planning for the introduction of U.S. forces in significant numbers had already begun.⁷

Electoral calculations led Johnson to postpone decisions on the war to avoid domestic political complications. Meanwhile, Goldwater attempted to use Vietnam as the foundation for his criticisms of the administration throughout the spring of 1964. In a speech at the Los Angeles Sports Arena in March, he expressed his astonishment at the administration’s goal to bring the situation in Vietnam “under control.” “Why in heaven’s name,” Goldwater asked, “*isn’t* it under control? It isn’t under control because it remains just what it has been for three years—an aimless, leaderless war.”⁸ In early April, Goldwater charged that Johnson’s policies were devoid of “goal, course, or purpose,” leaving “only sudden death in the jungles and the slow strangulation of freedom.”⁹ Later that month, he described U.S. policies toward Vietnam as “inadequate” and predicted (accurately, as it would turn out) that if nothing changed, “we’ll be fighting in Vietnam for a decade, and, at best, we’ll end up with a draw or a slow defeat . . . there is no policy that sets a goal of victory for all of this!”¹⁰

Goldwater intensified his attacks on the administration as the campaign evolved, blaming Johnson’s inexperience in foreign affairs for the worsening conditions in Vietnam and assuring voters

⁶ Quoted in Beschloss, ed., *Taking Charge*, 213–14.

⁷ There is a substantial literature on the planning that occurred within the administration throughout 1964, including Larry Berman, *Planning a Tragedy: The Americanization of the War in Vietnam* (New York, 1983); Robert Mann, *A Grand Delusion: America’s Descent into Vietnam* (New York, 2001); and Logevall, *Choosing War*.

⁸ Speech, March 19, 1964, W:3/3, Barry M. Goldwater Papers, Arizona State University Library (hereinafter ASU), Tempe, Arizona (emphasis in original).

⁹ Speech, April 10, 1964, 1964 Presidential Campaign (W), box 3/4, Goldwater Papers, ASU.

¹⁰ Speech, April 29, 1964, W:1/10, Goldwater Papers, ASU.

that “we *can* and we should *end the fighting in Viet Nam* by taking . . . strong, affirmative action.”¹¹ Goldwater slammed the administration for mortgaging the future “in order to make political advantages for themselves today” and for its “near-sighted, political wheeling and dealing” over Vietnam policy. He implored his audience to “demand an accounting of our policy in Vietnam . . . demand the positive actions which can end the fighting there,” and called on the president to meet with the Republican leadership immediately to listen to their advice on the situation in Southeast Asia.¹²

To be sure, Johnson worried about Goldwater’s attacks and the specter of escalating the U.S. engagement in Southeast Asia before the election in November. But both candidates overestimated Vietnam’s importance to the U.S. electorate. Despite the on-going deliberations inside the Beltway over the war and possible contingencies, Vietnam did not resonate in the American consciousness in 1964 to the degree that it would later in the decade. In a Gallup Poll taken in May 1964, for example, when asked, “Have you given any attention to developments in South Vietnam?” more than 60 percent of respondents stated that they had given “little or none” to the conflict.¹³ Admittedly, the initial stirring of dissent had begun to appear in comments from prominent national figures like Walter Lippmann and Hans Morgenthau, with the nascent antiwar movement on college campuses, and among a handful of politicians in both parties. In addition, a vocal minority of hawks urged the administration to demonstrate its backbone in fighting the spread of communism in Southeast Asia.¹⁴ But this elite opinion ran far ahead of the public, largely because the administration did everything it could to prevent the conflict from becoming more

¹¹ Speech, May 14, 1964, 1964 Campaign Speeches, vol. 1, Goldwater Papers, ASU. (emphasis in original).

¹² Speech, May 16, 1964, W:1/8, Goldwater Papers, ASU; and *New York Herald-Tribune*, May 18, 1964.

¹³ George H. Gallup, ed., *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1935–1971* (New York, 1972), 1882.

¹⁴ On Lippmann’s critique of the Vietnam conflict, see Fredrik Logevall, “First Among Critics: Walter Lippmann and the Vietnam War,” *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 4 (Winter 1995): 351–76. On Morgenthau’s opposition and influence, see Jennifer W. See, “A Prophet Without Honor: Hans Morgenthau and the War in Vietnam, 1955–1965,” *Pacific Historical Review* 70 (Aug. 2001): 419–47. On congressional opposition, see, for example, Gary Stone, *Elites for Peace: The Senate and the Vietnam War, 1964–1968* (Knoxville, Tenn., 2007). On GOP hawks and the war, see, for example, Andrew L. Johns, *Vietnam’s Second Front: Domestic Politics, the Republican Party, and the War* (Lexington, Ky., 2010).

of an issue. More important, domestic politics remained LBJ's primary concern, not only with regard to the election but also his commitment to the Great Society. Thus Vietnam did matter to Lyndon Johnson, even if it did not to many Americans, but in a negative sense: he wanted to keep everything about Southeast Asia as quiet as possible until after November.

Vietnam also mattered to Barry Goldwater, who sought an issue that he could use to make headway against Johnson. This approach proved to be a double-edged sword for Goldwater. His uncompromising anti-communist rhetoric won him the support of conservatives, but it also served to undermine his appeal to the general electorate. The administration used Goldwater's own statements against him, portraying him as a loose cannon who was not only out-of-touch with the majority of Americans, but who posed a clear threat to global and national security. A perfect example of this occurred when Goldwater appeared on ABC's *Issues and Answers* on May 24, just nine days prior to the California primary that would make or break his presidential aspirations. The senator was asked how he would interdict communist supply lines across the Laotian border. Sounding very much like the Air Force major general he was, Goldwater asserted, "There have been several suggestions made. I don't think we would use any of them. But defoliation of the forests by low yield atomic weapons could well be done. When you remove the foliage, you remove the cover." Both the Associated Press (AP) and United Press International (UPI) suggested that Goldwater had called for the use of nuclear weapons in South Vietnam, an interpretation which at best misrepresented the facts. Although the UPI subsequently retracted its story, Goldwater later commented, "the retraction never caught up" with the headlines and was "a near-fatal blow." Johnson realized that even if Vietnam became an issue in the fall, he could now portray Goldwater as a fanatic who would use nuclear weapons if elected. Indeed, this strategy prompted one of the most effective political ads in history—the infamous "daisy" commercial that profoundly influenced voters and their perception of Goldwater.¹⁵

¹⁵ Edwards, *Goldwater*, 223–24. The "Peace, Little Girl" commercial—better known as the "daisy" ad—showed a little girl picking petals off of a flower, as her counting morphs into a missile launch countdown. The commercial ends with the detonation of a nuclear weapon. The ad only aired once, but the repeated media coverage of the controversy kept it in the public spotlight.

The self-inflicted wounds caused by his unvarnished and combative rhetorical style notwithstanding, on the eve of the GOP convention Goldwater remained steadfast in his support for escalation. In an interview with Germany's *Der Spiegel* on July 10, the senator was asked what he would do about Southeast Asia as president. He responded, "I would make it abundantly clear . . . that we aren't going to pull out of Southeast Asia, but that we are going to win in fact." Once that decision was made, Goldwater continued, he would turn the conduct of the war over to the Joint Chiefs of Staff and say, "Fellows, we made the decision to win, now it's your problem."¹⁶ While potentially problematic—he never defined what "winning" would entail, and essentially proposed giving the military a blank check in Vietnam—this statement presented a straightforward solution to the problem in South Vietnam, differentiating it from many of Goldwater's more belligerent campaign pronouncements. Had the senator been somewhat more circumspect in his public speeches on the campaign trail, perhaps his fate in November would have been less assured.

The Vietnam issue caused controversy at the GOP convention in San Francisco, which was already deeply divided between the moderate wing of the party and Goldwater's acolytes. The tensions became most apparent when the debate over the platform plank on Vietnam turned into a full-scale brawl between the two camps. Some delegates agreed with Senator Margaret Chase Smith (R-ME), who took a "pull out or fight" position. She "continued to fear Americans did not have the facts on what was happening" and considered the situation in Vietnam to be a "quagmire" that the United States was losing.¹⁷ After an extended internecine debate the Goldwater forces prevailed, although much to the detriment of Republican unity. In the final platform document, conservatives censured the administration for encouraging "an increase of aggression in South Vietnam by appearing to set limits on America's willingness to act." The plank pledged to "move decisively to assure victory in South Vietnam while confining the conflict as closely as possible."¹⁸

¹⁶ Interview transcript, *Der Spiegel*, July 10, 1964, Office Files of Bill Moyers, Box 30, Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library (hereinafter LBJL), Austin, Texas.

¹⁷ Patricia Ward Wallace, *Politics of Conscience: A Biography of Margaret Chase Smith* (Westport, Conn., 1995), 178.

¹⁸ Quoted in Goldberg, *Barry Goldwater*, 203.

In his acceptance speech on July 16, Goldwater exhibited his typical inflexible and unyielding conservatism, although he addressed Vietnam only briefly. He excoriated the administration for its timidity for “refusing to draw our lines against aggression . . . and *tragically* letting our finest men die on battlefields unmarked by purpose, pride or prospect of victory.” Denying that the fighting in Vietnam was a “police action,” the GOP nominee said, “Make no bones of this. Don’t try to sweep this under the rug. We are at war in Vietnam. And yet the president . . . refuses to say, refuses to say, mind you, whether or not the objective over there is victory. And his secretary of defense continues to mislead and misinform the American people.”¹⁹ Yet Goldwater’s Vietnam comments did not make much of an impression on the delegates assembled at the Cow Palace that evening or on the American people; everything he said paled in comparison to the negative reaction to his blistering assertion that “extremism in defense of liberty is no vice.” As historian Fredrik Logevall has pointed out, “Lost in the hubbub surrounding the convention and his nomination, Goldwater’s pointed words about Johnson’s Vietnam policy received little attention. But, of course, he had it exactly right.” The United States was involved in a war and the administration was withholding information from the public about the war and the contingency plans to expand the conflict to North Vietnam.²⁰

Shortly after the convention, Goldwater met with Johnson at the White House. After a brief sixteen-minute conversation, the two candidates released a joint statement that noted that they had agreed not to inflame racial tensions over civil rights during the fall campaign. There was no mention of Vietnam in the statement, although there is evidence that the two men did discuss the conflict. While Johnson’s memoirs do not discuss the meeting, Goldwater does in each of his autobiographies. According to Goldwater, Johnson accepted his proposals not to challenge one another on civil rights or Vietnam policy; Goldwater contends that the agreement was honored by both men during the rest of the campaign. Yet even a cursory glance at the documentary and public record reveals this claim is, at best, an exaggeration and, at

¹⁹ J. William Middendorf II, *A Glorious Disaster: Barry Goldwater’s Presidential Campaign and the Origins of the Conservative Movement* (New York, 2006), 131 (emphasis in original); Edwards, *Goldwater*, 272; and Goldberg, *Barry Goldwater*, 205.

²⁰ Logevall, *Choosing War*, 195.

worst, completely inaccurate.²¹ If such an agreement on Vietnam did exist, it did not appear to have much, if any, restraining effect on Goldwater's attacks on Johnson's policies during the fall of 1964.

In addition, by voluntarily relinquishing leverage on Johnson's two most obvious political liabilities—even if only in the abstract—Goldwater demonstrated questionable campaign strategy. A Gallup Poll taken after the GOP convention showed that only 52 percent of the country approved of the president's handling of U.S. Vietnam policy.²² Given those numbers, Goldwater could be forgiven for believing that he could attack Johnson successfully on the issue of Vietnam in the fall campaign despite their purported agreement on July 24. Unfortunately for Goldwater, however, the Tonkin Gulf incidents in early August would decimate his advantage over the president with regard to U.S. policy in Vietnam. The alleged attacks enabled LBJ to go to Congress and ask for a joint resolution authorizing him to "take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack" against U.S. forces and "to prevent further aggression." Because of the obvious pretext for the request, Johnson could continue to portray himself as a moderate on the conflict and further marginalize Goldwater. Predictably, the attacks resulted in an outpouring of patriotism and expediency in an election year; members of Congress could now demonstrate their support for U.S. forces without the threat of an electoral backlash. Moreover, the possibility of a Goldwater administration "helps explain the Democratic congressional leadership's relative passivity" when Johnson asked for the resolution.²³

The rapid and overwhelming passage of the measure provided Johnson with bipartisan support and domestic political protection,

²¹ Goldwater, *Goldwater*, 192–93; Barry M. Goldwater, *With No Apologies: The Personal and Political Memoirs of Barry M. Goldwater* (New York, 1979), 192–95; and Gregory L. Schneider, *Cadres for Conservatism: Young Americans for Freedom and the Rise of the Contemporary Right* (New York, 1999), 84. Thomas Powers suggests that Johnson engineered an agreement on race at the meeting but does not mention the war as part of the discussions. See Thomas Powers, *The War at Home: Vietnam and the American People, 1964–1968* (New York, 1973), 19–20.

²² Allcock, "The Virtues of Moderation," 166–67.

²³ Melvin Small, *At the Water's Edge: American Politics and the Vietnam War* (Chicago, 2005), 28. On the background to the congressional resolution, see Andrew L. Johns, "Opening Pandora's Box: The Genesis and Evolution of the 1964 Congressional Resolution on Vietnam," *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 6 (Summer–Fall 1997): 175–206. Edwin Moise has convincingly argued that while the first attack on American naval vessels in the Tonkin Gulf did occur, the second most likely did not; Moise also refutes charges of a conspiracy on the part of the administration. See Edwin E. Moise, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1996).

albeit temporarily, and insulated him from attacks by Goldwater. Even Goldwater backed the administration's actions, telling the president in a telephone conversation shortly after the attacks, "I think you've taken the proper action and I'm sure you'll find that everyone will be behind you."²⁴ Stephen Ambrose correctly argues that the Tonkin Gulf incidents and resolution represented "the decisive moment in the 1964 election," in that Johnson "made himself invulnerable to the criticism that he was shilly-shallying on Vietnam and was too soft on Communism . . . Nixon [was] very lucky he was not the nominee, as Johnson had just stolen his issue."²⁵ Goldwater, obviously, was not as fortunate.

In the short term, Johnson enjoyed a windfall of public support. A Harris Poll found that 85 percent of the American people supported the air strikes, leading the *Los Angeles Times* to opine, "In a single stroke, Mr. Johnson has, at least temporarily, turned his greatest vulnerability in foreign policy into one of his strongest assets." Other poll numbers supported that conclusion. A Harris Poll taken in July showed that 58 percent of Americans criticized the administration for its handling of Vietnam policy. After the attacks, the president received a 72 percent vote of confidence in his approach to the war. More important for the election campaign, those who believed Johnson could handle Vietnam better than Goldwater rose from 59 percent to 71 percent.²⁶ The numbers for Johnson are even more impressive when one considers that Vietnam was the only issue on which Goldwater had stronger public approval ratings than Johnson. As Richard Rovere noted in the *New Yorker* in September 1964, through his handling of the Tonkin Gulf incidents, "Johnson had taken the play away from Goldwater" on Vietnam as a campaign issue.²⁷ In retrospect, no amount of criticism about Johnson's Vietnam policies after August 1964 could have salvaged Barry Goldwater's presidential campaign. Could the race have turned out differently? Probably not.²⁸ There is no real-

²⁴ Quoted in Allcock, "The Virtues of Moderation," 167.

²⁵ Stephen E. Ambrose, *Nixon: The Triumph of a Politician, 1962-1972* (New York, 1989), 55.

²⁶ Harris Poll, August 10, 1964, Box 214, WHCF, ND 19/CO 312, LBJL.

²⁷ Quoted in Robert David Johnson, *All the Way with LBJ: The 1964 Presidential Election* (New York, 2009), 157.

²⁸ Robert Goldberg suggests that the Arizona senator could have forced Johnson to debate Vietnam policy, which could have prevented the Americanization of the war in 1965. Goldberg, *Barry Goldwater*, 216, 228. See also Edwards, *Goldwater*, 273, 317. Thomas

istic counterfactual scenario that could make Goldwater president.

In spite of the support Johnson gained during the Tonkin crisis, Goldwater maintained that Americans should recognize the general failure of LBJ's Vietnam policy. Indeed, Goldwater increasingly referred to the conflict as "Lyndon Johnson's War," claiming that the conflict resulted from the president's "weak and confusing leadership," and questioning if there had ever been "a more mishandled conflict in American history." In a September 1964 speech in Pikesville, Maryland, Goldwater said that four years of drift in foreign policy had led the United States into "Lyndon Johnson's war in Vietnam . . . American sons and grandsons are being killed by communist bullets and communist bombs. And we have yet to hear a word of truth about why they're dying." The GOP candidate also made a prescient observation on September 29: "Why does he put off facing the question of what to do about Vietnam? Does he hope that he can wait until after the election to confront the American public with the fact of total defeat or total war in Asia?" In fact, that was precisely LBJ's strategy. Johnson sought to "preempt the high ground, the moderate thoroughfare, the middle of the road from his Republican opponents."²⁹ The implications of that decision, of course, would soon become apparent.

The voting on November 3, 1964, was anticlimactic for the presidential race, but it would prove to be a line of demarcation for the U.S. involvement in Vietnam. As Goldwater went down in ignominious defeat, the administration essentially adopted his policy prescriptions for the Vietnam conflict. With a second term secured and domestic political calculations no longer the primary consideration, the focus could now be shifted to taking the appropriate and necessary steps in Vietnam to shore up the Saigon regime and stave off military disaster. Indeed, on the morning of the election, a National Security Council Working Group met to discuss how best to implement the expansion of the war that Goldwater had so forcefully advocated during the campaign and for which the administration had been planning for the past several months. As the *Tulsa Tribune* would editorialize, "It's strange what a difference just a few

Powers and Jeffrey Matthews disagree on this point; Powers argues specifically that "war and the fear of war dominated the presidential campaign of 1964 from its beginning." See Powers, *The War at Home*, 1; and Jeffrey J. Matthews, "To Defeat a Maverick: The Goldwater Candidacy Revisited, 1963-1964" *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 27 (Fall 1997): 662-78.

²⁹ Edwards, *Goldwater*, 332; and Matthews, "To Defeat a Maverick," 671.

weeks make. What was ‘trigger-happy’ in October is no longer ‘dangerous’ or ‘irresponsible.’ For in their hearts high officials here have known for some time that the policy in Viet Nam could not be left to flounder indefinitely.”³⁰ Herblock recognized the irony; several months later he drew a cartoon depicting Johnson looking into a mirror and seeing Goldwater’s face staring back at him.³¹

The real tragedy of the 1964 presidential election was the lack of a meaningful public debate over the trajectory of U.S. Vietnam policy. For Johnson, avoiding specifics on Vietnam was a matter of political expediency; it is patently clear that domestic political considerations drove the president’s decision-making and strategy throughout 1964. Yet even though events like the Tonkin Gulf crisis intervened and altered his campaign tactics, Goldwater bears responsibility as well. The fact that Johnson was allowed to defer major decisions on Vietnam until after the presidential election represents “a major failure of the Goldwater campaign.” By not directly challenging the administration to be more open about its intentions, there would be no national discussion about U.S. involvement in Vietnam “at a time when Johnson was particularly susceptible to the influence of public opinion.”³² As a result, “Johnson faced no serious test, no need to justify his course, and his aides continued to develop their scenarios without hesitation.” Robert Goldberg rightly concludes that “Americans were not so much deceived about Vietnam during the 1964 election as they were lulled into sleepwalking toward their future.”³³

³⁰ *Tulsa Tribune*, November 27, 1964. Two days earlier, the *Chicago Tribune* noted, “when the administration spokesman, General Taylor, refers casually to the possibility of bombing the infiltration routes from Communist North Vietnam into adjoining Laos . . . no one cries that the administration is ‘trigger-happy’ and will wind up getting us in a nuclear war.” See *Chicago Tribune*, November 25, 1964.

³¹ Logevall, *Choosing War*, 257–58.

³² Allcock, “The Virtues of Moderation,” 169.

³³ Robert Alan Goldberg, “Afterword: Barry Goldwater in History and Memory,” in Elizabeth Tandy Shermer, ed., *Barry Goldwater and the Remaking of the American Political Landscape* (Tucson, Ariz., 2013), 267.