

RE-EXAMINING THE ROLE OF THE U.S. MEDIA IN THE VIETNAM WAR

ĐÁNH GIÁ LẠI VAI TRÒ CỦA TRUYỀN THÔNG HOA KỲ TRONG CHIẾN TRANH VIỆT NAM

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Abstract - The paper discusses the influence of the news media on war outcomes using the example of U.S. media reports during the Vietnam War. Towards the end of the 1960s, as the war began to see no end with escalating death toll of U.S. troops and enormous war expenses, public and the media's support for the Vietnam War wobbled, which gradually caused heavy pressure for the U.S. government. The anti-war movement, which grew fiercely partly due to the negative portrayal of war by the media, did affect Washington's decisions to certain extent. Nevertheless, it was not the media that was responsible for America's stalemate in Vietnam, but stagnant war progress, instead, reported itself to American people, disappointed them, and urged them to demand immediate military disengagement. After carefully analyzing the media's influence on American people's perception of the war, the paper concludes that America's failure in Vietnam was, after all, more of a consequence of unsound decisions by the leaders in Washington rather than a direct outcome of unamicable media coverage and anti-war campaigns.

Key words - The media; the fourth estate; war propaganda; anti-war movement; the Vietnam War

1. Introduction

America's triumph after World War II gave the nation more confidence than ever to assume the responsibility of an international peace police. The United States now portrayed itself as a hero who committed to fighting against world peace offenders, such as monarchists, imperialists, militarists and fascists, to protect its own and other nations' rights. Of course, this rhetoric of self-righteousness was not new and could be traced back to the days of president Woodrow Wilson, who "equated American ideals and self-interest with the goal of a world free of power politics and aggression" and declared that American would "fight... for the ultimate peace of the world and for the liberation of its people". Therefore, when Wilson's "softness" is thought to have led to the mistake of the Munich Agreement in 1938, later generations of U.S. presidents started to believe that only military power could convey their desired messages to offenders of America's interests, especially communists (Anderson, 2011). It was thus unsurprising when America's rhetoric against communism went all the way from Truman doctrine of containing communism to "support free peoples" to LBJ's determination to wage war in Vietnam "to fulfill one of the most solemn pledges of the American Nation" (Merrill, 2006).

Constructed on the three pillars of American exceptionalism, containment of communism and president Eisenhower's domino theory, U.S. propaganda at first successfully convinced American people and the media that the war in Vietnam was just and important to defend America's security. However, as the war began to see no end with escalating death toll of U.S. troops and a

Tóm tắt - Bài báo xem xét ảnh hưởng của truyền thông tới kết quả chiến tranh thông qua việc nghiên cứu đánh giá về hoạt động đưa tin của truyền thông Mỹ trong cuộc chiến tranh Việt Nam. Về cuối thập niên 60, khi cuộc chiến trở nên dai dẳng với số binh lính Mỹ hi sinh ngày càng tăng và chiến phí khổng lồ phải bỏ ra, sự ủng hộ của dân chúng cũng như truyền thông Hoa Kỳ dành cho cuộc chiến trở nên lung lay và dần gây áp lực ngày càng lớn lên chính phủ Mỹ. Phong trào phản chiến, vốn phát triển mạnh mẽ một phần nhờ tin tức tiêu cực về cuộc chiến trên mặt báo, đã có tác động nhất định lên những quyết sách của Washington. Tuy nhiên, truyền thông không phải là tác nhân chính đưa Mỹ tới thế cờ chết ở Việt Nam, mà chính người dân Mỹ tự nhận thấy sự trì trệ của cuộc chiến, từ đó cảm thấy thất vọng và tạo áp lực buộc chính phủ phải rút quân khỏi Việt Nam. Sau khi phân tích kỹ lưỡng tác động của truyền thông lên quan điểm của dân chúng Mỹ về chiến tranh Việt Nam, bài viết đã chỉ ra rằng thất bại của Hoa Kỳ hơn hết là hậu quả của những quyết sách sai lầm từ Nhà Trắng chứ không hẳn chỉ là hệ quả trực tiếp đến từ cách thức truyền thông Hoa Kỳ đưa tin bất lợi về cuộc chiến hay từ các phong trào phản chiến.

Từ khóa - Truyền thông; quyền lực thứ tư; tuyên truyền chiến tranh; phong trào phản chiến; chiến tranh Việt Nam

deteriorating economy due to enormous war expenses, public and media's support for the war wobbled and gradually caused heavy pressure for the U.S. government. The anti-war movement, which grew fiercely partly due to the negative portrayal of war by the media, did affect Washington's decisions to certain extent. Nevertheless, it was not the media who was responsible for America's stalemate in Vietnam, but stagnant war progress, instead, reported itself to American people, disappointed them, and urged them to demand immediate military disengagement. In addition, the pro-war movement during these years was also strong enough to tear America apart in domestic debates over the morality of the war. Upon reviewing U.S. strategies as well as how war planners committed to their resolutions, it can be said that America's stumble in Vietnam was, after all, more of a consequence of unsound decisions by leaders in Washington rather than an outcome of unamicable media coverage and anti-war campaigns.

2. Propaganda efforts by the U.S. government

According to Ralph D. Casey, war propaganda since the mid-twentieth century has become "a necessary tool in promoting a national war effort", through which "popular appeals are carried to make the necessary sacrifices and to contribute muscle, mind, and money to the successful prosecution of the war". Especially in wartime, propaganda "must seek to demoralize enemy morale" using various tactics, among which an important one is "to picture the moral superiority of the cause against which the enemy is fighting" (Casey, 1944). In the Vietnam War, Washington, like its communist counterparts of Hanoi and Beijing, also

produced its own version of war propaganda to acquire and maintain public support for America's intervention in Vietnam. This propaganda was, in the beginning, actually rather successful in convincing the American people and media of U.S. virtue to go to war.

The Cold War as well as the rise of McCarthyism in the 1950s created a mass phobia about communism among American politicians and citizens. Growing from which, president Eisenhower's domino theory provided Americans with more legitimate reasons to believe that the spread of communism to the faraway land of Indochina would cause "incalculable" losses "to the free world", and thus action was needed to "preserve the vital interests" of free nations, including the United States (Eisenhower, 1954). The domino theory laid the foundation for the following presidents' rhetoric to justify U.S. (gradual) military involvement in Vietnam. For example, in a press conference in 1956 when John F. Kennedy was still a senator, he explained the geopolitical importance of Vietnam by utilizing the same formula of domino theory, stating how Vietnam was vital to containment of communism in Southeast Asia. In his speech, the United States undertook the role of a "volunteer fire department", whose firemen were always ready to "rush in" any communist conflagrations to halt the fire and save the inhabitants in exchange for their applause (Eisenhower, 1954). America in Kennedy's words could be compared to a God's messenger who brought democratic salvation to Vietnam, and Vietnam in return became a test of God's power.

Similarly, on an address delivered at John Hopkins University in April 1965, President Johnson asserted that the presence of Americans in Vietnam was necessary because "we must fight if we are to live in a world where every country can shape its own destiny", and "only in such a world will our own freedom be finally secure". Also, as America had promised to keep with the South Vietnamese people, breaking that promise "would be an unforgivable wrong". The United States, therefore, must help South Vietnamese to fight not only to "strengthen world order" but also to prevent Communist China from expanding its shadow in Asia. In addition, to emphasize U.S. morality in the war, Johnson described North Vietnamese communists as brutal aggressors, who attacked defenseless South Vietnamese citizens, including women and children, for the sake of North Vietnam's "total conquest" of the south (Johnson, 1965). A series of LBJ's speeches in the mid-1960s employed the same pattern of enhancing U.S. moral stand and emphasizing the significance of a free world, in which the United States must be a beacon of liberty and democracy.

As Philip Caputo admits in his memoir, it is Kennedy's challenge "ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country" (Kennedy, 1961) that "seduced" him and many other young Americans in his generation to the "missionary idealism" of "play[ing] cop to the Communists' robber and spread[ing]" America's "political faith around the world" (Caputo, 1977). Gallup polls in August 1965 and March 1966 also showed that over a half of U.S. population believed that America's

military engagement in Vietnam were "not a mistake" (Gillespie, 2000), which boosted Johnson's confidence to continue his war plan. Despite a rather steep decline in late 1966, when Americans realized that the war was going to be costly and lengthy, public support for Americans' combat on the Vietnam battlefield in general remained positive until early 1967, with more than 50 percent of Americans still having faith in Washington's policy in Vietnam. When LBJ appeared on television to announce his retaliation against North Vietnam during the Gulf of Tonkin crisis, that did not even stir public concern because, according to Melvin Small's observation, up to this point, almost every American citizen still believed in whatever their government reported on foreign affairs (Small, 2011).

The 1960s also witnessed the rise of the pro-war movement, in which political conservatives, students, veterans and many other social groups expressed their support for American troops in Vietnam. Sandra Scanlon in her book *The Pro-War Movement* notes that:

...individual acts of support for the troops in Vietnam, undertaken by 'Young Republicans and Young Democrats; by Lions, Moose, Elks and Masons; by the American Legion, the Jewish War Veterans, the VFW, DAR; by church groups, women's clubs, PTAs, the Junior Chamber of Commerce, and Boy Scouts; by garden clubs, labor unions, and 4-H groups; by local newspapers and television stations,' cannot be entirely separated from support for the war itself. Activities like blood drives, gift programs, and pro-war and pro-government rallies... should be viewed as manifestations of faith in some or all of the goals for which the United States was fighting in Vietnam: for example, belief that Americans were defending the independence of a weaker people; that they were extending democracy and protecting that of the United States... (Scanlon, 2013)

Her analysis proves that the U.S. war propaganda was, to some extent, actually successful in persuading American people of U.S. morality and rationale for deepened military commitment in the war. In review of media reports on the war before 1965, even though many journalists maintained a skeptical tone in their writing, the overarching theme was mainly to predict the cause of the war instead of directly criticizing Washington's policy in Vietnam.¹ However, when the war was prolonged and American death toll in Vietnam kept on rising while there was no sign of retreat from the enemy, the relationship between the U.S. government and the population as well as the media was deteriorating rapidly day by day.

3. A deteriorating relationship

While war propaganda until Nixon did not change much in terms of formula, whose linchpin was the domino theory and U.S. commitment to upholding its international "credibility" (Kimball, 2011), Gallup polls showed a steady decline in public support for U.S. military involvement in Vietnam after 1967. By Jan 1973, only three in ten Americans believed that their government had

¹Bates et al. (1998).

made a right decision on the land war in Vietnam (Gillespie, 2000). Since war was still just an option, the U.S. government had been struggling to sustain popular support and the media's favor. All in all, the anti-war movement did cause much turbulence and headache to decision makers in Washington.

Protests against U.S. military intervention in Vietnam started as early as 1965 when the first American combat troops were sent to Vietnam. On April 17, 1965 the first organized demonstration occurred in Washington with 25,000 protestors. From then on, these demonstrations became the fashion for the anti-war movement. Besides, a so-called "teach-in movement" was also spreading across universities such as University of Michigan, Harvard, Columbia and Berkeley, where students were taught about the war by "left-leaning professors and other dovish experts". Anti-war protesters also employed many others tactics such as self-immolation, leafleting, signing petitions, refusing to pay taxes and helping draft resisters to express their objection to what their government was doing in Vietnam (Small, 2011).

Acknowledging the importance of American popular support for the war, the Johnson administration launched an "Optimism Campaign", aiming to persuade the people and the press that the United States was making good progress in Vietnam. Every week, LBJ's national security advisor Walt Rostow would meet with representatives from other agencies to discuss what should be publicized about the war. To paint an optimistic picture of America's efforts in the war, the MACV, headed by General William Westmoreland, would choose to report an "downward trend" in the communists' combat strength as well as their "sinking morale". As observed by historian Edwin E. Moïse, "the campaign seemed to be working: the word 'stalemate' appeared less often in commentaries on the war. As the media became more optimistic, the American public did the same. The Gallup Poll occasionally asked the question, 'Do you think the U.S. and its allies are losing ground in Vietnam, standing still or making progress?' The proportion of those surveyed who answered "making progress" went from 35 percent in July 1967 to 50 percent in December" (Moïse, 2017). However, as American death toll shot up in Vietnam, the media could not stay silent. Media reports about the war after 1965 appeared to be sensitive to casualty statistics (Small, 2011). Especially when the Tet Offensive hit, both the U.S. media and people were "caught off-guard" when learning about what the Vietnamese communist forces had done with their reportedly "dropping strength" (Moïse, 2017). In his review of William M. Hammond's *Reporting Vietnam*, L.D. Meagher notes that "public opinion polls show support for each war declined by about 15 percentage points each time the number of American casualties increased by a factor of ten (100 to 1,000, or 1,000 to 10,000, for example). Each increase in the casualty figures also prompted an increase in news coverage of the war... the amount of time devoted to Vietnam on network news programs tripled between 1965 and 1969" (Meagher, 1999).

The anti-war movement together with "unfavorable" coverage of the war by the media in the late 1960s forced President Johnson to seek solutions to reassure the public, such as the above-mentioned Optimism Campaign, and when these efforts failed, it cost him his political career with his announcement of not running for reelection. It is difficult to precisely measure how influential the anti-war movement and the media were on Washington's decisions, but they did cause pressure to the U.S. government by contributing to many on-going social disturbances at the time, including the civil rights movement and urban riots, and thus challenged both LBJ's domestic and foreign policies. The effect of the anti-war movement was also demonstrated through political messages from both major-party candidates in the 1968 election. In order to win voters' ballots, they all promised to withdraw American troops from Vietnam and end the war soon.

The relationship between the U.S. government and the media continued to worsen after Nixon took office in 1969. Despite his promise to end the war, Nixon still carried out secret bombing of the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Cambodia, which was later revealed by the *New York Times*. Nixon got infuriated by this leak and began "preventative" actions against some journalists and government officials. He also endorsed "harassment and penetration of anti-war organizations" by intelligence agencies, all of which were exposed during the Watergate investigations. In order to consolidate more popular support, in November 1969 Nixon delivered his epochal Silent Majority speech, in which he encouraged the silent majority who had been supportive of his policies to "rise up against the noisy minority". Moreover, he and his administration also attacked the "elitists" who ran the newspapers and television networks, such as NBC, ABC, CBS, *Newsweek*, *Time*, the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* for setting "the agenda for the rest of the media", which was "anti-war, liberal, and, especially, Nixon hating".

Along with the media's revelation of governmental secrets, the anti-war movement leaders, frustrated with the slow progress of troop withdrawal in Vietnam, did not cease to organize more and more serious activities to protest against the dragging war. In October 1969, they called for a "nationwide moratorium" which attracted two million Americans in two hundred cities. In his memoir, Nixon criticized that the moratorium "destroyed whatever small possibility may still have existed to end the war" as it signaled to Hanoi not to recede at the negotiating table thanks to their "allies" among the Americans. Resentment from anti-war Americans, especially students, continued to increase due to Nixon's decision to expand war to Cambodia. Violence and protest erupted in hundreds of university campuses in 1970 and peaked in May when four students were shot dead and nine others were wounded by National Guardsmen at Kent State University. Anti-war demonstrations remained strong in the capital city. Starting with a small but most politically successful demonstration by 2,000 members of Vietnam Veterans Against the War, who were even willing to return their medals to the government at the Capitol to prove their opposition to the

war, the movement advanced to a “traditional mass demonstration” with over 300,000 participants in Washington, not to mention a later attempt to close down the capital in the 1971 Mayday Protest.

According to Small Melvin, the influence of the anti-war movement on campus could be linked to Nixon’s new draft policy in 1969. During his time, much fewer draftees were “sent to the combat theater, and in 1972 he again introduced a new model of an “all-volunteer army”. Melvin also commented that the anti-war movement affected new draftees in a way that their resentment against the “unpopular and seemingly endless war” lead to underperforming and undisciplined soldiers on the battlefield. In *Diplomacy*, Kissinger accuses the anti-war movement of hindering Nixon’s endeavor to “negotiate an honorable extrication”, and as Nixon was “too insecure and too vulnerable” at the time, there was no chance for reconciliation between him and anti-war activists. In other words, Nixon’s plan was totally deranged because of the anti-war protesters. Kissinger also asserts that Nixon’s ambivalence in his solutions to the Vietnam War was partly due to American people’s challenging demand of ending the war but not losing it (Meagher, 1999). In the end, he blames the anti-war protesters for their lack of consideration and understanding in pressuring the government to end the war and withdraw troops from Vietnam. First, they did not acknowledge Nixon’s effort to disengage American troops. Second, political and military calculations did not function in such a simple way (Kissinger, 1994). In summary, the anti-war movement and news coverage of the war also troubled the Nixon administration as it did his predecessor. However, while they indeed contributed to dividing the United States along the line of philosophical and moral differences, it is, in the end, the people at the Pentagon that should take major responsibility for America’s disorientation in Vietnam.

4. The falsely blamed media

American wartime leaders’ frustration towards the media can be nicely summarized in Nixon’s criticism of television’s and newspapers’ literal coverage of war events as follows:

The Vietnam War was complicated by factors that had never before occurred in America’s conduct of war... The American news media had come to dominate domestic public opinion about its purpose and meaning. In each night’s TV news and each morning’s paper the war was reported battle by battle, but little or no sense of the underlying purpose of the fighting was conveyed. Eventually this contributed to the impression that we were fighting in military and moral quicksand... Television showed the terrible human suffering and sacrifice of war. Whatever intention behind such relentless and literal reporting, the result was serious demoralization of the home front, raising the question whether America would ever again be able to fight an enemy abroad with unity and strength of purpose at home (Hess, 2009).

According to Nixon, the media seems to have only cared about laying bare the brutality of war without

bothering to investigate and display the underlying meaning of all the “terrible human suffering and sacrifice”. Hence, the media had been misguiding public concern and causing America to divide over interpretations of the war in Vietnam. Such notion was also shared by President Johnson when he subtly blamed U.S. media for broadcasting “dramatic” events such as confrontations between police and anti-war rioters, which were “newsworthy”, rather than reporting “progress” like the government effort to seek “peace” in Vietnam (Johnson, 1968). Both presidents’ criticism carries a common sentiment that it is the irresponsible media that weakened America’s morale on the battlefield. In fact, unless they meant to “shift responsibility” from the government to television and newspaper reporters, they somehow overestimated the power of the media over the people as well as the power of the people over the government’s decisions regarding Vietnam.

It is true that new reports about the Vietnam War were not always portraying a selfless and heroic America, which was fighting hard for world peace, as U.S. government had always claimed to do, but it was not the media’s fault that American people cast doubt on the cause of the war and on America’s progress in Vietnam. Hostility between policymakers in Washington and the media was real. Nonetheless, the media’s candid reports of the war did not perplex the American population, but it was the discrepancy between government reports and actual combat events that did. For example, during President Johnson’s Optimism Campaign in 1967, General Westmoreland was trying to convince the media and the public that the Vietnamese communist forces were losing its strength and that the enemy was actually “weaker than he appeared to be” (Moise, 2017). But victory remained out of hand and American death toll in Vietnam kept rising steadily. Even though the 1968 Tet Offensive was a military failure to Viet Cong, it sent the whole America a strong message that the Vietnamese communists were not going to retreat any time soon. The media did not fabricate statistics about American casualties in Vietnam, nor could it conceal events like the Tet Offensive from the U.S. public. Even if it had reported the war in a more positive way, Americans at home would have sooner or later questioned what was happening in Vietnam once their presidents kept asking for more troops and money. Therefore, as the war dragged on, more and more Americans became skeptical about U.S. achievements in Vietnam. Melvin Small even argued that the morality of war did not concern Americans as much as the fact that the United States had been spending too much on the war. War was not only “tearing the country apart” but also threatening America’s prosperity (Small, 2011). American people were looking for progress and could not find it in reports on actual war events brought home by the media, hence they became frustrated and angry at their political leaders. It was not the media’s responsibility when it refused to report false news or manipulate information just to boost American morale. It just shared the very same concern as other Americans’: The United States might be stalemated in the war.

Furthermore, Small pointed out that the media's portrayal of anti-war protesters was actually not friendly enough to assist the anti-war cause. Anti-war demonstrators were stereotyped by the media as "hippies", who had been closely linked to urban riots in the late 1960s. To attract TV viewers' attention, the media often focused on "the most violent, bizarre, or salacious protestors", who looked "filthy, ragged" with arms and hands "raised in an angry gesture... performed with a single raised finger". As a result, public resentment against these hippies in the end overwhelmed their sympathy for the peace movement, and many citizens eventually became supportive to the war because they wanted to express their opposition to those who "burned down the cities" (Small, 2011). In his 1973 article "The Presidency and the Press", author Richard Harris attempts to prove that the media was actually rather merciful to President Nixon when it gave him a nine-month honeymoon for free criticism of the press. Also, he asserts that the press in fact did not have much room to act due to the government's repression. Thus, it could not, in general, report much on the anti-war movement as it should have. Instead, on television only a few selective pieces of news which were just several-minute long were broadcast (Harris, 1973). Therefore, it can be argued that U.S. political leaders somehow exaggerated the media's "fault" in America's failure in the Vietnam War.

Not only the media's power was overestimated, the actual influence of the anti-war movement on the government's decisions should be recalculated. As Small has observed, "throughout much of the Vietnam era, a majority of Americans expressed strong opposition to the anti-war movement and especially to the apparently unruly mass demonstrations" (Small, 2011). Kissinger also admitted that a majority of American people did not desert their leaders. After the Tet Offensive, "polls showed that 61 percent of the American people considered themselves hawks, 23 percent doves, while 70 percent favored continuation of the bombing" (Kissinger, 1994). Along with war escalation in Vietnam was the rising strength of the anti-war movement. However, there is little evidence showing that Washington's choice of war strategies was essentially driven by public opinions.

All the mass demonstrations as well as the teach-in movement at large universities in the mid-1960s after all could not prevent President Johnson from escalating war in Vietnam. In addition, Johnson's strategy of "limited war" was more of a result of the president's personal preference – as he would rather devote his mind and heart to the Great Society programs – and the ambiguity of war objectives rather than a consequence of public pressure (McMaster, 1998). The anti-war movement could pressure Johnson to summon Westmoreland and ask him to design a media campaign for proper communication between the government and the people about the war progress, but it could not compel him to immediately disengage American troops from the Vietnam battlefield. Johnson, in fact, even had a plan to ask Congress for 206,000 additional soldiers (Small, 2011). The movement could also force Johnson to admit a deeply divided America in a speech just a day

before he announced his absence from the coming president election, (Johnson, 1968) but it could not prevent him from hand-picking his successor, Vice President Hubert Humphrey, who was expected to continue fighting against the "doves" in the government (Small, 2011).

Public demand to bring their American sons home was also unable to inhibit President Nixon from expanding war to Laos and Cambodia, causing more casualties than ever for both American troops and Indochinese civilians within the first three years of his administration. Nixon did not hesitate to repress the media and allow mass arrest as well as detainment of people who attempted to participate in a mass civil disobedience in 1971. Melvin again notes that "by 1971, most Americans did not approve of demonstrations in general and certainly opposed the civil disobedience that came with them". Hence, it was not surprising when he cites a poll in which 56 percent of asked people "approved of the police's approach to the protestors, agreeing with the president", who accused the protestors of being selfish, caring more about themselves than about "the rights of people in Washington". And despite all the criticism he had received, President Nixon still decided on the Christmas Bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong in 1972, hoping for a better deal at the negotiation table. Historians even criticized Nixon for his plan of a "decent interval", in which he believed a short amount of time he had before South Vietnam collapsed would give him better chance in reelection and preserve America's international reputation (Small, 2011). This means Nixon was perhaps more concerned about his reelection chances than responding friendly to the anti-war activists. All of which point out to one fact that like Lyndon B. Johnson's, Richard Nixon's decisions in the Vietnam era were not very much influenced by the anti-war movement. Despite his uncovered hostility to the media because of its coverage of the war, which he believed had significant impact on American people's perception of America's military involvement, historical events during his presidency showed that public displeasure at the war did not prevent Nixon and his advisor Kissinger from "making the war their own" (Rabe, 2014) and developed it into a second Indochina War.

Parallel to the rise of the anti-war movement in the 1960s and 1970s, the pro-war movement was also proliferating during these years. Johnson's years were not only marked with the growth of anti-war demonstrations but also with patriotic campaigns launched by conservative groups to support the war in Vietnam. The most notable one was the rally "We Support Our Boys in Vietnam" in May 1967, in which "tens of thousands of people marched down Fifth Avenue in a parade that lasted almost nine hours". The organizers' goal was to gain and show "maximum support" for U.S. servicemen in Vietnam, trying to assure the fighting men that "they have the full respect, love, prayers and backing of the American people". They also believed that their campaign "represented the *authentic* voice of the American people" (Scanlon, 2013). President Nixon received no less assistance from conservative groups as well. Organizations like the American Legion or the National Committee for

Responsible Patriotism continued to develop various campaigns to express their ardent support for America's actions in the war. Many pro-war student groups also emerged such as Young Americans for Freedom (YAF), the National Student Coordinating Committee for Victory in Vietnam (NSCVV), the College Republican National Committee (CRNC) and so on. These groups would focus on on-campus activities to challenge the anti-war cause and campus radicalism (Scanlon, 2013).

5. Conclusion

It is true that the anti-war movement, encouraged by the media's honest report of the war, somewhat constrained American war planners in terms of political communication and war maneuvers. It did not allow the government to enjoy complete freedom and comfort when developing war strategies and requesting resources. However, it is neither the anti-war movement nor the media that was blameworthy when America made mistakes in Vietnam. In fact, it was the policymakers themselves who drove the United States further into the Vietnam morass. Since war planners could not develop concrete war objectives from the beginning, American soldiers had to fight an aimless war not knowing what to achieve in the end. Their frustration on the battlefield led to their commitment of atrocities such as the My Lai massacre, which, through the media's report, shocked the entire Americans at home. Public animosity against the war kept climbing due to slow military progress and rising casualties, which in turn induced U.S. government to come up with solutions to quickly disengage American troops from Vietnam. Such pressure, together with the government's fear of losing U.S. credibility and other private political calculations by the presidents, made American war leaders produce even more faulty decisions. The loop went on until the fall of the South Vietnamese government in 1975, marking the failure of both U.S. war plan and its propaganda.

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