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# “The Media Were Not Completely Fair to You”:<sup>1</sup> Foreign Policy, the Press and the 1964 Goldwater Campaign

By Laurence R. Jurdem

In early November 1963, *Life* magazine featured Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona on its cover. The man the article called “the country’s most famous conservative” was pictured in a denim shirt, dungarees, and his signature cowboy hat as he lovingly caressed the head of his palomino horse, Sunny. While the story focused on Goldwater’s presidential prospects for 1964, the same issue included a lengthy editorial voicing concerns about several of his views on America’s role in the world.

Characterizing Goldwater as “the front-runner for the Republican nomination,” *Life* noted that many Americans were disturbed by the senator’s extreme foreign policy positions. These included withdrawing from the United Nations, the belief that the distribution of humanitarian aid to poor countries around the world was a waste of American resources, and the conviction that the United States needed to heighten its commitment to defeating the Soviet Union in the Cold War. While the editors believed Goldwater to be “neither an isolationist nor a warmonger,” they also argued to be taken seriously as a candidate, Goldwater could not simply apply a series of “one sentence solutions” to a world as complex as the one that existed in late 1963. *Life*’s description of

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<sup>1</sup> The above quote comes from comments made to Barry Goldwater by journalist Howard K. Smith. Barry M. Goldwater with Jack Casserly, *Goldwater* (New York, 1988), 168.

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Goldwater's immoderate thinking on foreign affairs shows in microcosm much of the media criticism that would plague the Arizonan's 1964 presidential campaign.<sup>2</sup>

The tone of this and other commentary in *Life*, a year before the 1964 election, was measured in comparison to much of the media coverage that followed Goldwater during his campaign for the presidency. During the primaries, Goldwater's ideas were called fascist. A German banker was even quoted in a *Time* article saying: "If we give you [Goldwaterites] four or five years you'll start putting on brown shirts." The barb was just one of many reflecting the belief that Goldwater was an extremist, intent on pushing the United States into a nuclear confrontation with the USSR. But was that media portrayal accurate, and did the members of the mainstream fourth estate *all* view Goldwater's foreign policy opinions the same way?<sup>3</sup>

The 1964 campaign was heavily discussed in publications from Left to Right, which made factually strong cases for and against the candidate. This essay provides an overview of what the press thought of Goldwater's views on foreign affairs. It also considers the accuracy of editorial opinion regarding his positions on national security. While Goldwater's occasional spontaneous comments did not help his candidacy, the question remains as to whether the media portrayed him as more of an outlier than he actually was.

Goldwater's passionate belief in an assertive foreign policy and a strong national defense had long been a part of his personal history. Both positions had emerged as he and other members of his generation watched Nazi Germany's growing military power and its encroachment on European neighbors in the 1930s. It seems that the appeasement displayed by Britain's Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain toward Adolf Hitler in Munich in 1938 significantly affected the future senator's worldview. In his memoirs, Goldwater argued that the Western European nation's failure to sustain their military capabilities in the decades after the First World War was the main factor directly responsible for Hitler's success in threatening

<sup>2</sup> "Goldwater's Foreign Policy: Let's Hear More," *Life*, November 1, 1963, p. 4. Goldwater responded to the magazine's editorial for greater detail with an essay shortly after he began his campaign. Barry Goldwater, "My Proposals for a 'Can-Win' Foreign Policy," *Life*, January 11, 1964, p. 30B.

<sup>3</sup> William F. Buckley Jr., *Flying High: Remembering Barry Goldwater* (New York, 2008), 150-51.

Europe. The senator's belief during his political career in "maintaining weapons superior to any potential enemy," Goldwater wrote, "was the natural outcome of my frustrations . . . in the period just prior to World War II." The lesson that America should never allow itself to be militarily weak or unprepared was one Goldwater would never forget. It also did much to shape his views on the actual use of American power, including his perspective on confrontation with the Soviet Union.<sup>4</sup>

The desire for an assertive policy against global communism was clear in Goldwater's first Senate campaign in 1952. Running against Democrat Ernest McFarland, the Senate majority leader, he was critical of the Truman administration's conduct of the stalemated Korean War. Goldwater harshly criticized Truman's refusal to allow allied forces under the command of General Douglas MacArthur to confront Red Chinese troops, a strategy Truman believed might provoke war with China and the Soviet Union. Goldwater argued that MacArthur's approach would eventually have won the war and unified the dangerously divided Asian nation. When Truman chose not to follow a strategy that many on the Right believed would have led to victory, Goldwater, as he wrote years later, concluded that the nation's foreign policy "had embraced appeasement and deserted principle."<sup>5</sup> A continuous challenge—to fellow Republicans and the entire public and government—to roll back communism would be a staple of Goldwater's campaign for the presidency and would do much to define him for the rest of his career.

In the eyes of the national and international press, Barry Goldwater was both a compelling and highly polarizing figure in 1964. Popular within the Republican Party, he had crossed the country over the previous several years freely airing his controversial opinions on foreign and domestic policy. In his role as head of the Republican Senatorial Campaign Committee, for a total of six years, Goldwater had energized GOP audiences with his relentless criticism of the Democrats for what he saw as their ineffective New Deal policies and their failures in containing the expansionist behavior of the Soviet Union.<sup>6</sup> Speeches stressing these points helped build

<sup>4</sup> Barry M. Goldwater, *With No Apologies: The Personal and Political Memoirs of United States Senator Barry Goldwater* (New York, 1979), 31–32.

<sup>5</sup> Goldwater, *With No Apologies*, 49.

<sup>6</sup> Sen. Goldwater, "A Case for Victory," August 16, 1961, *Congressional Record*, vol. 107, S. 15952–15955.

Goldwater's following among conservative Republicans—and thus contributed to the success of the Draft Goldwater movement, ultimately leading him to run an insurgency campaign for president.<sup>7</sup>

But it was Goldwater's comments on Soviet relations that initially stirred the most controversy following the announcement of his candidacy in January 1964. Goldwater made headlines during his first national television appearance of the campaign, on NBC's program *Meet the Press*. During the interview, Goldwater declared unless Moscow was willing to end its involvement in the internal affairs of Eastern Europe, he was prepared to sever relations between the two countries. Asked by moderator Lawrence Spivak if he thought it was possible to engage the Soviets in arms negotiations, Goldwater said he did not see the point. In addition to these aggressive positions, some people noticed the recently announced presidential candidate seemed at times strangely confused and unprepared when discussing foreign and domestic issues.<sup>8</sup>

While the viewers took measure of the new candidate, the media were doing it too. It did not take long for columnists and editors to draw their own conclusions. The *New Republic*, in an editorial following Goldwater's announcement of his candidacy, accused him of being out of his depth and ill informed, stating that "his mind is a sea of phrases none of which reaches the shore of understanding." Those comments were accompanied by dismissals from major syndicated columnists like Ralph McGill and Walter Lippmann. Lippmann, whose "Today & Tomorrow" column was extremely popular and reflected the very core of the liberal foreign policy establishment, called many of Goldwater's positions "absurdities." Lippmann argued if the senator were forced to moderate his opinions in order to attract less conservative Republicans "he will mar his one greatest political asset—the image of a no-nonsense, put-up or shut-up, rough-riding he-man." In his memoirs, Goldwater later noted that he found it peculiar that whenever Lippmann, whom he called "the high priest of the liberals' Mount Olympus," wrote on any topic at length "his conclusions were immediately echoed by dozens of other liberal pundits."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> John W. Dean and Barry M. Goldwater Jr., *Pure Goldwater* (New York, 2008), 117; Barry Goldwater, *With No Apologies*, 161–62.

<sup>8</sup> "Goldwater Would Threaten Break with Soviet," *New York Times*, January 6, 1964, p. 17; Lee Edwards, *Goldwater: The Man Who Made a Revolution* (Washington, D.C., 1995), 208.

<sup>9</sup> "What's That Barry?" *New Republic*, January 18, 1964, p. 9; Walter Lippmann, "The

But Goldwater had his supporters within certain publications of opinion, including William F. Buckley Jr., managing editor of *National Review* (*NR*). The magazine was a strong advocate of Goldwater, with publisher William Rusher and editor L. Brent Bozell Jr. very much invested in the senator's candidacy.<sup>10</sup> While many observers were likely to agree with liberal pundits that Goldwater's candidacy had not begun well, an alternative reaction among conservatives was suggested in comments by Buckley soon after Goldwater's TV appearance. The conservative commentator found it difficult to grasp what all the fuss was about in response to Goldwater's suggestion of breaking relations with the Soviet Union. Severing diplomatic relations would, Buckley thought, send Moscow a powerful message: that America was not going to let itself be bullied, or stand idle, as the Russians continued to pursue their expansionist agenda. One of the driving principles of *NR*, as with Goldwater, was a continuing frustration with what seemed an ineffective policy in dealing with the USSR. Buckley and his colleagues thought it was time to stop enabling Soviet power and start diminishing it. During the campaign the argument that the United States had a lackluster and contradictory foreign policy was a consistent theme discussed in *National Review*, *Human Events*, and the writings of other conservative commentators.<sup>11</sup>

Unquestionably, the senator's introduction to many American television viewers in January 1964 was no great success. Part of the problem was that Goldwater was in tremendous discomfort from a recent foot injury and his pain may have caused him to present his positions in a less-than-coherent manner. But while the timing of the NBC broadcast and the foot injury was unfortunate, Goldwater's preparation could have been better. During the appearance, Goldwater made a number of factual mistakes. He said the Senate had the power to sever relations with the Soviet Union, when in fact that power was vested within the executive branch. In recalling notable figures who were against the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty,

Goldwater Challenge," *Syracuse Post-Standard*, January 7, 1964, p. 11; Ronald Steel, *Walter Lippmann and the American Century* (Boston, 1980), 554; Ralph McGill, "Goldwater High on Lonely Peak as Only True Prophet of the GOP," *Los Angeles Times*, January 14, 1964, p. A6.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Alan Goldberg, *Barry Goldwater* (New Haven, Conn., 1997), 138; Goldwater, *With No Apologies*, 170.

<sup>11</sup> William F. Buckley Jr., "Goldwater and the Soviet Union," January 9, 1964, available online at Hillsdale College website, Buckley Online, [https://cumulus.hillsdale.edu/Buckley/index2.html#1578948121915\\_12](https://cumulus.hillsdale.edu/Buckley/index2.html#1578948121915_12) (accessed June 7, 2014).

Goldwater cited the political scientist Hans Morgenthau. The senator's information was wrong. Morgenthau very much favored the treaty.<sup>12</sup>

The lack of preparation for questions that might arise in his introduction to many American voters is puzzling. In later years Goldwater admitted that the primary campaign was highly disorganized, that he was often unprepared and overscheduled. But one wonders if Goldwater's well-documented ambivalence about running for president contributed to a lack of focus. He had seemed uninterested in a campaign for the Oval Office until early 1963, then leaned strongly against the idea after JFK's assassination in late November.<sup>13</sup>

Goldwater's *Meet the Press* interview was only the first of many gaffes and misstatements during the Arizonan's campaign. Shortly after arriving in New Hampshire in preparation for the nation's first primary, Goldwater responded to a question from the media about the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the issue of nuclear weapons. The senator knew that NATO's commander had the authority to use tactical nuclear weapons in the event (combined with a communications breakdown between NATO's executive leadership and the Oval Office) of a Russian attack on Western Europe. Furthermore, Goldwater's position had already been publicized a week earlier, in a lengthy response to *Life's* editorial questioning his views on foreign policy. Six months after his NATO comments, *U.S. News & World Report* also published an article confirming that his comments reflected "established policy under Eisenhower and Kennedy."<sup>14</sup> But to the media, Goldwater's response made it sound as if he wanted to equip each NATO soldier with an atomic weapon. Goldwater noted that one reporter covering his remarks pluralized the word "commander," thus giving the impression that "I was willing to let a field captain use tactical nuclear weapons if he thought it advisable." That misinterpretation, plus what has been called a "disinformation machine" created by his rival for the nomination, Governor Nelson Rockefeller of New York, caused many Republican voters in New Hampshire

<sup>12</sup> Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus* (New York, 2001), 266.

<sup>13</sup> Goldwater, *With No Apologies*, 166; Raymond Moley, "Goldwater's Decision," *Newsweek*, January 13, 1964, p. 78; Goldwater, *With No Apologies*, 161.

<sup>14</sup> Edwards, *Goldwater*, 207–8.

to see him as “trigger-happy” and a warmonger.<sup>15</sup>

Rockefeller was happy to use his immense fortune to undermine Goldwater’s credibility, casting doubt especially on his opponent’s national security judgment. Campaigning in New Hampshire in early February, Rockefeller continued to call Goldwater “dangerous and reckless”—criticizing his proposed sending of U.S. Marines to turn the water back on at the American base at Guantanamo Bay, which had been shut off by dictator Fidel Castro. The incident had been precipitated by the U.S. Coast Guard seizure of two Cuban vessels in American waters. Goldwater argued that the situation was another example of President Johnson’s impotent foreign policy under which national credibility and prestige continued to erode.<sup>16</sup>

*Newsweek*’s Kenneth Crawford appeared to side with Rockefeller when he discussed Goldwater’s aggressive stance on Cuba in March 1964. Crawford mocked Goldwater’s ideas of launching another invasion of Cuba by calling it “original,” a slight that clearly referenced the failed “Bay of Pigs” initiative two years before. The former Washington bureau chief may not have realized how deeply the failure to remove Castro disturbed Goldwater, who believed the operation, as executed by the Kennedy administration, was “a cheap, undignified subterfuge” that should have been undertaken more seriously. Goldwater believed that a successful liberation of Cuba might have sent a strong message to the world about America’s ability to confront global communism. However, the public’s fear of nuclear confrontation with the Soviet Union so soon after the missile crisis of 1962 probably made it a counterproductive position for a presidential candidate.<sup>17</sup>

But Goldwater had not embarked on a presidential campaign to do what was politically expedient. The point was amplified early

<sup>15</sup> Barry Goldwater, “My Proposals for a ‘Can-Win’ Foreign Policy,” *Life*, January 11, 1964, p. 30B. Goldwater attempted to amend his comments on the NATO issue. During a speech in Concord, New Hampshire, the *Washington Post* reported: “Some persons think he wants to let every second lieutenant in Europe make such a decision. That is not so.” Allan Priaulx, “Goldwater in New Hampshire Says He’d Support Cuban Exile Invasion,” *Washington Post and Times-Herald*, January 8, 1964, p. A2; David Lawrence, “Americans Mised on Goldwater,” *Nashua* (N.H.) *Telegraph*, July 27, 1964, p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> John L. Considine, “Rockefeller Hits at Johnson, Goldwater,” *Washington Post and Times-Herald*, January 5, 1964, p. A6; Frank L. Spencer, “Goldwater Again Asks for Use of Force in Cuba,” *Washington Post and Times-Herald*, February 9, 1964, p. A5; “Goldwater Cuba Threat Attacked by Rockefeller,” *Washington Post and Times-Herald*, February 15, 1964, p. C32; Goldwater, *With No Apologies*, 166.

<sup>17</sup> Kenneth Crawford, “Peace: It’s Relative,” *Newsweek*, March 2, 1964, p. 27; Barry Goldwater, *With No Apologies*, 138.



in the campaign when conservative commentator Holmes Alexander wrote in *Human Events* that the senator's attractiveness to so many was "not his image, but his principles." It was a point that reflected Goldwater's belief that the campaign would be based on ideas not personalities. That declaration was sincere and one that Goldwater followed throughout his run for president. He felt it was critical to be honest with the American people about the world's dangers, even if that meant alienating some from his candidacy. In a meeting with former president Eisenhower during the campaign, the general told Goldwater: "Barry, you speak too quick and too loud." Goldwater later admitted that he agreed with Eisenhower's opinion.<sup>18</sup>

Aware that he was too often characterized in the media as narrow-minded and unpredictable in his actions, journalists who supported Goldwater decided to give the public a better presentation of the candidate than the candidate was doing himself. Perhaps for that reason, *National Review* published a summation of Goldwater's positions, mostly on foreign policy, in order to give the views greater clarification. Many of the misperceptions of Goldwater as an impulsive, over-reactive figure can be squarely blamed on the candidate. During Goldwater's tenure as head of the Republican Senatorial Campaign Committee, the crowds had been friendly and the media favorable. In particular, the reporters from newspapers like the conservative *Arizona Republic* and other local media outlets in various states who had covered him expected and enjoyed the Arizonan's witty, off-the-cuff comments. They were one of the things that made Goldwater so popular with his constituents. But now he was involved in a national campaign, one in which a broader group of media followed him daily; many of these journalists were certainly not prepared to give him the benefit of the doubt or ignore his factual misstatements.<sup>19</sup>

That image of impulsiveness plagued Goldwater further when he unfortunately rejected President Johnson's offer of regular foreign intelligence briefings from the White House. Goldwater suspected LBJ's gesture, made in the latter part of April 1964, was not genuine but simply a political tactic designed to enhance the president's image. In an article published in the *Washington Post*,

<sup>18</sup> Holmes Alexander, "Barry's Concern: Not His Image but His Principles," *Human Events*, March 14, 1964, p. 1; Goldberg, *Barry Goldwater*, 181.

<sup>19</sup> Goldberg, *Barry Goldwater*, 185; William F. Buckley Jr., "Answer for Conservatives," *National Review*, February 25, 1964, pp. 145-46; Edwards, *Goldwater*, 209.

correspondent Edward T. Folliard reported Johnson thought the briefings would give Republican candidates the opportunity to have a better-informed debate among themselves about America's role in the world. Goldwater argued that since the White House was not telling the whole truth about certain subjects—like the growing war in Vietnam—such information was dubious at best.

Criticism about Goldwater's refusal to accept Johnson's offer of intelligence briefings continued to appear as the senator campaigned for the nomination throughout the summer. In late August, James Reston of the *New York Times* wrote a column entitled "Those Darned Facts Keep Getting in Barry's Way." The newspaper's Washington correspondent contended that Goldwater should accept Johnson's offer, if only because it would help him to stop making "serious charges based on wildly inaccurate information, which open himself up to counterattack and make him look ridiculous." Reston, a longtime political columnist, also suggested that if Goldwater believed the administration was not being candid on a particular issue, he could use his numerous contacts in the Pentagon to find out the facts. The senator, who served as a brigadier general in the Air Force Reserves, presumably had a large network of contacts within the military establishment. His lengthy involvement in the Air Force, his consistent focus on defense and military issues in the Senate, and his close friendship with Lt. General William Quinn, a senior army intelligence officer, led Reston to conclude that Goldwater had the capacity to communicate in a highly detailed and substantive manner rather than simply "shooting from the hip" or not speaking intelligently.<sup>20</sup>

Reston's reasoning was probably accurate. If Goldwater had carefully maintained consistent messages on various issues, his campaign might have been less criticized in the media. But that would have been repetitive, and monotony was not Goldwater's style. He was bored easily, and the prospect of giving dozens of very similar speeches on the same topic irritated him. To break up the boredom inevitable in daily campaigning, he added some new phrases and concepts. When he made spontaneous remarks, they often

<sup>20</sup> Edward T. Folliard, "Goldwater Rebuffs Offer of Foreign Policy Briefings: President Says He Would Avert Partisan Battles," *Washington Post and Times-Herald*, April 24, 1964, p. A1; James Reston "Washington: Those Darned Facts Keep Getting in Barry's Way," *New York Times*, September 11, 1964, p. 32; "President May Expand Reports to Candidates," *Free Lance-Star* (Fredericksburg, Va.), April 27, 1964, p. 2.

had not been thought through clearly enough, nor had he alerted his campaign staff to what he was planning to say. Those unpracticed comments often backfired, making him sound impulsive and unprepared. Reporters, many of whom were just waiting for the unpolished, right-wing candidate to make another mistake, quickly seized on them.<sup>21</sup>

Goldwater clearly knew by late January 1964 that his spontaneous remarks had begun alienating moderate voters, even some who may have been dissatisfied with the Kennedy-Johnson policies. Hoping to broaden his appeal, campaign leaders tried to make Goldwater sound more moderate and more consistent on foreign policy. As reported on the front page of the *New York Times* in April, the campaign put out a series of detailed position papers that “modified” some of the opinions that Goldwater had voiced in the past. They included a rewording of his stances on relations with Moscow and the accessibility of tactical nuclear weapons to NATO’s top commander in order to defend Western Europe in the event of a Soviet attack.<sup>22</sup>

The strategy was a clear attempt by the campaign to show the voters as well as the media that Goldwater was trying to improve his analysis of these highly complex issues. In its coverage, the *Times* reported that, in 1963, Goldwater had favored “withdrawing recognition from Russia.” Now, in similar language he had employed in January during his NBC interview, Goldwater hoped to use the *threat* of ending diplomatic relations as a means of getting Moscow to show more respect for American interests. While that was different from what Goldwater had said in 1963, it was almost identical to his comments as a declared candidate during the NBC interview in January 1964. As reported by Walter Lippmann, Goldwater said “he wanted to use the threat of non-recognition as a bargaining tool.” On the NATO commander’s access to nuclear weapons, the campaign’s position was simply: “a nuclear NATO could meet local invasions on the spot with local tactical nuclear forces.” The term a “nuclear NATO,” a phrase used by the campaign, suggests that NATO did not have tactical nuclear weapons but should, or that it depend on them with greater frequency in order to resist local

<sup>21</sup> Edwards, *Goldwater*, 210, 364.

<sup>22</sup> Joseph A. Loftus, “Goldwater in 64 Softens His Stand,” *New York Times*, April 16, 1964, p. 17; Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, “Caution by Goldwater,” *Washington Post and Times-Herald*, January 24, 1964, p. A15.

invasions. The position was similar to what had been Goldwater's stance on the problematic NATO nuclear issue all along. However, the fact that he had, at least for the moment, chosen to confine his clarification to a staid position paper, rather than state it in speeches and other more public methods of communication, may have resulted in weaker impact among the media and the voters.

Although the position papers covered a variety of foreign policy issues, they did not include Goldwater's stance on Vietnam. During the campaign, Goldwater had often expressed his concern about the growing American involvement in Southeast Asia, believing the situation was far worse than the Johnson administration was willing to admit. Throughout the spring of 1964, he harshly criticized the administration for vacillating. "Why can't we make up our minds to win down there?" Goldwater asked in a California speech, later the subject of an article by Tom Wicker of the *New York Times*. The senator did not accept Johnson's strategy of containment. Indeed, he felt that without a more aggressive Vietnam policy, America would suffer further loss of credibility as the standard bearer of freedom against the forces of totalitarianism.<sup>23</sup>

The GOP candidate's aggressive strategy for American victory in Vietnam resulted in more negative publicity when he appeared in late May on the ABC television program *Issues and Answers*. One question from moderator Howard K. Smith concerned how to prevent the North's continuing replenishment of military and domestic supplies. Goldwater said it was a difficult situation. While the routes were hard to identify from the air, he believed "defoliation of the forests by low-yield atomic weapons could well be done." Although he had said nothing about actually using this lethal option to eliminate supply lines, the Associated Press (AP) and United Press International (UPI) reported exactly that, prompting the *San Francisco Examiner* to publish the incendiary headline: "Goldwater's Plan to Use Viet A Bomb." The story was also highlighted by a moderate Republican paper, the *New York Herald-Tribune*, which had a story deceptively titled: "A Attack On Viet Jungle Proposed By Goldwater." While accurately reporting his words on the ABC broadcast, the article cited them as another example of the senator's foreign policy blindness. That included Goldwater's apparent lack of

<sup>23</sup> Tom Wicker, "Goldwater Calls for Vietnam Victory and Attacks Johnson's Fiscal Policy," *New York Times*, March 19, 1964, p. 19.

realization that such a tactic was a direct violation of the Limited Test Ban Treaty, which America had signed along with Great Britain and Russia in 1963. While both the AP and UPI eventually printed retractions, the media continued to criticize Goldwater as being uninformed in the foreign policy arena.<sup>24</sup>

While Goldwater's comments may not have been by themselves incendiary, any talk of the use of nuclear weapons so soon after the Cuban Missile Crisis would certainly have created a heightened sense of apprehension on the part of the public and the press. Historian Robert Goldberg has argued that the media's strong reaction to these comments may have followed naturally from Goldwater's previous mention of nuclear weapons in discussing the NATO issue and his reputation for speaking loosely. Decades after the interview, Howard K. Smith observed, "the phrase nuclear weapons may have triggered an effect. Use of the term was inflammatory." The commentator further added, "I think those reporters just thought they had latched on to something. But it wasn't there."<sup>25</sup> Goldwater later stated that in addition to never advocating the use of nuclear weapons he would not have used them in Vietnam. But the media's reaction showed that, despite his attempts to be more thoughtful and restrained in presenting his views, they still saw him as impulsive and unpredictable.<sup>26</sup>

Goldwater's victory in the California primary effectively ended the hopes of Nelson Rockefeller and the moderate wing of the GOP. In an article analyzing the results of the primary, *Newsweek* asked, "Can Anyone Stop Goldwater Now?" While admitting he was no warmonger, the writer in one of the many summaries covering the event gave the impression the candidate's answers to complex foreign policy questions remained too simple. "Barry Goldwater," the article said, "had answers of a sort for all the problems," that troubled the country. For instance, the writer explained, in Goldwater's eyes "the Soviet Union is our enemy, therefore we should have nothing to do with it; perhaps we should break diplomatic relations." Goldwater, he continued, had argued that since the United Nations "won't do as we wish, therefore

<sup>24</sup> Victor Wilson, "Attack on Vietnam Proposed by Goldwater," *Washington Post and Times-Herald*, May 25, 1964, p. A1; Art Buchwald, "Atomic Defoliation," *Washington Post and Times-Herald*, May 31, 1964, p. E7; Goldwater with Casserly, *Goldwater*, 167–68.

<sup>25</sup> Goldwater with Casserly, *Goldwater*, 168.

<sup>26</sup> Goldberg, *Barry Goldwater*, 191–92; Perlstein, *Before the Storm*, 346–47.

perhaps we should pull out of the UN.” While the *Newsweek* article was not wrong in its direct descriptions of Goldwater’s positions, it indirectly made him look more radical than he actually was. The damaging portrayal of a leader with an unpredictable temperament resonated especially with moderate Republican voters. Asked if she could see herself voting for Goldwater in the fall, a Rockefeller supporter replied: “Let me think about it,” followed by, “Don’t bomb me.”<sup>27</sup>

As the Republicans prepared for their convention in San Francisco, Buckley and his *National Review* colleagues did their utmost to argue that Goldwater’s nomination was a positive prospect for the party, and indeed might be highly rewarding. In a memo in the second week of June, Buckley proposed that a special supplement be published during the convention projecting what a Goldwater presidency would look like. Once the public read these proposals and realized they did not include “atom bomb rattling,” he told colleagues, “a sense of relief would be felt.” Buckley stated that he wanted “to require our readers to think through to the contingency of a Goldwater election and force themselves to recognize that such an eventuality would not only be non-apocalyptic, but enormously exciting.” Buckley and his colleagues at *NR* clearly hoped that publishing this detailed material, explaining Goldwater’s positions in a clear, unthreatening style, would counter the prevailing attitude among GOP moderates who portrayed him as dangerous and unstable.<sup>28</sup>

When the senator made his acceptance speech on the evening of July 16, his foreign policy stance was the same as the one he had held since his first election in 1952. “Yesterday it was Korea. Today it is Vietnam,” Goldwater declared to his energized delegates at the Cow Palace. He accused the administration of abject failure in the battle against global communism. With the refusal to confront the Russians aggressively, American credibility had suffered, he implied. The inability to lead the Cold War against totalitarianism sent a dangerous message to U.S. allies. Goldwater compared his foreign policy views to those of President Eisenhower and to the former president’s “strength” and “unbelievable will that communist

<sup>27</sup> “Can Anyone Stop Goldwater Now?” *Newsweek*, June 15, 1964, p. 23.

<sup>28</sup> William F. Buckley Jr., “To All Concerned,” June 9, 1964, 1–2, Box 30, William F. Buckley Jr. Papers, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.

imperialism [must be] blunted.” Linking himself to Eisenhower’s presidency in his acceptance speech reflected a strategy of urging more GOP moderates to support Goldwater’s nomination, even though many remained alienated.<sup>29</sup>

The speech, like the Goldwater nomination itself, was not greeted favorably by major newspapers. In its editorial, the *New York Herald-Tribune* viewed the candidate’s agenda as “an arrogant declaration,” and one that would “shatter the Atlantic Alliance” if Goldwater were elected and able to act on it. The editors went on to declare that Goldwater’s failure to grasp the delicate nature of diplomacy would lead to dangerous repercussions in the event he became president. Successful statecraft required the leader to accept the world as it was. Goldwater’s rejection of compromise and his language of confrontation offered nothing, the editorial seemed to suggest, but eventual nuclear disaster. The lines from other major papers were much like that of “the *Trib.*” The *New York Times* called Goldwater “unfit” and argued that his policies would alienate the country from its allies and drive it to the verge of war with the USSR. The *Washington Post* said that he seemed to view American difficulties in the East-West conflict as no more than a simple “lack of strength or a lack of will.”<sup>30</sup>

Although Goldwater claimed to have a foreign policy approach similar to Eisenhower’s, the record calls that partly into question. While they shared a common belief in applying strong, NATO-based “collective security” against the Soviet Union and Eastern bloc, they also had serious differences. Whereas Eisenhower believed in the idea of foreign aid as a means of supporting nations vulnerable to communist encroachment, Goldwater characterized the idea as one of “waste and extravagance.” While Eisenhower favored negotiations and summits to diminish the danger of a nuclear confrontation, Goldwater found them useless exercises that only “provided legitimacy to communist advances.” Goldwater also urged a foreign policy that would encourage the complete rollback of communism around the world. A key element of that strategy was

<sup>29</sup> “Goldwater’s 1964 Acceptance Speech,” *Washington Post* website, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/daily/may98/goldwaterspeech.htm> (accessed January 8, 2020).

<sup>30</sup> “Goldwater’s Off-Key Keynote,” *New York Herald-Tribune*, July 18, 1964, p. 10; “The Goldwater Victory,” *New York Herald-Tribune*, July 16, 1964, p. 20; *New York Herald-Tribune*, July 21, 1964, p. 21; “Papers Give Their Views on Nominee,” *Washington Post and Times-Herald*, July 17, 1964, p. A5.

backing resistance movements behind the Iron Curtain. Here again Eisenhower and Goldwater differed. As foreign policy analyst Colin Dueck has explained, the rollback and brinkmanship ideas were not carried out. After more analysis by the president and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, it was decided that these would lead to no significant accomplishments against the Soviet Union. But Eisenhower was also much more measured and pragmatic in his opinions and judgments, while Goldwater did not like to mince words.<sup>31</sup>

As the Goldwater campaign tried to enhance the candidate's credibility in foreign policy, Lyndon Johnson announced that North Vietnamese forces had attacked two U.S. Naval destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin. The president proposed a congressional resolution to "repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression." Following the communist attacks on the two American vessels, LBJ ordered the bombings of military installations in North Vietnam. That show of force gave the public the impression that Johnson was finally willing to get tough with the communist North Vietnamese. Goldwater fully supported both initiatives. "We cannot allow the American flag to be shot at anywhere on earth if we are to retain our respect and prestige," the candidate said of his opponent's responses at a rally in Newport Beach, California.<sup>32</sup> Goldwater believed it was critical for American leaders to present a united front on Vietnam. He therefore promised Johnson he would not be critical of any decision-making in regards to Southeast Asia.<sup>33</sup>

One can argue that Goldwater's choice was reminiscent of the era when leaders like the late Michigan senator Arthur Vandenberg argued when it came to foreign policy, "politics stopped at the water's edge." At the same time, biographer Robert Goldberg rightly notes that in avoiding a serious debate on Vietnam during the campaign, the challenger clearly handicapped his chances to win. Such a debate would have given Goldwater the opportunity to present a detailed strategy as an alternative to the Johnson administration.

<sup>31</sup> Colin Dueck, *Hard Line: The Republican Party and U.S. Foreign Policy since World War II* (Princeton, N.J., 2010), 96–97, 104–5, 121–22.

<sup>32</sup> Charles Mohr, "Goldwater Backs Vietnam Action by Johnson," *New York Times*, August 5, 1964, p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> Mark Atwood Lawrence, *The Vietnam War: A Concise International History* (New York, 2008), 86.



A thoughtful alternative approach might then have reduced public perception of him as impulsive and a disorganized thinker.<sup>34</sup> However, Goldwater's promise to LBJ that he would not discuss or strongly disagree with the president on Vietnam, turned out to be "at best an exaggeration." Late in the race, he did offer some thoughts about preventing the enemy from launching another attack. These included the clear advocacy of bombing supply lines or positioning a destroyer off the North Vietnamese coast. Both of these actions were taken upon Johnson's escalation of the war following his victory in the election.<sup>35</sup>

While many editors and writers who composed the conservative publications of opinion were thrilled with the clear distinction between the candidate's positions and that of his opponent, those within the mainstream press offered a different point of view. Roscoe Drummond noted the contrast in foreign policy between the Goldwater campaign and Republicans of recent decades. Richard Wilson wrote wistfully in the *Los Angeles Times* that the type of strong consensus between men like Secretary of State Cordell Hull, a Democrat, and Republican diplomat John Foster Dulles in 1944, during planning for the creation of the United Nations was not "likely to be seen again." But Wilson criticized what he considered both campaigns' apparent unwillingness to have a serious debate on the prospects of war and peace, a debate critical to the national interest. While their two foreign policy approaches were markedly different, the columnist believed each sought the same objective: "maintaining the international power and political dignity of the United States." Wilson was also critical of the Johnson campaign for portraying Goldwater as a radical committed to nuclear Armageddon. Wilson appeared to view Goldwater as much more pragmatic than did many of his fellow commentators. When dealing with an actual crisis, Wilson wrote: "no sensible President, once in office, would allow himself to be bound or trapped into war-or-peace action dictated by an election."<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Goldberg, *Barry Goldwater*, 214–16; Hendrik Meijer, *Arthur Vandenburg: The Man in the Middle of the American Century* (Chicago, 2018).

<sup>35</sup> Perlstein, *Before the Storm*, 398–400; Julius Duscha, "Whole Foreign Policy Is at Issue Barry Says," *Washington Post and Times-Herald*, August 7, 1964, p. A2; Gladwin Hill, "Goldwater Hints His View Stiffens Policy on Vietnam," *New York Times*, August 4, 1964, p. 1; Andrew L. Johns, *Vietnam's Second Front: Domestic Politics, the Republican Party and the War* (Lexington, Ky., 2010), 71.

<sup>36</sup> Richard Wilson, "War-or-Peace Slogans Oversimplify Complex Issues of Foreign

But in the *New York Herald-Tribune*, the editors chastised Goldwater for continuing to be vague about the actual measures he would take in battling communism. While conceding that he did not want international conflict, the editors wondered what concrete solutions Goldwater offered to the many difficulties that might lead to war in the future. *National Review*'s James Burnham also cited a lack of specifics, although he considered it an overblown concern. In a column written in the second week of September, "The Perils of Under-simplification," he noted that Republicans as well as Democrats had been primarily concerned with Goldwater's black and white analyses. But Burnham then argued that if a leader had a clear ideological path for the nation in mind, his choices in international affairs were comparatively simple. Burnham contended "for a long time our foreign policy had been in essence, an evasion of reality." But while critical of America's current strategy, the author said nothing about the positive aspects of Goldwater's platform. The candidates' name was barely mentioned.<sup>37</sup>

The widespread distaste for Goldwater became even clearer as the endorsements of major newspapers and magazines began to appear. According to historian Rick Perlstein, in the two decades between 1940 and 1960, "the nation's top one hundred newspapers endorsed the Republican candidate 77 percent of the time. In 1964, only 45 percent would." One major GOP-leaning publication endorsing a Democratic presidential candidate for the first time was the *Saturday Evening Post*. Castigating Goldwater and lashing out against the leadership of the Republican Party, the editors accused the party of "betraying its duty by putting forth a man . . . who is manifestly unqualified to be President." Though Goldwater had undeniably run a campaign based on his core principles, the *Post* claimed that he "changes his convictions almost as often as his shirt." The harsh condemnation by this historically Republican paper was telling. While Goldwater certainly did not expect much of the "liberal" media to endorse him, it must have been a grave disappointment to lose the *Post* as well. Here was especially clear evidence that he had not been able to stem the accusation that he

Policy," *Los Angeles Times*, September 2, 1964, p. A5.

<sup>37</sup> "In Your Heart," *New York Herald-Tribune*, September 4, 1964, p. 16; James Burnham, "The Perils of Under-Simplification," *National Review*, September 8, 1964, p. 768.

was a reactionary, with an unsophisticated mind and an untrustworthy temperament.<sup>38</sup>

As the campaign continued into the fall, many in the media concluded that the two men who were competing for the highest office in the land did not represent the best that America had to offer. In the latter part of September, a *Time* editorial remarked that even though the public was not really enamored of Lyndon Johnson, Goldwater's "itchy trigger finger image" had decisively swung the voters toward the incumbent. "I don't think too much of President Johnson, but I guess I am really afraid of Senator Goldwater," one Republican explained. The magazine concluded that while most American voters were not rushing to embrace the president, they wanted to run away from his challenger. David Lawrence tried to calm Republicans who feared Goldwater's impulsiveness. The columnist noted that even Dwight Eisenhower had dismissed Goldwater's warmonger image as "tommyrot." To show Goldwater and Eisenhower viewed foreign policy in a similar manner, he quoted extensively from Eisenhower's comments in a televised conversation between the former president and Goldwater. During the conversation, Eisenhower used some language that was similar to the candidate's, expressing hope for a stronger America that "will not be pushed around." But Eisenhower also offered a standing caveat, as Lawrence conceded, that the United States cannot "be the bully and say get out of my way, I'm coming through." The author also tried to dispel Goldwater's comments about equipping NATO commanders with nuclear weapons, stating that the alliance's American commander had long been given permission by Washington to employ small nuclear weapons in an attack on Western Europe by the Soviet Union.<sup>39</sup>

In the first week of October, the *New York Herald-Tribune* came out for Lyndon Johnson. Based on its critical coverage of Goldwater throughout the campaign, this was no surprise. But that same week the paper showed its special concern about his foreign policy by publishing a separate editorial. The editors believed his proposals

<sup>38</sup> "Why Lyndon Johnson Must Be Elected," *Saturday Evening Post*, September 19, 1964, p. 84; Perlstein, *Before the Storm*, 426; *Los Angeles Times*, September 6, 1964, p. B2; "How Major Newspapers See the Candidates," *Los Angeles Times*, September 13, 1964, p. F3.

<sup>39</sup> David Lawrence, "Ike Exploding 'Trigger Happy' Tale," *New York Herald-Tribune*, June 24, 1964, p. 26; "The Itchy Trigger Finger Image," *Time*, September 25, 1964, p. 33; Perlstein, *Before the Storm*, 441-43.

continued to lack the substance and detail that would be necessary for the public to choose an untested man. The *Tribune* also criticized Goldwater as lacking moderation, a failing that did not point toward a more secure world. The editors did admit that, despite all the attempts by the Johnson campaign to portray Goldwater as unsteady, he was neither a radical nor a fanatic who took lightly the thought of a nuclear confrontation with the Soviet Union. But in the end, despite his good intentions, the election of Barry Goldwater “would truly be a leap in the dark.”<sup>40</sup>

As the race for the presidency entered its final stretch, a *Herald-Tribune* editorial expressed what many voters believed the campaign had accomplished—very little. The past few months were, according to the newspaper “scurrilous and evasive.” Both campaigns had failed to enlighten the public on the general problems the country faced and had been unclear on what each was prepared to do about them. It was therefore not a surprise when, on November 3, Johnson won forty-three million votes to Goldwater’s twenty-seven million.<sup>41</sup>

About the predominant attitudes of the major media outlets during the 1964 campaign, a number of conclusions can be drawn. Many major-media journalists could be expected to be politically unsympathetic to Goldwater. He was not the sophisticated, urbane candidate that President Kennedy had been. But neither was Lyndon Johnson, who many in the media looked down on for the same reason. Strong support among journalists for the welfare state instituted by Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal may have made them even more suspicious of Goldwater’s platform since expanding the social safety net was a key part of Johnson’s campaign. It is certainly understandable that Goldwater’s lack of clarity on issues such as nuclear weapons—especially in combination with his aggressive attitude toward Russia and communism—frightened many in the media as it did many Americans. Most of the mainstream press was happy with the slow and deliberate policy of containment, believing the nation was dealing successfully with the communist threat. The media certainly did not look favorably upon Goldwater’s aggressive preference for a “rollback” policy, particularly after the

<sup>40</sup> “Readers Tell Opinions of Times’ Support for Sen. Barry Goldwater,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 7, 1964, p. A4; “The Choice on Foreign Policy,” *New York Herald-Tribune*, October 5, 1964, p. 22.

<sup>41</sup> “As the Campaign Ends,” *New York Herald-Tribune*, November 1, 1964, p. 26.

confrontations with the Soviet Union over Cuba and Berlin had heightened the public anxiety just two and three years before. A less pronounced but real nuclear anxiety seems to have operated in regards to Vietnam. As the nation became more embroiled in Southeast Asia, and as the press remained uncertain about the U.S. objectives in that conflict, Goldwater's seeming recklessness about using low-level nuclear weapons to disrupt supply lines further undermined voter's confidence in him. While the media did not love Lyndon Johnson, few mainstream editors seemed to think that a Goldwater presidency would be a safe alternative in terms of foreign policy.

While Goldwater was a man of great integrity and character, he was a poor national candidate. Much of the controversy around him was of his own making. His quickness to make specific, and sometimes speculative, comments caused him to make misstatements on complex issues, resulting in more questions than answers. Goldwater arguably based his campaign on a few key principles, essentially those of restricting the federal government's power at home while attempting to extinguish the threat of communism abroad. Politically speaking at least, these were too simple for the remarkably complex problems they involved. While James Burnham may have been right to say that Goldwater's ideology was a beacon to the country, his lack of clarity and poor communication skills did not serve him well. There is no doubt that the senator certainly deserved credit for running a bold and unapologetic campaign. But because many of his ideas, particularly in foreign policy, appeared unusual or overly extreme, Goldwater owed his supporters, the country at large, and also himself the consideration to explain his goals clearly and specifically. The size of his defeat by Lyndon Johnson resulted partly from Barry Goldwater's inability to meet that challenge.