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Securitizing isolationism: Nixon and the construction of US history and identity during the Vietnam War

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.

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Abstract

In 1969 Richard Nixon became President of the United States having campaigned on a promise to end the war in Vietnam. Amidst increasing domestic pressure to end US military involvement in Vietnam – which had escalated sharply in 1964 during the previous Johnson administration – the Nixon administration laid out a plan to withdraw from Vietnam and reduce US international responsibilities. As the administration presented this approach – which advocated a gradual withdrawal from Vietnam and insisted that allied states provide the troops to defend themselves – it repeatedly used the terms ‘isolationism’ and ‘isolationist’.

American politicians, academics, and pundits had been calling contemporary policies, historical approaches, and each other, isolationist since the early 1900s. These terms were grounded in a broad narrative which asserted that during the interwar period an isolationist US had prolonged WWII, delayed US entry into the war, and increased the sacrifices made during the war. The ‘lesson learned’ by the US was that an ‘internationalist’ foreign policy was needed to protect the US and was necessary in the radically different post-WWII world. A supposed inclination to isolationism in the US was presented as an expression of a US moral example to the world, a historical effect of the policies of the ‘Founding Fathers’, and a consequence of geography. However, during the Nixon administration’s prosecution of the Vietnam war, public invocations of isolationism increased dramatically. Even more striking was the administration’s use of these invocations. While isolationism had typically been a pejorative term, the administration directed it at disparate targets – politicians and elites that the administration referred to as internationalists of the post-WWII era were called isolationists, as were segments of the US public.

This thesis uses securitization theory to conceptualize the Nixon administration’s invocations of isolationism as a security discourse. This theorization allows for an evaluation of the administration’s invocations of isolationism as a series of political,

discursive acts – which in turn allows this thesis to further problematize the concept of US isolationism. In positing isolationism as a security discourse, this thesis focuses on what else isolationism *did* – what it reinforced or created – rather than what isolationism *was* (such as a history, foreign policy, or characteristic). This thesis argues that isolationism discourse created conditions of security or insecurity and reinforced concepts of US identity. Through an analysis of the Nixon administration's public discourse, this thesis identifies four conceptual isolationism discourses: 'Ethical Responsibility', 'Spatio-Temporal Othering', 'Ideological Character', and 'Psychological Character'. An examination of these discourses furthers securitization theory by arguing that the Nixon administration's isolationism security discourses constituted or reperformed historical narratives, knowledge, and identities through the process of discursively constructing threats during the Vietnam war.

Lay summary

This thesis uses securitization theory to understand the Nixon administration's use of the terms 'isolationism' and 'isolationist' during the Vietnam war.

Richard Nixon, US President (1969-74), oversaw the final years of US military involvement in Vietnam (1969-73). As Nixon ran for president in 1968 and through to his 1972 reelection, there was increasing pressure from segments of the US public and members of Congress to end US involvement in Vietnam. In 1968 Nixon campaigned on a promise to end the war in Vietnam. After his election, he also offered an approach to US foreign policy that advocated the US reducing its international responsibilities. As the Nixon administration promoted its plan for gradual withdrawal from Vietnam and reduced international responsibilities, the administration's public discourse repeatedly invoked the terms 'isolationism' and 'isolationist' – as did the wider public discourse of politicians, academics, and pundits.

Isolationism and isolationist had been pejoratives in the US since the early 1900s – particularly amongst political elites who formulated and contested US foreign policy. Calling someone an isolationist or their policy isolationism was considered derogatory because of its association with the period between WWI and WWII when the US was allegedly isolationist. According to the standard explanation, the US being isolationist kept it out of WWII, which then prolonged WWII and only increased the sacrifices of the US. After WWII, the US had supposedly learned that being internationally engaged would protect the US from making the same mistake again and that such a policy was now necessary in a radically different post-WWII world. The 'fact' that the US might again turn to isolationism was held to be an inherent trait of the US public. It was claimed that isolationism was how the US had historically sought to protect and nurture its unique democratic character, so that it may present this moral example to the world.

Securitization theory posits that threats are created through speech acts.

Essentially, if someone says 'we' are threatened by 'them', that makes it so. In other words, an object or situation is not intrinsically threatening, it is instead designated and accepted as being a threat through discourse. A speaker, in this case the Nixon administration, draws on a known context – such as historical tropes like isolationism and contemporary events such as the Cold War – and tells an audience (e.g. the US public) that particular foreign policy approaches or other countries are a threat to the existence of 'our' country. In doing so, securitization theory conceptualizes this process as creating or reinforcing understandings of who 'we' are as well as constructing a threatening 'them'.

This thesis conceptualizes the Nixon administration's invocations of isolationism as such a security discourse. As per securitization theory, Nixon stating that isolationism was a threat to the US, created or reinforced the idea that isolationism was a reoccurring threat and reinforced a particular idea of what the US was or was not supposed to be. This thesis further argues that these discourses and their construction of threats created or reinforced particular narratives of US history and ideas of how the world of international relations functioned. Specifically, it argues that the administration's isolationism discourse reproduced the idea that the US public was prone to isolationism and that this was a part of a US character. The thesis also contends that the administration's isolationism discourse helped construct its foreign policy as a 'middle ground' approach and was articulated in aid of its political and electoral strategies.

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Table of Contents

Chapter one: Introduction	1
What does this thesis add?	2
What is securitization theory?	7
Children of Light and Darkness: Histories of ‘isolationism’ discourses.....	8
Reifications of isolationism in the historical literature	12
Isolationism as a persistent disciplining discourse	18
Methodology.....	21
What about the Nixon administration?	23
Methods.....	25
Selection of sources	26
The layout of the thesis	28
Conclusion.....	30
Chapter two: Theory	33
The Copenhagen School.....	35
What is security? The exceptional, the normal, and the audience	37
Relationality	38
Speech acts: A restrictive framework	43
Context.....	47
Basic discourses as theory	50
Identity, security, and foreign policy	53
Identity and narrative	54
The security pledge: Constative and performative.....	61
Conclusion.....	63
Chapter three: Methodology	65
Methodology: Foucauldian genealogy.....	65
Basic discourses as methodology.....	70
Epistemic realism and an inside/outside relationship	73
US exceptionalism.....	77
Conclusion.....	81
Chapter four: Ethical Responsibility.....	83
NSC-68 and the Truman Doctrine	83

US exceptionalism and the construction of ethics of responsibility: Neoconservative criticisms.....	90
Mead and neoconservatism.....	91
Mead and morality.....	99
Morgenthau, limits, moral purpose, and exceptionalism.....	103
Nixon, morality, and limits of responsibility.....	107
Threats and responsibility in a changing world.....	114
Conclusion.....	117
Chapter five: Spatio-Temporal Othering.....	121
Spatio-temporal othering: Theory and the nuclear age.....	121
The Nixon administration's nuclear policies.....	124
'Real' worlds.....	127
Nuclear policy, credibility, isolationism, and different worlds.....	129
Linkage.....	135
'Superhawks': Isolationism from another angle.....	137
Conclusion.....	143
Chapter six: Ideological Character.....	147
'Realignment' and George Wallace: A brief electoral context.....	150
Wallace voters and Vietnam.....	155
Wallace voters, anticommunism, and the 'Social Issue'.....	160
Threats and securitization theory.....	164
Constructing threats, relationships, and identity.....	170
Wallace for governor.....	173
Moratorium Day and Vice President Agnew.....	174
Meanwhile, back in Alabama.....	180
The 'Silent Majority' speech.....	181
Conclusion.....	184
Chapter seven: Psychological Character.....	187
American 'character': The differences between 'Psychological' and 'Ideological'.....	188
The bigger picture.....	190
Moral strength in the 'silent majority': An introductory overview.....	192
Knowing the public: Construction of a vacillatory US 'psychological character'.....	196
'Lasting peace': Withdrawal and appeasement.....	200
Appeasement discourse: Getting in and getting out of Vietnam.....	201
Perceptions of strength: Credibility and character.....	204
'Internationalists' into 'isolationists': Portraying withdrawal as threatening.....	208

A pragmatic response	211
Conclusion.....	216
Chapter eight: Conclusion.....	219
Four discourses	222
Durability.....	228
Epilogue: An enduring discourse	229
Bibliography	245

Chapter one: Introduction

This thesis uses securitization theory to examine US 'isolationism' during the Nixon administration's prosecution of the Vietnam War (1969-73). Conceptualizing isolationism as a security discourse allows for an evaluation of the administration's invocations of isolationism as a series of political, discursive acts. The thesis looks to further problematize the concept of isolationism in the US, particularly during the Vietnam War. During this period invocations of the terms 'isolationism' and 'isolationist' increased and the Nixon administration deployed them against a broad array of policies and individuals. In theorizing isolationism as a security discourse, this thesis focuses on what else isolationism *did* – what it reinforced or created – rather than what isolationism *was* (such as a history, foreign policy, characteristic).

The basic syntax of invocations of isolationism in US public discourse is usually that of a warning: if a person, policy, or the country embraces isolationism, a naïve and dangerous policy from the past, the US will be in danger. Though the history of isolationism is tangled – sometimes erroneously traced back to George Washington – the pejorative force of the term generally comes from associations with the interwar period. Specifically, isolationism is most often tied to US neutrality in the 1930s, when Congress attempted to keep the country out of the increasingly volatile situation in Europe (Jonas, 2002: 337). This fundamental structure of invocations of isolationism – the resurrection of this historical policy would threaten US existence in the present – is similar to the grammar of threats in securitization theory: an Other as a threat to a Self. As securitization theorizes that security discourses may construct 'security' and reinforce understandings of Self and Other, this thesis posits that isolationism discourse may have functioned in a similar manner.

However, this thesis does not apply a theory to an empirical context. The theoretical contribution formulated throughout the thesis evolved as it was applied to the context. In this sense, the theory and empirical data are intertwined. In line

with the methodology, outlined below, this thesis provides an examination grounded in its empirical context. Not only is this methodologically appropriate, it also will serve to reinforce an academic understanding of ‘isolationism’ as a term too vague and versatile for analytical use (e.g. assessments that purport to claim ‘that policy was isolationism’ or ‘these people were isolationist’) (cf. Blower, 2014: 351).

Rather than conceptualizing isolationism as an object to be evaluated – as a (historical) foreign policy or American characteristic – this thesis asks: what did isolationism *do*? More specifically, how did isolationism discourse function in the political discourse of the Nixon administration?

A second question this thesis asks: how might securitization theory be used to conceptualize the constitution of historical narratives, knowledge, and identities through the process of discursively constructing threats?

What does this thesis add?

This thesis seeks to make two interrelated contributions. Empirically, the thesis interrogates the concept of isolationism and examines how it functioned in US discourse during the Vietnam War and in doing so aims to contribute to knowledge of what the discourse of isolationism did – what it constructed and reperformed. Theoretically, the thesis adds to the securitization theory literature. Specifically, this project bridges in a novel manner the gap between two separate conceptual approaches in securitization theory – approaches theorized in aspects of the literature as mutually exclusive or in tension (cf. Balzacq 2005). Through combining these approaches, this thesis aims to better understand the empirical material, and to broaden securitization theory’s applicability and simplify its practicability by moving away from complicated and rigid applications of speech act theory.

While the ‘Theory’ chapter delves into much more detail on this subject, broadly speaking these two approaches can be summarized as follows.

First, the concept at the heart of securitization theory, that the construction of threats and a condition of (in)security is the creation of something new, through the

performance of known grammars within existing security structures. Saying something is a threat to 'us' both constructs an Other as a threat and establishes that something novel or extraordinary must be done to address this threat (Huysmans, 2011: 374).

Second, the theorization that what is created cannot be too 'new', or at least radically different from the existing context. In other words, the threat must reference concepts that an audience can identify or understand, including objects already accepted as threatening (e.g. missiles), and link itself to narratives of state identity (Buzan, et al., 1998: 33; Hansen, 2006: 25-6; cf. Der Derian, 1995; Nietzsche, 1998). Without such referents, a securitizing move could destabilize a consistent link between the new 'security' and the existing context (Hansen, 2006: 25-6; Huysmans, 1995: 57). In some aspects of the literature, these contexts are interpreted as being extra-discursive, which means they must necessarily preclude construction through speech as in the first concept (cf. Balzacq, 2005; Stritzel, 2007).

This thesis argues that these two theorizations can work together. Combining these conceptualizations is both possible and helpful – particularly in the empirical context of isolationism discourse. Speaking security is usually freighted with gravity: 'us', our state, is *existentially* threatened by this Other, therefore 'we' must take *exceptional* action. Not only is the issue presented as serious, but it is also usually presented by an individual with authority. This thesis posits that this authority also influences other aspects of the securitization, including audiences' perception of the validity of the existing context which is referred to when presenting the securitization.

For example: a president tells their constituents: "We are existentially threatened by another state, it wants to destroy us completely. As we have seen, this other state hates our way of life. That state has 20 missiles, we have 10 and must immediately increase defense spending to build 15 more to ensure our security. As we did in our previous war, we must act decisively. And like our ancestors, we must oppose this state and support our allies".

In this example, the construction of what is threatened and by whom is clear, as are the exceptional actions that must be taken. Aspects of the existing context would likely be known by the audience, such as the specific actions of the other state that may have demonstrated its hatred. Nevertheless, the wider context and actions of both states, the previous war, and the actions of the state's ancestors, were likely much more complex than just a few sentences could convey. Indeed, this narrative of history may not even completely comport with the historical record. However, this context and narrative of history may be reinforced by the gravity of the securitization. Moreover, this thesis argues, when these 'historical' tropes or characteristics are used repeatedly, they become more likely to be accepted by an audience.

Furthermore, this thesis argues that when securitizations construct (in)security, they also (re)create these 'historical' contexts. While the contexts may relate to elements of empirical data from a historical record, they are not necessarily the history a historian would recognize. This thesis theorizes that these contexts are constructed as being natural or taken for granted. In other words, they are presented as historical fact. This may be as simple as 'we did this in the last war' or it might be related to who 'we' are and how 'we' act as a nation, as a people. These securitizations may reinforce the notion that certain understandings of a Self (a nation or a people) are historical fact. The reperformances of context – of history and identity – are not singular instances, however. Part of what makes these discourses durable is that they are iterative. Since they form part of an existing narrative, they are regularly referred to or invoked in order to legitimate newer discourses or constructs, which also entails the existing discourses being reperformed. Though some smaller aspects of the discourses which perform history and identity contexts may change, overall they endure. In this sense, aspects of history and identity are both reperformed and created through discourse.¹

Through combining the two concepts mentioned above, the theorization formulated in this thesis addresses two criticisms of securitization theory: the

¹ Cf. Huysmans 1995: 57. Though this may be paradoxical in terms of the origins of an initial security narrative, analytically there are always some elements of the story to work with.

presence of a universal security grammar, with its concomitant issues of context, and the concept of the audience (see: Balzacq, 2005; Stritzel, 2007; Vuori, 2008). This theorization also builds on the concept of performativity in securitization theory, by engaging with the constitutive potential of iterative security discourses – particularly regarding the construction of audiences and histories (Hansen, 2011; Wæver, 2003; cf. Balzacq, 2010).

This thesis differs from scholars, such as Balzacq (2005), who claim Copenhagen School securitization theory negates the audience because of its theorization that security is constructed through speech acts (self-referentiality). In the view of these scholars, securitizations are not intersubjective processes – because there is no audience involvement – and are thus not self-referential and therefore should incorporate extra-discursive elements into any analysis (pp. 178-9; see also: Hansen, 2011: 359). Furthermore, this thesis argues, contra Balzacq (2005) and Stritzel (2007: 359, *et passim*), that the separation of securitization theory into these two distinct concepts (the construction of security through a speech act and pre-existing context) fails to adequately account for discursive iterability and its constitutive power (see also: Hansen, 2011: 359, *et passim*).

Furthermore, this thesis argues that by forgoing intentionality in securitization theory, there is no need for continued convoluted debates over whether securitizing speech acts are illocutionary or perlocutionary (see, e.g.: Vuori, 2008; Balzacq, 2005; Stritzel, 2007; Wæver, 1996; 1995). Instead, this project conceptualizes securitizations as more than just speech acts. Following Butler (2014), security discourse is conceptualized as performative – as iterative practices by which security discourse constitutes security (p. 2; Weber, 1998: 79-81).

Empirically, this thesis reveals a rather flexible discourse of isolationism, working within more rigid foundational myths of a US character. Much of the power of the Nixon administration's isolationism discourse was tied to isolationism's ostensibly eternal presence in reperformances of an American identity. The reinforcement of isolationism as a 'real' American trait through security discourses enabled the construction of isolationism as a threat or potential threat which could then be used to define the limits of domestic or foreign policy and identity.

The tropes that the US public oscillated between isolationism and internationalism, and that isolationism was a negative approach or trait, were – and remain – open to contestation. However, these were also durable constructs, consistently reperformed by enduring discourses. While this thesis argues that the Nixon administration's isolationism discourse defined the limits of its foreign policy approach, these discourses were still necessarily anchored to broader, established discourses. As these isolationism discourses intersected with and reproduced elements of US identity, history, morality, and foreign policy, they were freighted with authority – and recognizably linked to existing understandings and knowledge. Through the administration's securitizations, the constitution of threats related to isolationism – i.e. the construction of something 'new' – allowed the administration to rhetorically shift its foreign policy approach and present it as not isolationism, while also manipulating the discourse in various domestic electoral contexts. Meanwhile, through recourse to the 'past' and generally accepted notions of US identity, morality, and history, the administration's isolationism discourse portrayed the administration's approaches as truly 'American' and consistent with the past, while also reinforcing these particular understandings of a US Self as natural and accepted.

This thesis argues that securitizations can constitute new meanings: they may construct an issue as security and define the limits of a threatened Self against a threatening Other. However, the process of constituting new meanings may also simultaneously re-perform, reconstruct, and reinforce existing 'context'. Securitizations are theorized in this thesis as intertwined with the larger, structuring discourses in which they operate, including durable US myths and histories. Through situating securitizations within larger systems or assemblages of utterances, practices, and historical contingencies there is less theoretical reliance on speech acts (cf. McDonald, 2008: 568-9) and a greater possibility of exploring the relationships between the construction of new meanings and the reperformance of existing contexts. Such an approach allows this thesis to analyze the Nixon administration's isolationism discourse as a series of iterative acts that advanced its

foreign policy approach, while leveraging the power of history, security, and identity.

What is securitization theory?

Before taking a closer look at isolationism, this section gives a brief overview of securitization theory. Securitization is essentially the process through which an existential threat is constructed discursively – saying something is a threat makes it so. The basic grammatical construction of this process is: this ‘Other’ is a threat to ‘us’ (a Self). This ‘something’ or ‘Other’ is a threat because somebody with authority says it is so, but it is the ‘saying’ part that is of interest –the act of saying something is a threat *creates* ‘security’ (Wæver, 1995: 54-5). Saying something needs to be secured or that it is insecure does not refer to a ‘real’ threat somewhere outside of language – (in)security is a “rhetorical structure” (Huysmans, 1998: 492).

Connected with the idea that someone may have the authority to designate something as a threat is the notion that when something is threatened, exceptional or emergency measures may be used to address this threat (Buzan et al. 1998: 23-25). In the literature this is generally applied to contexts of politics and governments.² If someone with particular knowledge or authority in government, e.g. a president, says that ‘we’ or the state are threatened by an Other, this may be accepted by the public as true. In this manner a condition of security is constructed, the issue is securitized. This government official may then claim the need to transcend the bounds of ‘normal’ politics – to take exceptional actions to protect the Self (the state, ‘us’) from the threat of an Other.

However, in the literature, a securitization is not just theorized as constructing threats and the conditions necessary for individuals to take exceptional actions. When a securitization takes place, this also reinforces the authority of the individual or institution (i.e. an ‘actor’) to ‘speak’ security and designate threats (Hansen,

² In the early securitization literature, Wæver (1995) argued that “[s]ecurity is articulated only from a specific place, in an institutional voice, by elites” (p. 57). However, as Doty (2007) has shown, “securitization practices may originate from actors/agents who are not necessarily strategically positioned politically or institutionally” (p. 130, *et passim*).

2000: 288). Moreover, in the literature there is usually an audience – which can be the public or voters – who has to ‘accept’ that something is a threat (Buzan et al., 1998: 31). This further reinforces the authority of an actor to speak security and reaffirms the relationship between this actor and the audience to whom it speaks.

When thinking of isolationism as a securitization, isolationism may be thought of as the threat that is constructed. However, it may also be conceptualized as forming part of the existing context described above – the known threats and concepts of identity to which a securitization must form a connection. In other words, isolationism is often presented as a policy that will threaten the US, but it is also given as a historical context and portrayed as a part of a US identity. Before further theorizing isolationism as a security discourse, the next section explores the flexibility of historical isolationism discourse.

Children of Light and Darkness: Histories of ‘isolationism’ discourses

Though uses of isolationism generally follow the same threat logic or grammar, the definitions and histories of isolationism are often vague and convoluted. One key aspect of isolationism in the discourse is its relationship with ‘internationalism’ – internationally engaged foreign policies – and the cyclical nature in which the US public is alleged to swing between isolationism and internationalism. This is often presented as an innate trait within the US public or as an inherent aspect of a US character.

The historiography is a tangle of ‘isolationisms’, ‘neo-isolationisms’, and ‘new isolationisms’ – some used as pejoratives, others conceived by scholars to classify specific political positions. However, though a ‘new’ isolationism implies an ‘old’ isolationism, the definitions of the ‘old’ isolationism can vary across time and texts. Generally, when speakers make accusations about ‘isolationism’ or ‘isolationists’ they are not saying a person wanted to stay out of WWII during the interwar period. The implication, and pejorative heft, of the accusation is that an individual or their beliefs are of the same wrong-headed and dangerous logic as the supposed interwar isolationists (though the specifics are usually vague). As such, the use of

‘neo’ or ‘new’ before ‘isolationism’ or ‘isolationist’ in political discourse is usually implied. When a prefix is used, it generally does not carry a tremendous amount of meaning (i.e., it rarely denotes a specific set of beliefs – though some individuals, such as Tucker (1972) in his book *A New Isolationism: Threat or Promise?*, have tried to coalesce positions or policies around an isolationism label).

Invocations of ‘isolationism’ in US foreign policy discourse have represented (and constructed) many objects: a characteristic and history of the American people, a threat, a moral duty, a foreign policy of specific time periods, a creed bequeathed by the ‘Founding Fathers’, and – most often – a pejorative used in rhetorical attacks. As a ‘history’, isolationism is generally associated with the US staying out of the affairs of Europe, particularly during the interwar period. As a policy, it has usually implied some sort of disengagement from the world – again, typically Europe. Though in political discourse, and often in the historiography, the use of ‘isolationism’ or ‘isolationist’ has usually wielded the pejorative force of interwar isolationism, it has also been used in a more general manner. This vaguer usage is also perhaps the best definition of isolationism: “whatever the speaker wishes it to mean, which is usually something pejorative. [...] [I]t's whatever the user happens to oppose in foreign policy” (Roskin, 1972: 118-119).

Roskin (1972) also outlines a fragment of the convoluted historiography of isolationism:

[W]e should be aware that in 1940 Raymond Buell was castigating "the new isolationism" of the late 1930's (as compared to the early 1920's) and in 1956 Norman Graebner dissected "the new isolationism" of the early 1950's (as compared to the late 1930's). Making things even worse, the isolationist rascals refuse to stand and identify themselves as such. Senator Fulbright, for example, who is often implicitly or explicitly identified with the new isolationists, keeps urging America to greater internationalism. The cultural exchange program which bears his name has been praised as producing the greatest international migration of scholars since the fall of Constantinople. (p. 119)

Indeed, one could also go on to add that Selig Adler (1957) applied the term “neo-isolationism” to the supposed ‘internationalist isolationism’ of the 1920s.

Amongst this litany of isolationisms are references to the public or policymakers oscillating between isolationism and internationalism – a trope which appears to be related to the concept of US exceptionalism, with its arguments for the US to lead by moral example at home vs interventionism abroad to defend and spread US values (see: Dunn, 2005: 245; the ‘Methodology’ chapter).³ For example, as Cooper (1969) put it:

Until recently most Americans still appeared to accept the view that wise, responsible, high-minded internationalists had vied with ignorant, prejudiced, selfish isolationists for control of the nation’s foreign policy. That account, of course, simply reversed the roles assigned by the isolationists themselves during their ascendancy in the 1930s. They then portrayed themselves as the Children of Light and the internationalists as the Children of Darkness. (pp. 217-8)

Furthermore, there is a tendency to ‘discover’ isolationism or its antecedents in the words of the ‘Founding Fathers’ – not just in the rhetoric of politicians or pundits, but in the historiography as well (Blower, 2014: 351; an example of this: Reynolds, 1984: 50) - thereby further historicizing the term. This propensity to observe isolationism in the words of early US presidents is problematic because, not only is there no one definition for isolationism, the word was not in use before the early 1900s. Thus, it is possible for some writers to trace a line from the past to present, to anchor policies to the authoritative power of a US founding myth. Indeed, isolationism has often been constructed as an integral foundation of US foreign policy – and identity – by attributing it to the ‘Founding Fathers’.

The ‘Founding Fathers’ isolationism trope is most often supported with a particular set of quotes. The most common quote: President Washington warned that the US should “steer clear of permanent alliances” in his ‘Farewell Address’. Others include: President Adams averred “we should separate ourselves, as far as possible and for as long as possible, from European politics and wars”; President Jefferson spoke of avoiding “entangling alliances”; and President Quincy Adams enjoined that America “goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy” (Dunn, 2005: 253).

³ NB. Though ‘example’ and ‘intervention’ are different arguments, the ultimate goal for both was still spreading US values abroad – ‘perfection at home’ was just a first step towards this objective (Hilfrich, 2012: 83).

All of these quotes were given while presenting certain courses of action in response to specific events and were not characterized at the time as sweeping foreign policy precepts. None of these presidents used the term ‘isolationism’ or ‘isolationist’ (see, e.g., Weinberg, 1940). These statements were not presented as ideological commandments, set down to guide foreign policy for generations, nor were they a part of a coherent, historical policy tradition. Instead, they were pragmatic reactions to specific, contextual issues – and all were “destined to outgrow [their] breeches” (Dunn, 2005: 253-255; Weinburg, 1940: 541; Jonas, 2002: 338-9).

The word ‘isolationist’ first appeared, according to some scholars, in the Oxford English Dictionary in 1901, simply defined as “one who favors or advocates isolation. In U.S. politics one who thinks the Republic ought to pursue a policy of political isolation”, but with no indication as to the context in which the term had been used (Nichols, 2011: 356, n. 14; Jonas, 2002: 337). Blower (2014) finds no evidence of ‘isolationism’ in the Oxford English Dictionary until 1922 (p. 351). The term ‘isolationism’ is first recorded as being used in a foreign policy context in 1922 by the London correspondent for the *Chicago Daily News* (Jonas, 2002: 337).⁴ However, Nichols (2011) observes “[p]rominent and repeated” use of “isolationist” as early as 1898-1899, with only a “conceptually thick ideological form of the word” coming into widespread use “on both sides of the Atlantic” in 1921-1922 (p. 356, n. 14). Blower (2014), records “sporadic” use of ‘isolationism’ in newspapers until the outbreak of WWII, as well as ‘isolationist’ being used “sparingly” as a noun (not as an adjective) until the early 1920s, typically with negative connotations (p. 351). Though it seems that ‘isolationist’ may have preceded the term ‘isolationism’ – which would point to the initial use of the term as a pejorative rather than a set of beliefs (i.e. an ‘ism’) – the definitions of the terms appear to have been in flux from the beginning.⁵

⁴ Blower (2014: 351) records ‘isolationism’ as first appearing in the *Chicago Tribune*, *Boston Globe*, and *New York Times* in 1923.

⁵ In the 19th century, the term ‘isolation’ generally had positive connotations, particularly as the accepted policy of the US. In the 1890s, the “burden of proof” was on US imperialists to justify a new foreign policy (Hilfrich, 2012: 85; 77-94). Though in 1863 Secretary of State Seward rejected the term ‘isolation’, he still affirmed a policy of “nonintervention” as being for the US the “traditional one,

Reifications of isolationism in the historical literature

A frequent side-effect of treating isolationism as an object is that isolationism is reified in historical and political analyses. When isolationism has been analyzed in the literature it has usually been held as constant – it is not problematized, per se – and is taken as having persisted as a singular, if amorphous, object. Particularly in historical approaches, isolationism is treated as a coherent object throughout US history, though sometimes it is constructed as existing on a spectrum (a spectrum of degrees of isolationism and/or a spectrum of isolationism to internationalism). This is not necessarily an issue as historically invocations of isolationism have been persistent and have often followed similar grammars – though this can be problematic when isolationism is projected back to the founding of the US – however, it does run the risk of essentializing isolationism as something inherent in the US public or identity. Furthermore, grouping together disparate invocations of isolationism, which may encompass a plethora of different contexts, has the potential to draw focus away from specific discursive functions (such as a particular domestic political strategy) and to construct an overarching term or definition which may not be conceptually useful or consistent with the historical record.

The muddiness of definitions of isolationism as an object, i.e. as a policy, history, characteristic, etc., has led to conflicting analyses among scholars. Blower (2014) notes that isolationism was a pejorative during the interwar period, “and thus hardly an ideal moniker for historians to take up” (p. 351). For Blower (2014), the policies labeled isolationist had nothing to do with staying out of the world, but rather staying out of the war. (p. 351). As Roskin (1972) states, arguments over isolationism are essentially questions of “where the defense of America starts” (p. 124). Quoting Spykman (1942), he writes:

The Second World War presents the issue of intervention versus isolation in a new phase but it is basically the same question it has always been: shall we

which could not be abandoned” – a connection he reinforced by referencing Washington’s ‘Farewell Address’ (Jonas, 2002: 341).

protect our interests by defense on this side of the water or by active participation in the lands across the oceans? (ibid.)

Blower (2014) refrains from anachronistically ‘finding’ isolationism in the distant past of the ‘Founding Fathers’ (he specifically addresses this) and calls for the term ‘neutrality’ to be used to draw attention to the complex debates underlying US interwar foreign policy (p. 349). He furthermore goes on to acknowledge that isolationism (and ‘internationalism’) are overly broad terms that bring with them many “misleading” implications, and that many scholars who rely on them concede as much (p. 350).

Indeed, the difficulty of using a term such as isolationism in an analysis is present in the following example. Senator William Borah (Republican, Idaho) was a leading member of the ‘Irreconcilables’, a group of senators largely responsible for the US not ratifying the Treaty of Versailles and staying out of the League of Nations in 1919. Nichols (2013) describes Senator Borah as espousing in the 1930s “an internationally engaged, belligerent type of isolationism [...and believing] it perfectly appropriate to have both multilateral and unilateral trade bills” – the latter a view not shared by “more cautious isolationists” such as Senators Gerald Nye (R – ND) and Arthur Vandenberg (R – MI) (p. 398). The gap between the discourses and policies of Sens. Borah, Nye, and Vandenberg are papered over by such an analysis (Guinsburg, 1984: 255-256; cf. Cole, 1983). Furthermore, such a broad array of policies grouped under the single heading of ‘isolationist’ provides little use as a unit of analysis.

The application of isolationism as a unit of analysis – as what Cooper (1969: 1) describes as a conceptual term “historians have inherited rather than invented” – is prevalent in the literature. However, Cooper’s assessment is not entirely correct. Certainly, there is archival evidence that at some point during the interwar period individuals started calling other individuals isolationists and their beliefs isolationism. However, much – though not all – of the literature on isolationism objectivizes the term into a particular viewpoint, policy, or history.

Scholars, such as Nichols (2011, 2013), in his attempts to trace isolationism as a political position or ideology, risk reifying isolationism and imparting a historical

provenance onto a distantly connected series of incoherent and contextualized policies. Conversely, other scholars have been able to construct differing definitions of isolationism and disprove its existence during the interwar period entirely. Braumoeller (2010), by defining isolationism with a view towards security policy and military involvement, can state, “American isolationism [during the interwar period] is a myth” (p. 349). Similarly, Williams (1954, 1972) can label interwar US isolationism a “legend” by viewing it through the prism of US global economic involvement and expansionism (for Williams as a ‘revisionist’ historian, see: Krueger, 1973; Doenecke, 1979).

Nichols is not the only scholar to reify isolationism as a consistent historical object. Charles Kupchan (2020) and Eric Nordlinger (1995) both narrowly define isolationism by interpreting it as a coherent strategy, which persisted across history, and as rooted in a US identity/public. Kupchan (2020) generally “defines isolationism as a grand strategy aimed at disengagement with foreign powers and the avoidance of enduring strategic commitments beyond the North American homeland” (p. 6). Kupchan also attempts to strip the pejorative associations away from the ‘strategy’ of isolationism. In this reading, it was “America’s pronounced passivity during the dark history of the interwar era that gave isolationism the bad name it has today” (p. 8). For Kupchan, US policymakers during this period “took isolationism way too far” and the “isolationist excesses” of this era “do not justify blanket indictment of isolationist thinking that has prevailed” since WWII (p. 11).

Similarly, in a “sharply revisionist interpretation of isolationism” in aid of formulating a “national security strategy”, Nordlinger (1995) attempts to “reconfigure” isolationism and remove the “epithets that have been foisted upon it” to find its “true meanings’ (pp. 3, 5). Like Kupchan, Nordlinger (1995) presents isolationism as a spectrum (*inter alia* “strategic”, “quasi”, and “full blown” isolationisms) (pp. 6, 21). Though he never clearly defines this “full-blown” isolationism, Nordlinger does say full-blown isolationism does not advocate the “reasonably ambitious promotion of liberal and peaceful causes abroad” – but Nordlinger believes “[i]solationists are right in pointing to the folly of a vaulting idealism” (p. 7). Through eliminating the “misleading epithets and

characterizations” Nordlinger claims that “isolationism is taken and considered as its advocates have always meant for it to be” (ibid.). Nordlinger does not make clear precisely who these advocates are, why their definitions should be prioritized, nor how he was able to divine their intentions.

Kupchan (2020) specifically exempts expansionism within North America and the Western hemisphere from his definition of isolationism, and in doing so argues that author Robert Kagan and scholars Bear Braumoeller, Warren Cohen, and Melvyn Leffler are wrong to object to descriptions of the interwar US as isolationist (p. 30). In Kupchan’s definition, the US not pursuing “geopolitical ambition” beyond the Western hemisphere – specifically, not pursuing “enduring strategic commitments” beyond the hemisphere, i.e. building “far flung empires” – marks the US as isolationist (pp. 31-2). Kupchan claims this aversion to “strategic entanglement abroad” – isolationism in his reading – “became central to the American creed” and “lasted as long as it did because it was rooted in who Americans were and what they stood for” (p. 34).

Both of these accounts reify isolationism as a persistent trait throughout US history. Kupchan (2020) constructs isolationism as having been present in the US since its founding (e.g., pp. 5, 7, 29-30). Beyond being simply a history policymakers referred to or drew on, Kupchan (2020) presents isolationism as fundamental, something he repeatedly refers to as “part of America’s creed” (e.g., pp. 9, 365). Though Kupchan (2020) attempts to examine “the trajectory of isolationist thinking and practice” (p. 25), he also reifies isolationism as a “sentiment” (p. 8). Specifically, Kupchan (2020) constructs isolationism as something that has “persisted across time, party, and region because it was embedded in the nation’s identity and infused its politics” (p. 17). In addition to locating isolationism as a trait within a US identity, Kupchan’s work also reproduces the supposedly objective fact of the US public’s pendulum-like oscillation between isolationism and internationalism (pp. 23, 356, 365-6).

Nordlinger (1995) also reconstructs the concept of persistent, if not dominant, isolationism across US history. He asserts there is “virtually no disagreement about isolationism’s having served” the US “exceptionally well” from 1796 to 1896 (p. 11). Nordlinger also traces isolationism through to the 1990s (pp. 12-5). Indeed, for

some reason Nordlinger even traces the “isolationist epithet” back to the 1840s, claiming without proof that it was used “against those who opposed the breaking of diplomatic relations with Austria in support of Hungarian self-determination” (p. 7).⁶

Nordlinger (1995) and Kupchan (2020) furthermore present a spectrum of isolationism/internationalism as an enduring US history, ongoing public sentiment, and concrete factor in foreign policymaking. Both authors also advocate the adoption of a foreign policy approach that falls along this spectrum, but closer towards the isolationism end. However, Nordlinger and Kupchan are careful to set the limits of useful or appropriate isolationisms – previous incarnations of isolationism approaches are presented as having taking things “too far” into “full-blown” isolationism. Likewise, the authors set limits at the internationalism end of the spectrum. Kupchan (2020) calls for a “judicious retrenchment” focused on “shedding US entanglements in the periphery, not the in the strategic heartland of Eurasia” (p. 368). Nordlinger’s (1995) approach is conceptually a bit more imprecise – in terms of isolationism and an under-developed concept of ‘security’ – but calls for the US to have the unilateral ability to “say ‘no’” on international issues (while still ‘leading’ the world) (p. 275). However, Nordlinger (1995) advocates the “inclusion of some bilateral and multilateral security-centered accords”, such as nuclear nonproliferation which “are not inconsistent with isolationist thinking” (p. 277).

Stefan Klein (2017) also reifies isolationism as a past and “tradition” stretching back to Washington’s ‘Farewell Address’ (pp. 16, 124). Klein takes a more nuanced approach than many other scholars by noting the vague and often ahistorical ways isolationism is invoked or presented in political discourse – and recognizes Trump’s discourse against NATO as domestic bluster rather than foreign policymaking (pp. 14, 138-9). However, rather than focusing on isolationism as something that is used (e.g. as a discourse), Klein (2017) sees debates about it as “an essential element in US foreign policy rooted in the country’s historical traditions” (p. 19). Klein appears

⁶ Nordlinger (1995) briefly returns to this thought, but his only reference is Powaski (1991), who provides a quote that does not contain the terms ‘isolationist’ or ‘isolationism’ (p. 186).

to view isolationism – or its cyclical expression – as innate in the US public, that in “times of domestic turmoil” the US “tends to turn inward and put a stronger emphasis on its isolationist traditions” (p. 127). This ‘isolationism’ is defined as a “spectrum of isolationist behavior” which ranges “from military non-intervention to full-fledged economic and military neutrality” (ibid.). Klein also seems to reinforce a vague realist/idealist dichotomy by noting that the intrusion of this public opinion into US foreign policymaking leads policymakers “astray into emotionalism and subjectivity” (p. 130).

Bret Stephens (2014) reifies isolationism as a “tendency, frame of mind, [and] an attitude” (p. 19). However, rather than a work of scholarship, his book essentially functions as political rhetoric and attempts to harness the pejorative heft of isolationism. The gist of Stephens’ argument is that the Obama administration did not understand just how dangerous the world remained and did not apprehend the necessity of the US maintaining an internationally engaged foreign policy (see, e.g. pp. 7-23). Stephens explicitly states that the US (of c. 2014) was either poised to return to the world of the “1930s” or was in a situation similar to the “1920s or ‘30s” (pp. xv, 21). Stephens also presents potential US foreign policy options as being a choice between the US as “world policeman” or an isolationism which would lead to a “shooting range of global pandemonium [...] very much like the 1930s” (p. xv). In other words, the “*only* alternative” to “Pax Americana” would be “global disorder” (p. 143, emphasis original). Though polemic accounts can render cogent, even revealing analysis, Stephens’ work provides no real insight and does not seriously engage with the historical record or any academic texts. Furthermore, there is very little engagement with the concept of ‘isolationism’. Where the book is instructive – likely unintentionally – is in its employment of a rudimentary form of isolationism *qua* discourse. Stephens attacks the Obama administration based on a knowledge of how the world supposedly works, and crudely constructs the administration’s alleged foreign policy approach within a strict dichotomy of a positive, truly ‘American’ internationalism versus an ignorant, dangerous isolationism.

Isolationism as a persistent disciplining discourse

In conceptualizing isolationism as a security discourse, this thesis does not hold that isolationism was the only threat. Indeed, it is necessary to parse this discourse to draw out what was threatening and what was under threat. In general, during the Nixon administration isolationism as a policy was presented as threatening, both historically and in the present. However, the broad logic then, and in historical isolationism discourse, was never that isolationism itself was the direct threat. Isolationism was constructed as a threat that would enable a greater threat: the US coming under attack from other states. The knowledge associated with why this would happen was constructed from historical 'lessons' (usually WWII) and a purported understanding of how the international realm functioned. In this sense, the security discourse of isolationism can be thought of as performing a disciplining function. Foreign policy approaches were and still are disciplined as unacceptable for the US moral mission or inappropriate in the context of the 'reality' of the world, through speakers designating them as isolationist.

The most obvious and recent examples of this discourse are the charges of isolationism cast at candidate and then President Trump, which contained a mixture of charges and rebuttals, by and from journalists, academics, and politicians. Most of these accusations revolved around questions of whether a particular policy approach was or was not isolationism (e.g. Hitchcock, July 13, 2018). As with the isolationism discourse before it, there was little coherence across these articles in terms of a definition of isolationism. The 'fact' of Trump's isolationism was further reinforced by descriptions of President Biden's 'internationalism', which has often been described as traditional or normal (e.g. McCreesh, June 20, 2021).

Previous administrations were also accused of isolationism. In the late 1970s, neoconservatives charged the Carter administration with isolationism and appeasement – while also making such accusations at the preceding Nixon and Ford administrations. Some of these neoconservatives would find influence, and even jobs, in the Reagan and both Bush administrations (see, e.g. Halper & Clarke, 2004:

55-56, 62; Podhoretz, 1977).⁷ In the post-Cold War era, accusations of isolationism continued. For example, former (Republican) Secretary of State Baker accused the early Clinton administration of “creeping isolationism” because he believed it doubted the necessity of “American leadership” in the world. (Democratic) Senate majority leader Daschle stated that President George W. Bush’s “unilateralist policies” served to isolate the US (Baker, 1993; Dunn, 2005: 242-243, 246-247; for a discussion on unilateralism and isolationism, see: Dumbrell, 2005).

However, accusations of isolationism directed at the Trump administration were more forceful in their defense of a liberal, international order compared with the isolationism discourse aimed at previous administrations. For example, former NATO secretary general Anders Fogh Rasmussen said Trump was a:

fully-fledged American isolationist and this is a clear disruption from what was seen created by President Truman immediately after the Second World. All presidents until President George W Bush adhered to that principle that we should have a rules-based world order led by the U.S. and this is exactly what is at stake now. (Rasmussen quoted in Cole, June 6, 2018)

Connecting Trump’s policies to isolationism via his vague ‘America First’⁸ approach, Senator John McCain said in 2017:

The American example and American leadership are indispensable to securing a peaceful and prosperous future. Our failure to remain engaged in Europe and enforce the hard-won peace of 1918 had made that clear. There could be no more isolationism, no more tired resignation -- no more ‘America First’. (McCain quoted in Cillizza, Nov. 1, 2017)

Even Trump seemed unwilling to accept an isolationist label, stating, “Not isolationist, I’m not isolationist, but I am ‘America First’” (Trump, March 27, 2016); and “I am not an isolationist by any stretch of the imagination [...] fake news” (Trump, March 17, 2017).

This isolationism discourse appears to have had, or attempted, a disciplining function. The discourse presented the Trump administration’s foreign policy

⁷ Neoconservative thought will be covered in more detail in the ‘Ideological Character’ chapter.

⁸ NB. The term “America First” was coined in 1915 by President Wilson, whilst he was contemplating the League of Nations (Cooper, 1969: 37). Offering the motto “America First”, Wilson declared: “Let us think of America before we think of Europe, in order that we may be fit to be Europe’s friend when the day of tested friendship comes” (ibid., pp. 35-6).

moves/instincts as isolationist and thus in contravention of the (moral) liberal, international order. Since, as mentioned earlier, the term isolationism is so vague, there is little analytical value in determining if Trump's foreign policy was isolationist or not. Therefore, it would be specious to conclude that Trump's foreign policy proposals received more of this isolationism disciplining discourse than those of previous administrations because the Trump proposals were simply more isolationist than other administrations' proposals. Of interest here is what the discourse *did*. When a policy is described as isolationist, is something also implied – or constructed – about what is *not* isolationist and how one should understand foreign policy, the world, and a US Self?

Charges of isolationism were also levelled at the Obama administration. Josef Joffe, writing in *The Atlantic* in early 2016, said President Obama was “not a realist, but an isolationist with drones and special-operations forces” (Joffe, March 10, 2016). For Joffe, Obama's foreign policy (the ‘Obama doctrine’) was “rooted in the oldest tradition of them all”: isolationism. In this reading, “[m]any of the Founding Fathers were isolationists” and it is here that Obama fits into “America's ideological history” (ibid.). While Joffe's article lacks nuance, it still reproduces a dichotomy of ‘realism’ vs ‘isolationism’ as being a historical fact of US foreign policy, which seems consistent with a disciplining function. Joffe constructs a foreign policy lineage by lumping quite a few terms in together. His initial question inquires as to where President Obama fell on “the traditional matrix of American thought on foreign policy: realism vs. idealism, isolation vs. intervention, power politics vs. liberal institutionalism”, is rendered down into a simple realism vs. isolationism dichotomy (Joffe, March 10, 2016).

Another example, this time from the Biden era, demonstrates how the same discourse can be used in a different fashion thanks to the flexibility of ‘isolationism’ as a term and the two sides of exceptionalism (creating an example at home and bringing that example to the world). An editorial in the *Washington Post* from June of 2021 calls for the US to create a “deeper shift in our approach to engaging with the world” by recognizing it is *not* the “indispensable nation” and to instead “focus on getting our own house in order” (vanden Heuvel, June 15, 2021). The article then

quotes a discussion with the academic Andrew Bacevich, in which he claimed that the US should focus on “providing for the security and the well-being of the American people where they live”. The article’s author, vanden Heuvel, summing up these points concludes: “This is not isolationism, this is realism” (ibid.). As with the Joffe example, in this construction the import and force of academia – of rationality and knowledge – lends a gravity to ‘realism’ vs a naive ‘isolationism’. The US exceptionalism invoked in this example is more nuanced: while the US should focus on itself, it should also maintain its engagements with the world. Moreover, the onus of world leadership is attributed to the US as given or unquestioned.

These invocations of isolationism in the press and by policymakers are theorized as reproducing more than just the ‘threat’ of isolationism. This performative security discourse also reproduced understandings of how the international functioned, what the US identity (national identity or of the US public) was or should be, and what was *not* isolationism and thus appropriate or rational. This thesis conceptualizes this disciplining function as having occurred in the Nixon administration’s isolationism discourse during Vietnam as well. While not the immediate focus of the thesis, two structuring/disciplining discourses related to the construction of ‘knowledge’ and US exceptionalism are still theorized as having underpinned isolationism discourse during this period. These two discourses, epistemic realism and US exceptionalism, will be situated within the methodology in the next section.

Methodology

This thesis employs a Foucauldian genealogical ‘history of the present’. This methodology is a ‘history of the present’ in the sense that it allows for analysis of “objects given as necessary for our reality” (Dean, 1994: 33). In this manner, a genealogy can reveal the many ways in which an object was formed (ibid.). These multiple conditions for the formation of an object – in this case isolationism – are conceptualized as political, discursive practices. These discursive practices are theorized as having reproduced the ‘realness’ or ‘truth’ of isolationism (Bacchi & Bonham, 2014: 191; Foucault, 1980: 132-133). This methodology also helps reveal

isolationism as constructed. Isolationism is not an inherent trait of the US public. The innateness of isolationism in the US public is conceptualized as having been objectivized by a multitude of practices (which concealed themselves through this process as well) (Veyne, 1997: 159-160). In the first instance, isolationism is theorized as having been objectivized by isolationism discourses, a selection of which are analyzed in this thesis.

Conceiving of isolationism as constructed does not mean isolationism discourse did not draw on elements of history evident in the empirical record – indeed this likely added further authority and credibility to the discourse. As mentioned earlier, a securitization often seeks to maintain a link to recognized context (Buzan, et al., 1998: 33; see also: Balzacq, 2005). This allows elements of the securitization to be recognizable and maintains stability. In this thesis's Foucauldian methodology, the contexts the securitization maintains a link with, are also conceptualized as discourses. And like isolationism, they are also conceived as being assemblages of historical practices that appear to us as objects necessary for our reality.

The structuring discourses mentioned in the last section, are conceptualized as providing the context that the security discourse of isolationism drew on and by necessity maintained a stable link with. Inherent in discourses – 'what is said' – are the 'rules' "that explain how it is possible to say (or know) certain things" (Bacchi & Bonham, 2014: 180; Doty, 1993). The rules regarding the formation of 'knowledge' (what is said and accepted as 'true') within a discourse are constructed and reinforced as the discourse is articulated (Bacchi & Bonham, 2014: 174, 179; Bacchi, 2012: 3). Within a securitization there is a similar 'grammar' of security that must be followed for (in)security to be constructed – for an audience to understand something as a security issue – which Wæver (2003) describes as "a plot with existential threat, point of no return and a possible way out" (p. 14).

A discourse, and the 'rules' within it, construct a 'reality' in which certain practices not only became possible, but they also seem reasonable and unremarkable (Doty, 1993: 308). Within such discursive 'realities', if the same type of relations (e.g. between a Self and an Other) can be found across different texts, this usually indicates a particular logic. The presence of this relational logic across multiple texts

suggests a dominant discourse underlies these texts within a particular time and space (ibid., pp. 308-9). This thesis posits that isolationism security discourse during the Vietnam period was underpinned by an epistemic realism and US exceptionalism discourse. As these discourses are conceptualized as providing many of the foundations on which the Nixon administration's isolationism discourse drew, these discourses are important for understanding how these isolationism discourses may have functioned.

What about the Nixon administration?

All this talk of methodological discourse begs the question: what role did the Nixon administration play? This is not a question of where the data fits in, but a question of whether the administration wielded isolationism discourse (or any other discourses, for that matter) as a political tool or was the administration too intertwined within the discourse to truly manipulate it? In other words, did the administration see isolationism discourse as a malleable rhetoric and deploy it to further their own aims or did they just function in what they perceived as reality, reacting to what they assumed were concrete facts and events?

The short answer is it is probably unknowable, but likely a combination of both the administration wielding the discourse and functioning in what they perceived as natural conditions. Certainly, it appears that the Nixon administration used isolationism discourse offensively and defensively to deny that the Nixon foreign policy approach (the Nixon Doctrine) and the Nixon plan for withdrawal from Vietnam (Vietnamization) were isolationist. A predominant finding of this thesis is that the administration's isolationism discourse constructed the Nixon Doctrine as a middle ground approach. In this sense, the administration's isolationism discourse seems to have functioned as a political, and even electoral, discourse as much as a foreign policy discourse.

Securitization theory is not strictly a post-structuralist theory. In much of the securitization theory literature, securitizing actors are conceptualized as having agency, for example, by making decisions about whether to address a situation by

securitizing it or not (e.g. Buzan, et al., 1998: 32). Furthermore, the audience is theorized in this literature as choosing whether or not to accept a securitization. Indeed, the Arendtian concept that security is decided “*among* the subjects” is an important point in the Copenhagen School securitization theory – particularly in Ole Wæver’s work (ibid., p. 31, emphasis original; see: Wæver, 2015: 122; Wæver, 2003: 14 n. 43). The securitizing actor can only “influence” the securitization process, which is ultimately constituted intersubjectively (Wæver, 2000: 252, 286 n. 5; Wæver, 2003: 14 n. 43).

In the Foucauldian genealogy used in this thesis, the method used is not concerned with “discerning and accessing the intentions of actors, which remain subjectively internal and therefore inscrutable” (Neal, 2019: 61). However, “there is a role for the analyst beyond interpreting and describing the meanings and intentions of actors, and this role is to interpret systems of meaning and their significance in ways that may not be apparent to contextual actors themselves” (ibid., pp. 54-5). This thesis employs a similar approach by attempting to interpret what the discourse did rather than just what the administration might have intended it to do. Some non-public administration texts are utilized in this thesis to help contextualize and understand the administration’s public discourse. However, the focus is on the performance of the discourse itself.

This thesis argues that the administration’s isolationism discourse reproduced as ‘fact’ the notion that the American public was innately prone to swinging between ‘isolationism’ and ‘internationalism’. Furthermore, interrelated with this concept of a US psychological character, its isolationism discourse constructed and reproduced US responsibilities to itself and the world, constituted knowledges of how the world was organized and should be interpreted, and recreated an ideological or national character as it produced an election discourse. Whether or not the administration believed any of this was true and regardless of how, or if, any constructs of isolationism may have influenced its decision-making, the administration’s discourse constructed and reinforced these tropes.

These discourses are apparent in the public texts of the administration. In this sense, the administration did use these discourses or at least deploy these tropes.

Whether the administration legitimately believed isolationism was an innate threat, if it cynically deployed it to divide the country for campaign purposes and advance its foreign policy approach, or if it believed isolationism was a natural fact but still attempted to manipulate it to advance its political goals, is not relevant. As mentioned, in securitization theory the actors are conceptualized as having agency – they choose to securitize an issue or not. Whether the actor securitizes because they believe there is a ‘real’ threat or they are attempting to access exceptional powers, they are still theorized as having the agency to make the choice. This thesis draws the same ontological distinction, for the sake of analysis. The Nixon administration is conceptualized as having chosen to deploy isolationism discourse and in doing so reproduced it as natural, whether they believed it was ‘true’ or not is theorized as indiscernible in this methodology.

Methods

Again, even though securitization theory is not a post-structuralist theory this thesis – following Hansen (2011) – uses a post-structuralist interpretation of the theory (based on the many post-structural elements in, particularly, the Copenhagen School version of securitization theory). This study predominately analyzes the discourse of the Nixon administration, along with the discourse of some foreign policy elites, academics, and the media. These texts were chosen because this is where isolationism discourse, as a predominately elite discourse, was articulated. As the executive branch in the US in the late 1960s and early 70s had substantial powers to dictate foreign policy and define threats to the state, the administration was the primary actor capable of constructing security and thus using isolationism discourse. However, as Hansen (2006) point out, in a post-structuralist discourse analysis there is no statistical method to measure how many texts should be selected for examination, beyond focusing on periods of time where political and media activity is heightened (such as during the latter stages of US involvement in the Vietnam War) (pp. 77-8).

This thesis does not attempt to reveal isolationism in the past, to dispassionately examine historical objects (Bonditti et al., 2015: 183). Instead, it examines

relationships between power and knowledge (ibid.). However, these relationships are distilled by the analyst into analytical constructs, identified through reading texts (Hansen, 2006: 46). In this manner the analyst is a part of the methodology. The choice of what data is used and where the parameters of analysis are set is “part of the critical intentionality of the analyst” (Neal, 2019: 64). This thesis explicitly views isolationism discourse as political – and as discussed in the ‘Theory’ chapter, security can be conceptualized as politics. This approach allows the thesis to examine aspects of the discourse which appear to be prominently concerned with domestic identity politics and electoral strategy. Furthermore, it further problematizes ‘isolationism’ by revealing it as political, utilitarian, and inconstant, rather than a type of strategic foreign policy or academic unit of analysis.

Using Hansen’s (2006: 46) framework of ‘basic discourses’, this thesis identifies four ideal-type discourses that all converge around a common theme of ‘isolationism’. Though these isolationism-related discourses are not necessarily the most frequently deployed discourses, they are empirically prevalent (ibid.). The analytical value of the basic discourse approach is that it provides a framework to view multiple representations and policies as “systemically connected”, but which also construct multiple Others with “different degrees of radical difference” (ibid., pp. 46-7). These four basic discourses are: Ethical Responsibility, Spatio-Temporal Othering, Ideological Character, and Psychological Character.

Selection of sources

The Vietnam era was initially selected because at first glance there appeared to be more public invocations and discussions of isolationism during this time, relative to other points in post-WWII US history. Reviewing newspapers and speeches during US military involvement in Vietnam (ca. 1964-73) largely supported this assumption. Upon closer inspection it became clear that, while the Johnson administration (1963-8) did invoke isolationism, the Nixon administration (1969-74) not only used the terms isolationism and isolationist more often, but also did so in a more dynamic manner.

As this thesis theorizes isolationism as a security discourse – that is, the construction of a threat presented to the public – the focus was mainly on public data. While public speeches by the administration were the primary focus, the project relied on a broader discourse in newspapers, as well as the Congressional Record – which contains transcripts of speeches from members of Congress spoken in session, as well as articles and non-Congressional speeches submitted by members of Congress to the record for publication. Some non-public texts, particularly administration documents, were used to provide context and insight into the administration’s public discourses.

In most instances, for transcripts of presidential speeches and remarks, the thesis relied on the University of California Santa Barbara’s ‘American Presidency Project’ online archive of presidential public documents. The contents of other speeches, remarks, interviews, and comments were found in newspaper articles. As this thesis is concerned with the public discourse of the administration, rather than reactions of the public or its interpretation or coverage of the discourse, there was minimal methodological importance placed on which newspapers were researched.

Generally, particularly in the late 1960s and early 70s, the content and coverage in newspapers of major stories such as foreign policy announcements and presidential speeches were rather homogenous across the country. For such coverage, many papers either relied on a wire service (e.g. AP or UPI) or a similar service from major papers such as *The New York Times*. This was also the case for many op-ed and commentary pieces which were syndicated in papers throughout the country. For this reason, this thesis relied on larger newspapers at the time such as *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Baltimore Sun*, and *The Boston Globe*.

Many texts were identified and selected initially because they included the terms isolationism or isolationist. However, as the contours of the discourse and the specific time periods of particular debates became more apparent, the research criteria expanded.

The layout of the thesis

This thesis begins with the 'Theory' chapter, which outlines the theoretical foundations for the thesis along with its contributions to the securitization theory literature.

The second chapter, 'Methodology', then expounds upon the methodology used in this thesis – including two structuring discourses – which is closely interrelated with the 'Theory' chapter.

The next chapter, 'Ethical Responsibility', conceptualizes an isolationism discourse which constructed moral obligations through the advocacy of an internationally engaged foreign policy. This discourse constructed US responsibilities to the world and to itself. Through the function of this discourse the Nixon Doctrine was constructed as *not* isolationist and within an accepted 'moral' US character. Moreover, the discourse presented the doctrine as capable of accommodating a war-weary US public, whilst still maintaining US international engagement – itself necessary for the security of the US and perpetuating a US moral identity. The chapter argues that the administration's discourse presented its foreign policy approach as both pragmatic and a morally appropriate choice through acknowledging the malleability of US exceptionalism and morality tropes. In arguing that the world was now multipolar, allowing for reduced US responsibility but still requiring US leadership, the administration presented its foreign policy approach as a pragmatic middle ground between isolationism and globalism.

Fourth is the 'Spatio-Temporal Othering' chapter, which focuses on the discursive construction of 'worlds' – fundamental knowledges about how international contexts function and should be interpreted. The chapter argues that this discourse constructed a world in which the border between a free world and communism still needed to be maintained – based on a Soviet nuclear threat – but that through defending this border with the US nuclear shield, the US could reduce its responsibility to provide troops for the defence of other states. At the same time, another overlapping spatio-temporal discourse constructed a world of individual states with interests, rather than an ideological bipolar world, which was presented

as allowing the administration to engage in détente and reduce some US international responsibilities – itself presented as a pragmatic response to a desire for isolationism within the US public. This discourse constructed a threat from ‘unilateral disarmers’, allegedly elites who wanted to get rid of the US nuclear deterrent who the administration accused of isolationism. This ‘threat’ was co-constituted with a historic, interventionist ‘globalist’ foreign policy, which in turn situated the Nixon Doctrine in the middle between these two poles.

Next, the ‘Ideological Character’ chapter examines one of two subsets of isolationism discourse used to reproduce an aspect of an American ‘character’. This chapter concentrates on an isolationism discourse that reproduced a specific moral or ideological character, contrasted against an un-American ‘vocal minority’ segment of the public. Rather than focus on the features or details of what comprised this ideological character, the analysis focuses on the function of the discourse. The discourse seems to have constructed a US ideological character – one of honor, of a nation that kept its word – by vilifying a ‘vocal minority’. This discourse did not explicitly invoke the terms ‘isolationism/t’, because it was partly targeted at a segment of the public the administration perceived as inherently isolationist. Furthermore, as the sentiments apparently underpinning isolationism were connected with a US exceptionalist moral example, and thus inherently ‘American’, the isolationist term was not used against an Other specifically constructed as un-American.

The final analytical chapter, ‘Psychological Character’, seeks to demonstrate how the administration constructed a ‘psychological’ aspect of a US ‘character’ through its isolationism discourse. This discourse is conceptualized as having reproduced as unquestioned fact the concept that the US public was inherently prone to oscillating between ‘internationalism’ and ‘isolationism’ – and that a desire for isolationism after years of Vietnam and global, interventionist, anticommunist foreign policies was understandable. The administration was then able to present its foreign policy approach, and its plan for ending US involvement in Vietnam, as rational reactions to an understood entity (the US public). This discourse constructed a ‘moral strength’ within the US public and then appealed to this strength so that the public

could overcome its desire for isolationism. The administration then discursively linked the US public's moral strength with domestic leadership and US international leadership. This discourse also presented foreign policy elites as liable to the same oscillations as the rest of the public and portrayed them as unable to produce adequate foreign policy approaches.

Conclusion

Collectively these chapters demonstrate the functioning of a broad political discourse. The administration's deployment of isolationism appears to have been an attempt to set the limits of public debate and define perceptions of the Nixon administration's plan for withdrawal from Vietnam and its wider foreign policy approach. Furthermore, this discourse seems to have functioned in dialogue with other discourses concerning Vietnam and the Nixon Doctrine, as well as how the administration anticipated its policies would be perceived. In some respects, isolationism discourse seems to have been deployed to get ahead of any accusations that the Nixon Doctrine – which explicitly advocated reducing US international responsibilities and gradual withdrawal from Vietnam – was isolationist. In terms of competing policies, particularly calls for immediate withdrawal from Vietnam, the administration's discourse emphasized the necessity for moral courage, US credibility, and international leadership through a differentiation against isolationism, in order to Other these policies. Furthermore, the administration's discourse constructed policies and policy advocates, essentially strawmen, to make the Nixon Doctrine appear to be the middle ground – including accusing elites of wanting to completely withdraw from the world or wanting to unilaterally dismantle the US nuclear deterrent.

Throughout these discourses, there was the discursive construction and reproduction of a US moral character, the inherent disposition of the US public, knowledges of how the world allegedly functioned, and an inherent, immutable moral mission of the US. Though these discourses were anchored to and constitutive of already structured discourses, they occurred around sites of contestation. The administration's isolationism discourses represent attempts to

reperform isolationism as a pejorative discourse, while shifting the goalposts in terms of what made isolationism a pejorative. As the US public appeared to demand withdrawal from Vietnam – at whichever pace – along with some sort of reduction of US involvement in the world, the Nixon administration attempted to placate them with its foreign policy approach. At the same time, the administration's discourse designated other policies (immediate or negotiated withdrawal, etc.) as isolationism, while assuring the public that its policies would be moving away from globalism towards reduced involvement. If one were to imagine the administration's foreign policy moving on a path from globalism towards radically reduced involvement, the administration's discourse figuratively cleared a point beyond which it planned to go and designated this point isolationism. The point was essentially arbitrary – and not very far from the Nixon Doctrine itself – but this allowed the administration to situate itself in a middle ground.

Chapter two: Theory

This thesis conceptualizes the Nixon administration's isolationism discourse during prosecution of the US war in Vietnam as a performative security discourse. Theorizing this isolationism discourse in such a manner is beneficial in two interrelated ways.

First, as 'isolationism' is a vague and historically convoluted term often used as a pejorative, there is much more to be gained analytically by conceptualizing isolationism as a discourse rather than as an object (e.g. a foreign policy, history, characteristic, etc.). The questions 'what was isolationism' or 'who were isolationists' could have many answers, even just within the context of this thesis – and, as was explored in the 'Introduction' chapter, the answer would likely be 'a policy/group/individual/etc. a speaker disagreed with for political/analytical/ideological/etc. reasons', or, 'a policy/group/individual/etc. that an academic/journalist/etc. classified as such for any number of disparate reasons'. Therefore, this project asks the question: 'what did isolationism *do*'? In the context of the US during the Nixon administration's prosecution of the war in Vietnam, what did the increased invocations of isolationism in public discourse represent and was this indicative of something more than just contestation over whether the US should be isolationist or not?

Second, this project argues that the 'logic' of isolationism is essentially that of a security discourse. Put simply, to invoke isolationism is to warn of the 'threat' of isolationism to the continued existence of the US. Beyond the concept of isolationism discourse having the 'grammar' of security discourse, this project utilizes and engages with securitization theory to further explore what isolationism discourse was able to do. In the literature of securitization theory, security discourses are theorized as being able to construct objects and subjectivities. According to the 'Copenhagen School' strand of the literature, such 'securitizing

moves’ – discursive acts which construct the condition of (in)security – may also constitute an ‘audience’ for such moves.

Generally, the ‘audience’ in securitization theory are those to whom securitizing discourses are directed by a security speaker – the audience are those individuals who listen to speakers with authority whose discourse says ‘something is a *threat* to *us* (our state, our people, etc.), therefore we must take a specific set of actions’. This project theorizes that this audience may also be constituted as a threat within the securitizing discourse. Furthermore, the project argues that the securitizing discourse may construct the audience as having a specific ‘character’. This ‘character’ is presented in the discourse as being based on either a history or a ‘scientific’ knowledge. In constructing the audience as a potential threat, the security discourse constitutes this past or knowledge as pre-existing through the presentation of the threat. Furthermore, the authority and gravity associated with the concept of (in)security helps reinforce the acceptance of these characteristics as natural.

This theorization – that the audience of a securitizing discourse may be constituted as both an element of a national or public Self and as a potential threat to a Self – is used to conceptualize isolationism discourse as a powerful political tool. Specifically, this project explores what else isolationism constructed and reproduced – including understandings of a US ‘character’, narratives of history, and how the international realm was to be understood. In this manner, the administration’s isolationism discourse can be analyzed as a political discourse which, using the authority and gravity of rhetoric associated with threats and security, constituted and reproduced multiple constructs as it created a ‘threat’ of isolationism.

Furthermore, in formulating this theorization, this thesis seeks to add to the conceptual toolkit of securitization theory and the literature in which it is situated. The theorization presented in this chapter addresses two criticisms of securitization theory: the presence of a universal security grammar, with its concomitant issues of context, and the concept of the audience (see: Balzacq 2005; Stritzel, 2007; Vuori, 2008). Furthermore, the theorization builds on the concept of performativity in

securitization theory, by engaging with the constitutive potential of iterative security discourses – particularly regarding the construction of audiences and histories (Hansen, 2011; Wæver, 2003; cf. Balzacq, 2010). This framework is augmented by a Foucauldian conceptualization of discourse, power, and knowledge, designed to uncover the performative and constitutive power in security, foreign policy, and identity discourses.⁹

Before expanding on the conceptual addition this thesis aims to make to the literature, this chapter provides a short explanation of the origins of securitization theory, followed by engagement with the concepts of exceptionalism, the audience, speech act theory, context, identity, and narratives. Drawing on these concepts, and through interrogating their theoretical mechanics and engaging with the securitization theory literature, the chapter argues that security discourses may construct or reinforce pre-existing contexts through the construction of threats and audiences. It is important to note that these contexts are *presented* as pre-existent, rather than necessarily being antecedent. However, through the presentation of a context being a natural or unquestioned foundation for a securitization, the context is reinforced.

The Copenhagen School

The ‘Copenhagen School’ is a term coined by Bill McSweeney (1996) to refer to the security studies scholarship of Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver (CASE, 2006: 452). Buzan, Wæver, and others associated with the ‘Copenhagen School’ (CS) produced a research agenda consisting of multiple concepts, including securitization theory (Huysmans, 1998a: 480; Buzan, et al. 1998). Securitization theory, a speech act approach to security based on J.L. Austin’s (1975) speech act theory, branched out from the other CS concepts – namely ‘sectors’ and ‘security complexes’ – into its own security studies literature (Hansen, 2011: 358; CASE, 2006: 452).

⁹ The methodology and its underlying theoretical implications are discussed in more depth in the next chapter.

In one of the earliest theorizations of securitization, Ole Wæver (1995) states that “something is a security problem when the elites declare it to be so” (p. 54). This ‘security’ is a speech act: it “is not of interest as a sign that refers to something more real; the utterance *itself* is the act” (ibid., p. 55, original emphasis). In this conceptualization, security is not a perception referring to something ‘real’ that exists independently of the perception, it is a “rhetorical structure” (Huysmans, 1998a: 492). Fundamentally, this is a securitization: the process through which an existential threat is constructed discursively – saying something is a threat makes it so. In terms of a security ‘grammar’ – of which more later – the securitization is generally: this ‘Other’ is a threat to ‘us’ (a Self).

The CS concept of securitization also includes further theoretical complications. Important in the CS theory is the concept that the securitizing act, by dint of saying an object is an existential threat to a Self, takes the issue out of the realm of “normal” politics into the “exceptional” (Buzan et al. 1998: 24-5). The presentation of an existential threat necessitates emergency measures: an extraordinary threat must be addressed with extraordinary means (ibid., pp. 23-4). Thus, for the CS, a characteristic of a securitization is an issue transcending the usual rules and boundaries of politics.

The object under existential threat (e.g. a Self, or a related system, institution, etc.) is constructed as such through the discursive process of securitization. This object (a ‘referent object’ in CS parlance), by virtue of its threatened status, is able to legitimately claim recourse to survival by whatever means necessary (Hansen, 2000: 288; Buzan et al., 1998: 36). However, the referent object does not exist independently of the discursive articulation, it exists through it (Hansen, 2000: 288). The notion that an object is under threat is constituted through the discourse of a security actor; the constitution of the notion that an object is under threat also manifests and reinforces the security actor’s position and concomitant capacity to speak/construct security (ibid.). Moreover, while the securitizing actor may speak security, a securitization is only ‘successful’ if a relevant *audience* accepts there is an existential threat to an object (Buzan et al., 1998: 31). Generally, the CS literature theorizes the audience as being citizens or voters in a state, though Wæver (2003:

26) takes a much broader view of what may comprise potential audiences, stating the audience could be simply “the relevant group that needs to be convinced”, such as elites or specific subcultures (Vuori, 2008: 72).

What is security? The exceptional, the normal, and the audience

The normal/exceptional dichotomy at the heart of the CS securitization framework presents several difficulties. One issue is the concept of ‘normal’ politics: what constitutes ‘normal’? Though some have interpreted the CS theorization of ‘normal’ politics as implying liberal democracy (e.g., Aradau, 2004: 392), the concept of ‘normal’ politics is generally undefined in the CS framework (CASE, 2006: 455). However, the CS *is* explicit as to what ‘normal’ politics means, but in rather abstract terms. The CS refer to the “normal bargaining process of the political sphere” and the “normal run of the merely political” (Buzan et al., 1998: 4-5). In the CS securitization theory, ‘politics’ is conceptualized as a space or sector composed of institutions (i.e. actors and structures) – which can be constructed as existentially threatened – *and* as a process through which securitizations take place (Neal, 2019: 91; Huysmans, 1998a: 488). ‘Security’ is conceptualized by the CS as a “move that takes politics beyond the established rules of the game and frames the issue either as a special kind of politics or as above politics” (Buzan et al., 1998: 23). Since ‘security’ remains a type of politics, a security ‘move’ represents the replacement of one kind of politics (the ‘normal’ process or the ‘merely political’) with another, ‘special kind of politics’ (Neal, 2019: 91-2). In this sense, the CS theory is concerned with the *relation* between normal and abnormal politics. If a security grammar or logic is used to break or transcend the accepted rules, there is a securitization (Buzan et al., 1998: 24-25; Vuori, 2008: 69).

A securitization may be exceptional but might not necessarily need immediate attention or active assent from the audience. An ‘institutionalized’ securitization is a security argument “so well established that it is taken for granted” (Buzan et al., 1998: 28). Here, the sense of urgency and exceptionalism has been previously demonstrated, and the threat determined as persistent. In this case, entire budgets,

bureaucracies, and institutions may have their operations hidden from public view, predicated on initial security argument(s) (ibid., pp. 27-28; Neal, 2019: 105-106).

Notably, in the case of institutionalized securitizations the concepts of audience and exceptional politics become unfocused. If, for example, a security issue is addressed legally – either through a legislative body or department with legally established powers – the difference between normal and exceptional becomes less clear (Neal, 2012: 261; Neal, 2019). When the audience is factored in, the situation becomes more complicated. If the audience is the general public, does a vote for a government, and by extension its policies and actions of its departments, negate the argument of exceptionalism? That is, could actions taken within a secret (to the public) black box of security in the government, still be considered ‘normal’ politics? Even if these actions may take place within a security institution – one legitimated by an institutionalized securitization – do they even still count as security? Finally, what about non-democratic systems?

The relational aspect of normal/exceptional represents a means to address these questions, and to understand the audience. As this thesis will demonstrate, a relational approach can be used to formulate a performative model that transcends the speech act and furthers a conceptual understanding of the power of securitizing discourses to construct more than just security. Moreover, this performative approach addresses issues of context, specifically the CS concept of a universal security grammar. While the CS securitization theory is a performative model as well, the presence of a universal security grammar and the speech act model inhibit a conceptual focus on the iterability of security discourses, including how related discourses construct security as new while also reproducing practices as natural.

Relationality

Vuori (2008) has theorized the application of securitization theory to non-democratic states and in the process has further developed the concepts of audience and normal/exceptional politics (see also: Wilkinson, 2007). In non-democratic systems, there are still ‘rules’ or norms that can be conceived of as

‘politics as normal’. In this case, there can still be securitizations in such systems (Vuori, 2008: 69). Moreover:

[S]ecurity speech can be utilized for other purposes than legitimating the breaking of rules. Security can be used to reproduce the political order, for renewing discipline, and for controlling society and the political order, for example. [...] Securitization is a way of identifying and defining threats to [a nation’s] core values and their protection can be considered a special type of politics, even in non-democratic systems. (ibid.)

Concomitantly, the audience might not always be the general public, but may for example be a group of elites (Vuori, 2008: 72; Hansen, 2000: 289; Wæver, 2003: 26). For Vuori (2008), the type of audience addressed by a securitization is dependent on the “function the securitization act is intended to serve” (p. 72). For an issue to become security (a “successful securitization”) the appropriate audience must ‘accept’ the securitization. The success or failure of “the political function of securitization” exists on a continuum for Vuori, based on audience acceptance, which in turn is predicated on knowing the intended function of the securitization (ibid., pp. 72-3).

However, on the issue of success/failure – and relatedly, intentionality – this project differs theoretically and epistemologically from Vuori’s model. The points of departure correspond to what Hansen (2011) has characterized as a “post-structural reading” of securitization theory. Specifically, issues of context/universal security grammar and the audience are theorized in this project using a relational understanding of the normal and exceptional (as in the CS approach, and to a degree, Vuori’s) and a framework of multi-level performative discourses. These theorizations are based epistemologically and methodologically on the understanding that non-linguistic and extra-discursive phenomena can only be comprehended through discursive practices. That is, objects cannot constitute themselves as such outside of discourse (Campbell, 2001 443-444; Hansen, 2011: 360).¹⁰

¹⁰ Discourse in the foucauldian methodology used in this project entails more than just language. It also includes, *inter alia*, structures, practices, and positions of authority (Neal, 2006: 41; Foucault, 2002: 54; Veyne, 1997: 156-157. See also: the ‘Methodology’ chapter.

An epistemology and methodology founded on the constitutive power of discourse – that everything is constituted through discourse or is at least knowable as an object through discourse – precludes analysis based on intentionality. The intention of a securitization is essentially unknowable, as there is no way to discern the inner thoughts of a securitizing actor, with even the actor possibly being unaware of their intentions. Moreover, a focus on intentionality might efface unintentional actions and/or actions beyond the control of individual actor(s). In short, recovering or interpreting an actor's motives for discourse (e.g. speech acts or texts) is not relevant to the interpretation of the discourse itself (Skinner, 2002: 98). Any intentions, or effects of intentions, are to be found within discourses themselves (Gad & Petersen, 2011: 318).

It should be noted, however, that securitization theory is not strictly a post-structuralist theory. Particularly in the CS literature, securitizing actors are conceptualized as having agency, for example making decisions about whether to handle a challenge by securitizing it or not (Buzan, et al., 1998: 32). Furthermore, as just discussed, the audience is theorized in this literature as choosing whether or not to accept a securitization. Indeed, the Arendtian concept that security is decided "*among the subjects*" is an important point in CS securitization theory – particularly in Wæver's work (ibid., p. 31, emphasis original). The securitizing actor can only "influence" the securitization process, which is ultimately constituted intersubjectively, in explicit contrast to a Schmittian decision by a sovereign subject (Wæver, 2000: 252, 286 n. 5; Wæver, 2003: 14 n. 43). Regardless, the agency to influence the securitization process is still present in the CS theory.

This thesis still proceeds, however, with a post-structuralist interpretation of securitization theory. As Hansen (2011) has explored, CS securitization theory has many post-structuralist elements. Furthermore, a post-structuralist approach to securitization theory allows for a conceptualization of the audience which augments this thesis's analysis. Specifically, this theorization – elaborated upon below – posits an audience that is both constituted as an audience through securitizing moves and which bears an empirical relationship to the individuals it is said to represent. This approach allows for the audience to be conceptualized as being both constructed

through security discourse and as exercising some agency since the views of individuals may inform the construction of the audience (through surveys, etc.).

As will be developed further in the next section, this thesis does not adhere to many of the positions of the so-called ‘sociological turn’ in the securitization literature (see, e.g., Balzacq, 2005; Stritzel, 2007). Specifically, this thesis does not follow the methodological and epistemological stance of scholars, such as Balzacq (2005), that CS securitization theory negates the audience through self-referentiality¹¹ – which means securitization is not an intersubjective process because the audience is not involved – therefore securitizations should be conceptualized as not self-referential and any analysis should incorporate extra-discursive elements (pp. 178-9; see also: Hansen, 2011: 359). Furthermore, this project argues that Stritzel position (2007) that CS securitization theory has two *separate* “centres of gravity” in which there is a decisionist “performativity of security utterances” and a “social process of securitization, involving (pre-existing) actors, audience(s) (and contexts)”, does not adequately account for discursive iterability and its performative power (p. 364; Hansen, 2011: 359).

In the context of this divergence between the CS and the sociological turn, the concept of ‘relationality’ is important. In the literature of the sociological turn, particularly in Balzacq (2005), the audience must be accounted for, it “must be aligned with an external context – independent from the use of language” (Balzacq, 2005: 173). According to Wæver (2015), in the sociological turn the concept of the audience becomes an “empirical question”, whereas in the “political” version of the CS, “the theory studies securitization as a relationship, and therefore the question becomes how speaker and audience jointly reconfigure their relationship” (p. 124). Wæver (2002) also argues, that when analyzing security discourse what is of importance is not the beliefs of individual decision-makers or the shared beliefs of the audience, “but which codes are used when actors *relate* to each other” (pp. 26-27, emphasis original; Hansen, 2011: 360). According to this logic, an audience may

¹¹ Self-referentiality is the concept that security is constructed through a speech act. As Huysmans (1998b) puts it: security “does not refer to an external, objective reality but establishes a security situation by itself. It is the enunciation of the signifier which constitutes an (in)security condition” (p. 232). This key concept was introduced by Wæver (1995: 55).

be constituted as a subject within a discourse by virtue of having its “opinion” detected through surveys or elections (Hansen, 2011: 360). In this manner, an audience can ‘respond’ to a securitizing discourse within a discursive sphere. Thus, individuals can invoke the subjectivity of an audience and speak *for* this discursively constituted subject rather than speak *from* it (ibid.). The relationship between audience and securitizing actor remains discursive – any ‘input’ from individuals is constituted as speaking for a constructed subjective audience, rather than an extra-discursive audience which can be measured.

Such an approach is also important for this thesis which seeks to examine not only the discursive construction of security, but also discursive claims to understand and speak for the US public. As the following chapters will demonstrate, the Nixon administration’s discourse presented itself as responding to demands of the public while also constructing the character and attitudes of this public, and subsections within it. During Vietnam, isolationism was still presented as dangerous by the administration, but as ever, the definitions of isolationism remained convoluted. Furthermore, while the limits of what constituted isolationist policies and how isolationism manifested in the public were discursively constructed, these security discourses interacted with US foreign policy discourses and public opinion of the war and wider anticommunist globalism.

This concept of relationality – which the chapter will return to in the ‘Identity and narrative’ section below – is also a critical aspect of Wæver’s (2015) interpretation of speech act theory. In this understanding, the illocutionary effect of the speech act – i.e., the securitization, as covered below – is more than just a form of communication or uptake by the audience, it is a co-production of meaning between the actor and audience in which there is “a redefinition of the rights and responsibilities of actors” (Wæver, 2015: 122). The effect of the securitization is therefore conceptualized as social effect, rather than just the communication of intention (ibid., p. 127 n. 6; cf. the ‘pragmatic’ approach in Balzacq, 2005; 2010).

Whether the construction of a social effect (i.e. the securitization of an issue) is a result of an audience understanding and accepting the intention of a securitizing actor is not relevant to the analysis in this thesis. In other words, securitizations are

not theorized as ‘successful’ or ‘failed’. The focus in this project is on the security discourse itself: what did a security discourse *do* in a specific context? As is addressed in the next section, this thesis conceptualizes these security discourses as performative – as being iterative practices that produce security, rather than a singular act. A social effect theorization allows for a focus on the production of meaning throughout a discourse, whereas a framework of success/failure would likely focus on single acts as possible instances of uptake by an audience.

While the Nixon administration had agency in deciding to use isolationism discourse and in which contexts, it was the administration’s discourse that constructed threats and audiences. Individuals these audiences were said to represent had few means of input regarding these decisions beyond midterm and presidential elections, participating in surveys, and demonstrating. However, interpretations of public attitudes towards Vietnam and what it meant to be American were invoked and constituted as the ‘beliefs’ of these audiences. This chapter will return to concepts of identity, context, and narratives of history, but first it is necessary to further explore the conceptual mechanism posited as constructing objects and subjectivities in securitization theory: the speech act.

Speech acts: A restrictive framework

The aforementioned ‘sociological turn’ in the securitization literature has attempted to broaden the strict speech act/grammar of security emphasis of the CS towards a focus on context, practices, and relationality – a focus that largely overlaps with ‘discourse’ in the Foucauldian sense. A discursive approach greatly improves the ability of securitization theory to engage with context and interrogate the concept of the audience. In this type of approach, discourses are conceptualized as constitutive and *iterative*, rather than just focusing on the constitutive power of *individual* speech acts. As mentioned in the previous section, this thesis does not adhere to all of the theoretical and epistemological positions made by the authors in this ‘turn’, particularly their conceptualization of an extra-discursive audience and a lack of focus on iterability. However, the differences between this thesis and

particularly Thierry Balzacq and Holger Stritzel's contributions to the literature are a useful starting point for a discussion on speech acts.

As Hansen (2011) has noted, Balzacq's (2005) theorizations rely on a complicated speech act framework underpinned epistemologically by being able to 'know' intentions, and relatedly, assume a materialism/idealism distinction (p. 360). Furthermore, Stritzel's (2007) understanding of performativity in securitization theory is based on a misreading of Butler's performativity, as it is used in Wæver's securitization theory (Hansen, 2011: 360). Specifically, Stritzel (2007) holds that performativity implies that actors and their social relations are constituted *retroactively* – that is, *after* the speech act, rather than *in* it as Butler theorizes (ibid.). Contra Balzacq, this chapter proposes that by taking discourses into consideration rather than just individual speech acts, there is less need to focus on the mechanics of the speech act. Moreover, by eschewing intentionality, there is no need for continued convoluted debates over the illocutionary or perlocutionary focus of securitizing speech acts (see, e.g.: Vuori, 2008; Balzacq, 2005; Stritzel, 2007; Wæver, 1996; 1995). Furthermore, the chapter posits that the concept of performativity, already present in the CS/Wæver's securitization theory, also provides a means to move beyond traditional speech act theory, towards a more nuanced conceptualization of securitizations as a constitutive force. This section begins these arguments with discussion of performativity through engagement with Stritzel's (2007) problematic reading of the CS securitization theory (which leads him to conclude that the theory does not adequately address context or the audience).

Stritzel's (2007) criticisms are predicated on his assertion that securitization theory consists of two conflicting and theoretically underdeveloped centers of gravity: internalist and externalist (p. 359). The internalist reading "corresponds" to a "more poststructural/postmodern (Derridian and/or Butler) reading of securitization", which "concentrates on the speech act *event* and is grounded in the concept of performativity" (ibid., emphasis original). The externalist reading focuses on the "*process* of securitization" and what Stritzel calls a "constructivist reading of securitization", with an emphasis on "the often more sedimented social and

political structures that put actors in positions of power to influence the process of constructing meaning” (ibid., pp. 359, 369, emphasis original).

However, as Hansen (2011) notes, viewed through a post-structural lens it is not clear there are such tensions (pp. 359-60). That security is constructed through a security speech act (‘self-referentiality’) does not negate the audience or suggest a disconnect between the act and intersubjective context, as Balzacq and Stritzel argue. Instead, this points to an absence of an extra-discursive concept of security in CS securitization theory (Hansen, 2011: 360). Indeed, conceptualizing securitizing discourses as self-referential allows an analyst to view discourse as an intersubjective process through which securitizing actors make claims to identify ‘real’ security, often by constituting the “meaning of context” (ibid.).

Balzacq (2005) sees conflict within CS securitization theory, specifically an elision of the audience and context through differing concepts of the speech act. Balzacq’s strict interpretation of Austin’s (1975) speech act theory and equally strict application of it to securitization theory is at the root of this criticism. In short, Balzacq (2005) believes CS securitization theory vacillates between conceptualizing securitizations as having illocutionary and perlocutionary forces. In Austin’s speech act theory the *locution* is the utterance, the actual words spoken (e.g. a police officer telling a skater ‘the ice is thin over there’). The *illocution* is what is done *in* saying something (e.g. the skater is *warned* by the police officer). The *perlocution* is what is done *by* saying something (e.g. the police officer persuaded the skater to avoid the ice ‘over there’) (Skinner, 2002: 104-5; Balzacq, 2005: 175).

For Balzacq (2005) the self-referential aspect of a securitization (the construction of security through a speech act), is an illocutionary act – an act that conforms to a specific, conventional procedure (p. 177; Austin, 1975; cf. Wæver, 1996: 107, n. 3; Wæver, 1995: 79-80, n. 23; Buzan et al., 1998: 46, n. 5). In this interpretation of speech act theory an illocution must by definition conform to convention, thus in Balzacq’s view such an illocution elides audience acceptance (ibid.). Audience acquiescence, he believes, may only be found in the perlocution, but this denies self-referentiality as the perlocution is “specific to the circumstances of issuance

and is therefore not conventionally achieved just by uttering particular utterances” (ibid.; Austin 1962 [1975] quoted in ibid., p. 175).

This argument is reflected in Stritzel’s (2007) assessment that CS securitization theory “struggles with and suffers from [having] *pre*-established actors and *pre*-structured fields and at the same time claim[ing] that both are constituted *retro*-actively by performative acts” (p. 377, emphasis original). As mentioned above, Hansen (2011) points out that Butler’s performativity, which CS securitization theory relies on and which Stritzel is criticizing, does not constitute subjects and relations *retroactively* (p. 360). Instead, as Hansen quotes Butler “the subject appears not *after* the speech act but *in* it, as ‘identity is performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results”’ (ibid, emphasis original; Butler, 2010: 34; cf. Nietzsche, 2016: 41).

Setting aside for a moment the complexities of a speech act model, this project agrees with Balzacq (2005: 177) that the label “security as a speech act” should be rejected, though for different reasons. As Weber (1998), drawing on Butler, points out: identity is constituted and mediated through discursive performances, though not through a single, deliberate act (i.e. a performance). Instead *performativity* “should be understood ‘as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names”’ (pp. 79-81; Butler, 2014: 2). This project conceptualizes securitizations as more than just speech acts. Along the lines of Butler, security discourse is conceptualized as performative – as iterative practices by which security discourse constitutes security.

As the isolationism discourse analyzed in this project demonstrates, the relationship between identity and security is a complex blend of history, myth, perceptions of public opinion, domestic politics, and foreign policymaking. While isolationism as a discourse was rather flexible, the foundational myths and history of a US character were more rigid – and were constituted as immutable. Through the administration’s construction of security, the connotations of isolationism were different depending on the context the administration’s discourse constituted. Much of the power of isolationism discourse arose from its seemingly eternal presence in the narration of an American identity. The reinforcement of US isolationism as ‘real’ – as a historical

inclination or innate characteristic – through security discourses enabled the construction of isolationism as a threat or potential threat which could then be used to define the limits of domestic or foreign policy.

The link between the performance of identity and security, along with the CS concept of the society sector, are discussed in the ‘Identity, security, and foreign policy’, after the concept of context within the speech act model is examined in the next section.

Context

Similar to his comments on performativity, Stritzel (2007) also criticizes the narrowness of the speech act model, claiming, “a *single* security articulation at a *particular* point in time, will at best only very rarely explain the entire social process that follows from it” (p. 377, emphasis original). In a sense, a single speech act is a singular act or performance. However, here as with his comments on retroactivity, Stritzel’s misreading of performativity – i.e. his claim that actors are both pre-established *and* constituted by discourse in CS securitization theory – limits his analysis and the potential analytical scope of securitization theory. A single speech act is both a function of discourse and a re-performance of the same discourse. However, the distribution of constitutive power – i.e. the power to construct security, identity, foreign policy, etc. – within and across discourses is historically and contextually contingent (Dunn, 2008: 81).

The grammar, logic, or convention that underpins the self-referential, constitutive power of a security speech act both defines the “universe of audience imagination” and structures the relationship between speaker and audience involved in the performative construction of security (Salter, 2008: 329-330; cf. Vuori, 2008: 72). However, this grammar and relationship is also historically and contextually contingent. Thus, there is no universal security grammar, only a historically and contextually contingent grammar and speaker/audience relationship – a grammar and relationality grounded in specific discourses.

Though, as will be discussed further in the 'Identity and narrative' section, this grammar is not always constituted anew with each use – as Huysmans (1995) argues, there are always aspects of a security 'narrative' to work with (p. 57). Indeed, this was the case with isolationism discourse, which relied on both a 'history' of isolationism in the US character traced back to the Founding Fathers and a threat posed by isolationism as evidenced by the interwar period and WWII. In the case of the Nixon discourse, isolationism discourse was further grounded in, and intertwined with, anticommunist and Cold War discourses, as well as discourses involved in the delimitation of state borders and conceptualizations of how the international functioned.

This conceptualization about a lack of universal security grammar in effect 'explains' – in the sense of 'how', if not 'why' – the process of a speech act or discursive function by contextualizing it within a broader historical discourse. It does not, as Stritzel (2007) points out, "explain the social process that follows from it" (p. 377). However, this is the most powerful conceptual aspect of the securitization: "the insurrecting potential to break the ordinary, to establish meaning that is not already within the context— [a securitization] reworks or produces a context by the performative success of the act" (Buzan et al., 1998: 46 n 5). Though a securitization may establish a 'new' meaning – i.e. construct security: a threat and threatened object, in accepted conditions – it still functions in a specific, if much broader context. Furthermore, while a securitization may establish different meanings through the designation of something as a threat, it still enacts security. Neal (2019) uses the Foucauldian concept of *parresia* – how 'truth' telling irrupts an established code or discourse and through making this radical break constitutes the speaker as a truth teller, but with uncertain outcomes – to highlight how the performative grammar of security discourses brings about effects (i.e. security) that are "known and ordered in advance" (pp. 172-3; cf. conventional procedures in illocutionary acts covered earlier).

While securitizations must be apprehended "on a horizon of meaning that they have opened for themselves", unlike Claude Romano's understanding of events, they are also understandable "in the light of their explanatory context" (Romano

quoted in Jay, 2011: 567). As Huysmans (2011) notes, a securitization, in declaring an exception, “enacts limits of a given order by calling upon existential threats. [...] The exceptionalist actualization of the decision also posits a politics of creating *ex nihilo*” (p. 374). These securitizations designate the limits of a given order by constructing existential threats that both define what is under threat (i.e. a Self) and what the given order is unable to deal with. This act, this rupture “implies a claim to enact new possibilities of right and wrong” (ibid.).

Though a securitization represents the opportunity to ‘create’ *ex nihilo*, this is not entirely possible in the context of partially structured, durable discourses (i.e. structuring discourses). An acute change to the existing order could challenge the predominant discourses by destabilizing a consistent link between the narrative of identity and the securitization (Hansen, 2006: 25). As such, a performative security discourse constructs itself and functions as its own constative context. This context draws on elements of a Self’s narrative of identity (Derrida, 1986; Honig, 1991; Der Derian, 1995; Nietzsche, 1998). This chapter will return to the constative/performative concept in the ‘Security pledge’ section.

This chapter proposes, broadly in agreement with Balzacq and Stritzel’s critique, that there are two mechanisms at work in securitization theory: self-referential performativity and social effects involving ‘pre-existing’ actors, audiences, and contexts. However, these mechanisms are not necessarily in conflict. A securitization can constitute new meanings: it may construct an issue as security and define the limits of a threatened Self against a threatening Other. However, through this process it may re-perform, reconstruct, and reinforce existing ‘context’. A securitization is intertwined with the larger, structuring discourses in which it operates, as this project argues is the case with isolationism. By situating securitizations within larger systems or assemblages of utterances, practices, and historical contingencies (i.e. structuring discourses) there is less theoretical reliance on speech acts (cf. McDonald, 2008: 568-569).

Much like Butler’s reading of sex/gender, the grammar of security (and thus its constitutive power) is co-constituted with and inseparable from specific structuring discourses. Securitizing discourses reproduce these specific structuring discourses

and iteratively reestablish them as 'natural' and 'pre-discursive' (Weber, 1998: 79). This historically and contextually contingent relationship is effaced by the construction of the structuring discourse as pre-discursive/natural (again similar to sex/gender).

Basic discourses as theory

At first glance, invocations of isolationism during the Nixon administration seem to represent the use of a broad isolationism discourse. And, as the concept of a discourse is essentially an analytical construction, this is, in a sense, true. However, upon closer inspection, invocations of, or allusions to, isolationism in the Nixon discourse are indicative of multiple, interwoven discourses. Hansen's (2006) basic discourses concept can be used to explore the relationships between discourses, how they developed over time and changed in response to events (p. 46).

Furthermore, this framework can be used to analyze the relationship between basic discourses and structuring discourses (ibid.). The multiple isolationism discourses covered in this project served several overtly political functions, including to win votes and sell the Nixon foreign policy approach as appropriate to a changing world, and appropriately American in the context of US history and character/identity. Some of these discourses also constituted themselves as being above politics, as navigating the realities of a dangerous world, formulating foreign policies based on objective factors, and defining threats to US existence. In this manner, these discourses structured a broader hegemonic discourse, one which delimited Self from Other, and thereby equated sovereignty, order, and knowledge with the Self and associated danger, anarchy, and the unknowable with the Other. This hegemonic discourse is not the focus of this thesis, but its presence does bleed through in the contexts and claims to knowledge and objectivity often reproduced by isolationism discourse.

The basic discourse framework – which is also methodologically important and therefore covered in more depth in the 'Methodology' chapter – is also theoretically relevant. A basic discourse is an analytical lens identified through readings of texts – in this case Nixon administration public foreign policy discourses

(Hansen, 2006: 46). Each basic discourse essentially constructs different Others with different degrees of difference (ibid.). These discourses, while empirically prevalent, are not necessarily the most frequently used, but are chosen to provide a lens through which to examine different representations and policies that were generally connected, even if they were modified over time (ibid. pp. 46-7).

Hansen (2006) posits three analytical lenses/forms of identity of “equal theoretical and ontological status”: spatial, temporal, and ethical identity (pp. 42-48). This project uses a similar framework, though expanded to suit the empirical data. These basic discourses are: ‘Ethical Identity’, ‘Spatio-Temporal Othering’, ‘Ideological Character’, and ‘Psychological Character’.

Hansen (2006) posits three analytical lenses to form the basis of a basic discourse framework: spatial, temporal, and ethical identity (pp. 41-8). These concepts of identity, in Hansen’s (2006) reading, are the means through which the boundaries, internal constitution, and relationship with an outside world are argued (p. 41). Subjects are constituted through discourses – even abstract ones – by situating them within specific boundaries, positing their possibilities for change or repetition, and constructing ethical relations (ibid.). This project utilizes slightly modified versions of these analytical lenses. As the ‘Spatio-Temporal’ chapter explains in more detail, the concepts of spatial and temporal are combined due to the difficulty of conceptually separating them. Additionally, this project focuses on the construction of ethical responsibilities, more so than the constitution of a specific ethical identity. Though this discourse could be conceptualized as constructing an ethical identity, the chapter’s analysis focuses on the constitution of responsibilities, particularly necessary limits to responsibility as well a responsibility to a Self.

In addition to the ‘spatio-temporal’ and ‘ethical responsibility’ basic discourses, this project also conceptualizes two other basic discourses: an ‘ideological character’ and ‘psychological character’. The ‘ideological character’ discourse is an analytical lens used to explore a discourse that constructed and reinforced a moral or ideological US character – a historical Self used to include segments of the public (identified by the administration as isolationist) within the Self while Othering another segment as un-American. The ‘psychological character’ discourse

constructed an 'objective' evaluation of the US public as liable to oscillate between isolationism and internationalism – a 'fact' which necessitated a pragmatic response.

The use of a basic discourse framework to conceptualize performative security discourses could be subject to some of the early criticisms of securitization theory. Huysmans (1998a) notes the differing approaches the CS took to theorizing security versus social relationships and structures (p. 493). Specifically, while security in the theory is "radically constructivist" – no 'real' threats exist independently of the practice of speaking security – other practices and structures are said to be so deeply sedimented that they are not "a matter of choice" (ibid.; Buzan et al., 1998: 205). Huysmans (1998a) uses Woolgar & Pawluch's (1985) term "ontological gerrymandering" to refer to this "methodological choice" (p. 493).

Drawing on Miller & Holstein (1993: 6), Huysmans (1998a) posits that this 'gerrymandering' indicates a theoretical inconsistency as it manipulates an analytic boundary so that some aspects are problematized and others left unproblematic (pp. 493-494). The use of a basic discourse framework may be assessed along these same lines. This project accepts this criticism, as there must always be some type of arbitrary, analytic boundary: if every aspect is problematized at once, there is no referent to anchor an analysis. The CS explicitly addresses this issue by noting that, while they conceptualize all social relations as constructed, they hold some relations as more durable, and therefore keep them constant for the sake of an analytical focus on variations amongst other relations (Buzan et al., 1998: 204-5). While holding open the possibility that sedimented practices are in principle contingent, the CS note that such structures, because they "are not currently politicized and thereby not widely seen as a matter of choice", can be used as frameworks in some cases (ibid., p. 205).

Likewise, this thesis, though with a more poststructuralist rather than constructivist lens, views structuring discourses, which these basic discourses reproduce as well as draw on for legitimacy and authority, as durable. This does not mean that these discourses are unproblematic or extra-discursive, only that they were more durable at the time and are therefore not as thoroughly problematized as the basic

discourses. Furthermore, the analysis in this project, and even securitization theory itself, cannot be separated from the discourses in which they were constituted (cf. Woolgar & Pawluch, 1985: 224).¹²

Identity, security, and foreign policy

This project conceptualizes these basic discourses – and structuring discourses – as situated in a hegemonic discourse that constitutes objects as ‘foreign’ – predominately through the historically and contextually contingent relational process of ‘othering’ (Guillaume, 2011: 29) – a process that constructs identity and disciplines ambiguity. Foreign policy reproduces and contains challenges to this identity (Campbell, 1990: 270-271; Campbell, 1998a: 68-69). The performative construction of security (i.e. Other as threat to Self) is a part of this array of processes (Weldes, et al., 1999: 10). As security is relational like identity, the others constituted by security may be internal as well as external: an Other is often an aspect of a Self (Buzan & Hansen, 2009: 143).

In CS securitization theory, the concept of the societal security sector – essentially the securitization of identity – has been accused of reifying identity for the sake of analysis, resulting in a debate of identity in the literature (Williams, 1998; McSweeney, 1996; Buzan & Wæver, 1997; McSweeney, 1998). The possibility of reification is discussed in the ‘Identity and narrative’ section below. It is worth noting here, though, that the relation between identity and security posited in this thesis is grounded in historically contingent discourses. Specifically, any overlap between the construction of security and identity through differentiating Self from Other, is conceptualized as historically contingent on the development of the discourses that construct and claim to ‘know’ foreign policy.

Foreign policies, even abstract doctrines, which utilize concepts of national or security interests, are expressed within national security discourses that rely on national identity representations (Hansen, 2006: 26). Campbell (1990) argues that in

¹² Along similar lines, Neal (2019) argues that securitization theory “should be dated as the product of a particular time and place” (pp. 7, 48-49).

the US, specific, historically contingent practices and knowledge (of foreign policy, international relations, etc.) have produced an understanding of US foreign policy as “solely a response to a realm of necessity” (p. 271; see also: Campbell, 1998a: 61-72). For this reason, foreign policy discourse in the US holds a privileged position as it elucidates the foremost threats to the nation and state (Campbell, 1998a: 70). However, this is not to say that foreign policy and security discourses are synonymous, only that foreign policy discourse – particularly as articulated by policymakers – has a historical and institutional authority to define both the limits of a Self and any Others which may threaten it. In other words, policymakers can use this authority to make the case for an exception to the existing order which necessitates extraordinary action in order to protect the existence of the state. In a system like the US during the late 1960s to the early 1970s – or even today in some cases – because of this authority, it was often difficult to challenge whether an issue should be securitized.¹³

Identity, foreign policy, and (in)security are theorized as being constituted relationally, with the practices, knowledge, and authority associated with such relationships objectified by neighboring historical and institutional discourses (cf. Veyne, 1997: 181). The next section explores these relationships, particularly in the context of ‘narratives’.

Identity and narrative

The ‘Context’ section argued against a ‘universal security grammar’ in securitization theory and claimed that the security grammar and the speaker/audience relationship was historically and contextually contingent. However, security grammar and the speaker/audience relationship are not conceptualized by this project as being continuously constructed anew.

Indeed, this apparent tension was at the center of Stritzel’s (2007) criticism regarding performativity mentioned earlier: there appears at first a conflict

¹³ Neal (2019) explores the “migration” of security politics from the realm of the exceptional into a more prosaic politicized arena (an arena that is not quite ‘normal’ politics either) in the UK context (pp. 32-34, *et passim*).

between already constituted identities, and identities being constructed through security discourse. Huysmans (1995) addresses this conceptual paradox with the concept of a security 'story' or 'narrative' (pp. 54-7). A story cannot be told without given units (e.g. a national identity), but these units are created within the story. While this is paradoxical in terms of origins of the initial story, analytically there is always already some form of the story to work with (ibid., p. 57).

The units in the story are not given, they are constructed – but they construct themselves as being given through security discourse (Huysmans, 1995: 57; cf. Butler, 2010: 34; Nietzsche, 2008: 26). Conceptualized by Huysmans (1995) as a “centre-periphery image”, a securitization places the threatened identity at the center of the narrative – “the spot from which the world is looked at” – while also constructing a periphery constituted as the position where the threats are located (p. 55). Thus, the center is constructed as “an unquestionable given”: a ‘natural’, pre-discursive identity (ibid.).

Using securitization theory, this project explicitly applies temporality to Huysmans’ framework. As Campbell (1998b) states, the “narrativizing” of events “is integral to the performative constitution of identity” (p. 34). A narrative is constructed through the constitution of relationships. These relationships can be spatially oriented, as in Huysmans’ framework – between center and periphery – or temporal. In terms of temporality, the relationships are constituted between past and present. Through constructing a temporal relationship between two events (or identities) within a narrative – i.e. constituting historicity – the events or identities are given meaning and become understandable in the context of the narrative (Somers, 1994: 617; Campbell, 1998b: 34).

Such a conception of identity addresses McSweeney’s (1996) criticism of CS securitization theory as treating identities “as objective realities, out there to be discovered and analyzed” and therefore reifying particular identities (pp. 83, 91; Huysmans, 1998a: 489). As McSweeney (1996) points out, identity is not “‘out there’, waiting to be discovered”, but is present in identity discourses that are always in a process of construction and negotiation (p. 90). This at first seems like a strawman argument since the CS has been quite explicit about using a constructivist

concept of identity – with Buzan & Wæver (1997) specifically refuting these charges from McSweeney, claiming that an identity, while constructed, can become “socially sedimented” and thus become a “possible referent object for security” (p. 243).¹⁴

However, McSweeney’s (1996) robust criticism of the CS leads him to raise an important analytical point about the potential for security analysts to become “the unwitting accomplices” to the reification of identity (p. 91). To wit, the “problem is to interpret identity claims, rather than assume their validity and coherence” (ibid.). Taken further: how can the analyst ‘judge’ the validity of a (narrative of) identity? Can there be a ‘valid’ identity/narrative, particularly an *intersubjective*, collective identity? What (discursive) constraints of history are valid boundaries of possibility? In terms of this project, this involves not assuming the validity of any particular US identity but judging it as relevant based on its empirical prevalence in the discourse. This does necessarily involve foregrounding administration constructions of identity and the administration’s representations of the US public. However, as the administration was popularly elected – especially in 1972 – the broadest strokes of these narratives of identity are assumed to be generally accepted by the public (or at least not rejected).

A narrative may be theorized as an act of “world-making” in that “[n]o historiographical endeavor may presume to ‘represent’ reality – if by representation we mean a corresponding system of things and their sign” (Funkenstein, 1992 quoted in Campbell, 1998b: 32). However, though this world-making is not arbitrary, there is not a “waterproof algorithm” with which to prove a narrative’s “[c]loseness to reality” (ibid.). This “closeness” must be determined contextually, “without universal criteria”, but by examining all of the aspects that comprise the narrative (ibid.).

In terms of factual content, i.e. transcripts of discourses, accounts of historical events, etc., this closeness must rely on empirical rigor – or at least the assumption

¹⁴ Furthermore, in his somewhat problematic rendering of ‘objectivism’ in the CS theory, McSweeney’s criticism places extra-discursive boundaries on the construction of identity in the form of “facts” or “constraints of history” (McSweeney, 1996: 90). However, such boundaries/constraints can be conceptualized as discursively constituted by older, competing discourses, rather than material factors (Hansen, 2006: 27).

of such rigor (though this is not assured, see: Campbell, 1998b: 38). Beyond this, and imperative for 'judging' narratives of identity, is an interrogation of the "relationship with the other" that a narrative constitutes (Campbell, 1998b: 43). That is, how is the Other constructed within a narrative that relates Self to Other? To further explore this relationship between Self/Other this thesis utilizes aspects of Bakhtinian theory as a means of conceptualizing multiple Others. In line with the basic discourse framework employed by this thesis, Others may be constituted within a network of related identities (Hansen, 2006: 36).

In Bakhtinian theory, identity is conceptualized as functioning through one of two historically and contextually contingent relationships: dialogical or monological (Guillaume, 2002b: 8). A dialogical relationship is predicated on the Other being recognized as a Self and as being "ontologically necessary" to complete one's own Self (Guillaume, 2002a: 8-9). In this case, the Other is recognized as a subject with an 'identity' (Guillaume, 2002b: 8-9). In monological utterances, the Other becomes an object of a Self's understanding, to be modified and interpreted to satisfy the Self's own needs. In this manner, the Other is denied the subjectivity afforded to the Self (Guillaume, 2002b: 11; Guillaume, 2002a: 9).

In a securitization, the threat is defined against a Self. As mentioned earlier, a fundamental – if contested – aspect of securitization theory is the audience. In CS securitization theory, the securitization is 'successful' if there is assent from the audience, i.e. if 'facilitating conditions' are met. For the CS there must exist audience acceptance of the contextual factors surrounding the issue, concession to the authority of the speaker, and recognition of a grammar of security (Buzan et al., 1998: 33).¹⁵

As Buzan et al. (1998) stipulate, the position of authority that empowers the speaker to declaim security is conceptualized as "the relationship between speaker and audience" (p. 33). This authority is historically contingent and is re-performed with each securitization – assuming it is 'successful'. However, as covered above, the term 'successful' is problematic in that it assumes the intentions behind a

¹⁵ Cf. Doty, 2007: 129-130: authority does not necessarily need to be sovereign/elite.

securitization and reactions to the securitization by the audience are discernable, or even knowable. Even if one forgoes speaker intentionality, audience assent is difficult to assess. Does apathy from an audience constitute acceptance, or at least legitimize the speaker's authority – i.e. does acceptance exist on a continuum as Vuori (2008: 72-73) posits?

As mentioned earlier, Wæver (2002) argues that when analyzing security discourse what is of importance is not the beliefs of individual decision-makers or the shared beliefs of the audience, “but which codes are used when actors *relate* to each other” (pp. 26-27, emphasis original). Often the audience is discursively constituted as a subject via the detection of its ‘opinion’ through polls or elections (Hansen, 2011: 360). Such an approach focuses on what is done by the discourse, rather than actors per se. Moreover, just as what security ‘does’ is constituted through discourse, so is the acceptance of an audience. The audience that apprehends a securitization is constituted through that securitization, it does not pre-exist it – the audience is constituted as a subject within the security discourse (Hansen, 2011: 360-361). In other words, the audience is performatively constituted.

Just as this discursive approach does not seek to uncover any ‘real’ motives behind a discourse (Wæver, 2002: 27), there is no ‘real’ acceptance to be unearthed in the minds of the audience. This is not to deny the agency of an audience, individually or collectively. Instead, this approach only examines their discursively constituted subjectivity in relation to the speakers of security. However, this relationship is rarely equal in many aspects. A US president, for example, has considerable power in terms of not only constructing security or foreign policy, but also imposing such a view on the American public (particularly regarding the ‘international arena’ – and even more so 50 years ago, as mentioned earlier). On the other hand, as the Vietnam era in the US so aptly demonstrates, the agency of the audience (expressed through voting for or against someone, protests, etc.) can exert an effect – though still constrained by the effects of a power disparity.

The discursive approach employed in this project “produces strange paintings, in which relations replace objects” (Veyne, 1997: 181).¹⁶ Recalling Bakhtinian theory, the relationship between Self and Other takes on more significance. A Self is not conceptualized as existing on its own (cf. Weldes et al. 1999: 10-11; Diez, 2004: 321; Campbell, 1998a). Instead, ‘identity’ is considered a multiplicity of self-understandings in dialogue with, and in a sense answering, alterity – with alterity potentially represented by multiple Others (Guillaume, 2011: 3; Guillaume, 2002a: 8). Indeed, an Other constituted by security/foreign policy discourse may be situated within a network of relational identities, rather than a simple Self/Other dichotomy (Hansen, 2006: 36). To borrow Hansen’s terminology, some Others are constituted as “less-than-radical others” (ibid.). A “radical” Other is “constructed through and stabilized by a simultaneous articulation of a number of other identities of a less radical and more ambiguous character” (ibid.).

A securitization – a securitizing move that constructs security – in Western contexts has frequently (but not always) included the public/audience within the construct of a Self. Indeed, the public is usually constructed as the audience *and* an integral aspect of a Self – e.g. ‘we’ are threatened, ‘we’ need protection. Moreover, this public/national identity is often grounded in some historical claim. Specifically, there is often a concept of ‘debt’, which the present generation ‘owes’ to its forebearers – the present community owes obedience to the past, as the past dictated the present conditions of the community (Nietzsche, 1998: 68-70). This description of debt is fitting for the US, particularly during the time period under examination (cf. Der Derian, 1995: 41-42).

In formulating an approach to withdrawal from Vietnam, and a related foreign policy approach of reduced international involvement, the Nixon administration’s discourse reproduced two interrelated ‘debts’. On one hand, the administration attempted to pay the debts of the interwar period and WWII, based on the ‘lesson’ that interwar isolationism had exacerbated the effects of WWII by keeping the US out of the war and that the US must remain internationally engaged. On the other

¹⁶ Indeed, this echoes the Foucauldian genealogy used in this thesis, which is covered in more detail in the ‘Methodology’ chapter.

hand, the administration reproduced the notion that the US public would vacillate between international engagement and isolationism, a trait allegedly tied to both the warnings of the Founding Fathers and the American moral mission which swung between providing an example at home and bringing that example to others, through force if necessary. In many ways, the Nixon administration's isolationism discourse was an attempt to stake out a middle ground between isolationisms. The administration's approach was presented as not being isolationist, but a reaction to a tendency towards isolationism in the public as well as a 'changed' world that was no longer bipolar. Specifically, the Nixon discourse constructed the necessity for international engagement as paramount – through presenting isolationism as a threat – while presenting too much international engagement as likely to lead to isolationism – which also constructed isolationism as a threat, but not the public's supposedly innate tendency towards it. The multipolar nature of the world was also presented as a rational justification for reduced international responsibility.

This thesis examines how different elements of a US Self were presented by the Nixon administration as being isolationist. In one aspect of the discourse, an un-American 'vocal minority' Other was constructed against a US moral, ideological character. This discourse reinforced the notion of a US identity concerned with honor and living up its word. However, the discourse did not explicitly invoke isolationism, but was instead targeted towards voters the Nixon administration perceived as isolationist. Another, interrelated aspect of the discourse constructed a 'silent majority' of the US public as being inherently prone to oscillation between internationalism and isolationism. Though enacting isolationism as a policy was portrayed as dangerous – and such an enactment would happen if the US embraced the isolationist policies of various foreign policy elites – this disposition towards oscillation was constructed as natural and understandable.

The subjectivity of the audience constituted through these situations often relied on 'detection' of the public's opinion through polls, etc. However, along the lines of a monological relationship, the administration also constituted the audience as an Other, an object of a particular Self's own understanding. While the 'support' of the 'silent majority' for the Nixon administration's approach to Vietnam might be

constructed in a manner similar to a dialogical relationship, a divisive political rhetoric, deployed in aid of an election strategy, was used to construct an un-American 'vocal minority', which in turn defined an 'ideological' US Self (i.e. a moral character).

The security pledge: Constative and performative

This section returns to the constative/performative concept briefly mentioned in the 'Context' section to further theorize relationships between audience, security, and the past. Through employing Der Derian's (1995: 28) concept of the 'pledge' as a form of security, this section uses the notion of 'debt' to further examine the construction of specific elements of American 'character', as well as the alleged presence of both a historical and continuing predilection towards isolationism in the public.

The debt concept is used to highlight the temporal aspect of isolationism discourses, particularly the construction of historical isolationism as indicative of isolationist tendencies in contemporary US publics. The so-called 'lessons' of the 1930s and WWII are theorized by this project as having co-constituted supposedly historical elements of a US moral example and character which underpinned the necessity of US international involvement and responsibilities. Throughout this project, and particularly in the isolationism discourse, covered in the 'Psychological Character' chapter, a debt may be observed in the construction of a history of oscillation between internationalism and isolationism in the US public. Indeed, this seems to be a reperformance of a broader US exceptionalism structuring discourse covered in the 'Methodology' chapter.

Following Der Derian (1995: 28), this project conceptualizes security as being sought in the form of a pledge – that is, a security pledged as a guarantee of the payment of a debt. Isolationist security discourse drew heavily on the debt to the sacrifice of WWII, with emphasis on interwar isolationism supposedly causing or exacerbating these sacrifices, along with a duty to honor the debt. Generally, the debt was to be repaid or honored by the continued, prosperous, and dominant existence of the

American state. The security was the adherence to a specific set of foreign policy objectives and approaches, all based upon a particular understanding of the 'international'. The honoring or fulfilment of this pledge was said to be the future prevention of another world war through policies that promoted international engagement. The 'knowledge' of what were appropriate policies, and indeed of how the world functioned, are conceptualized as another, interrelated structuring discourse – epistemic realism – also covered in the next chapter.

The function of these structuring discourses in relation to isolationism discourse are theorized in this section as reproducing a 'foundational moment' (Derrida, 1986).

This moment can be further conceptualized as consisting of two parts: a foundational sacrifice, and foundational 'character' resulting from the sacrifice. The sacrifice aspect of the foundation was implicitly or explicitly referenced in any isolationism discourse: a dangerous interwar isolationism led to WWII, with all of its sacrifices. The invocation of isolationism also presented the 'lesson' from such sacrifice: international engagement was crucial for the US to avoid further sacrifice in the future; international leadership provides assurance that no other state will drag the US into another such war. Essentially, this framework presents a different conceptual viewpoint of how the isolationism discourses analyzed in this project reperformed specific knowledges of what policies are appropriate, how the world functions, and elements of a US moral character, i.e. the epistemic realism and US exceptionalism discourses.

The administration's discourse presented the payment of this debt as ultimately up to the US public, in terms of choosing the appropriately moral and 'American' path. However, the administration's discourse still laid claim to the knowledge of what policy would be best. As Nixon put it in 1971:

In Southeast Asia today, aggression is failing—thanks to the determination of the South Vietnamese people and to the courage and sacrifice of America's fighting men. That brings us to a point that we have been at several times before in this century: aggression trained back, a war ending. We are at a critical moment in history: What America does – or fails to do – will determine whether peace and freedom can be won in the coming generation. That is why the way in which we end this conflict is so crucial to our efforts to build a lasting peace in coming decades. The right way out of

Vietnam is crucial to our changing role in the world and to peace in the world. (Nixon, Feb. 25, 1971)

In the administration's discourse, the US had to choose how it proceeded in Vietnam and afterward. This choice, for the administration, must be informed by the 'lessons' of history and America's unique role as a leader in the world because of this history. As Nixon said of Asia in 1970,

Nowhere has the failure to create peace been more costly or led to greater sacrifice. America's Asian policy for the 1970's must be based on the lessons of this sacrifice. [...] we remain involved in Asia. We are a Pacific power. We have learned that peace for us is much less likely if there is no peace in Asia. (Nixon, Feb. 18, 1970).

In articulating isolationism security discourses, the performative act of constructing a threat from isolationism constructed a constative context of historical debt and the lessons learned from it. The securitizing move of constructing the threat of isolationism to the US, though it functions within an accepted grammar of security, constructed a new threat – current isolationism as a reaction to Vietnam. In doing so, the securitization both drew on and reperformed the historical 'fact' that interwar isolationism exacerbated the sacrifices of WWII and threatened the US. The securitization also reperforms the discourse of the lessons of interwar isolationism, specifically constructing them as accepted, unproblematic knowledge.

The next chapter will focus on the structuring discourses, as this project is concerned with iterative acts rather than single speech acts. However, the next chapter's conceptualization, which relies on structuring and basic discourses, follows a similar logic.

Conclusion

This chapter presented a theorization formulated to further explain the discourse of isolationism. By using securitization theory to conceptualize isolationism discourse as a political tool, intertwined with the reproduction of elements of US 'character', the public, history, and knowledge of the international, this project seeks to problematize the concept of isolationism by viewing it as more than just a collection of objects (e.g. a history, a pejorative, etc.). The approach of theorizing isolationism

discourse as a performative security discourse also allows this project to examine the Nixon administration's discourse as a series of iterative acts that advanced its foreign policy approach, while leveraging the power of history, security, and identity. Furthermore, the arguments in this chapter seek to expand the conceptual toolkit of securitization theory. In the course of addressing the empirical data in this thesis, the analysis seeks to engage with the concept of performativity by theorizing iterative rather than single acts, which construct their own constative contexts in the course of constituting threats and knowledge. This chapter also postulated a 'debt' theorization which generally mirrors the epistemic realism and US exceptionalism discourses used in this thesis. However, this 'debt' framework was presented in this chapter to further understand constative and performative speech acts, a logic which will be expanded upon in the 'Methodology' chapter.

The next chapter will situate these theorizations in a methodological and epistemological framework. This framework will outline the thesis's approach to the empirical data and provide context for the historical empirical referents used to construct isolationism.

Chapter three: Methodology

This chapter explains the methodological framework for the analysis in this thesis. The first section describes the Foucauldian genealogy employed in this thesis and justifies its use in this context. Situated within this approach, and in addition to the explanation in the 'Theory' chapter, this chapter further outlines the basic discourse framework used to explore four related isolationism security discourses in the Nixon administration discourse. Following this, the chapter expands upon the structuring discourses mentioned in the previous chapters. These 'epistemic realism' and 'US exceptionalism' structuring discourses are theorized as elements of a partially structured field of foreign policy, security, and identity discourse which form the touchstones of context and 'historical' continuity usually necessary for the construction of (in)security. Following Hansen (2006), and in line with the poststructuralist approach used in this project, the identities and policies produced through these structuring discourses (and reproduced through isolationism security discourse) are conceptualized as ontologically inseparable (p. 24). Therefore, identity, foreign policy, and security are viewed as "mutually constitutive and discursively linked" (ibid., p. 25). The chapter ends with an explanation of how the sources in this project were chosen.

Methodology: Foucauldian genealogy

Explaining history and making it explicit consists in first perceiving it whole, in relating the so-called natural objects to the specifically dated and exceptional practices that objectivized the objects, and in explaining the practices not on the basis of a unique motive force but on the basis of all the neighboring practices in which they are anchored. (Veyne, 1997: 181)

This project employs a Foucauldian genealogical 'history of the present' to analyze the conditions of formation for the 'reality' of isolationism as a historically rooted characteristic of the American public and American nation in US foreign policy and security discourses (Dean, 1994: 33). This 'reality' or 'truth' of isolationism is

theorized as having been a part of a set of political discursive practices that (re)produced and sustained this 'truth' and attached specific effects of power to it (Bacchi & Bonham, 2014: 191; Foucault, 1980: 132-133). The 'truth' – in this case a history of isolationism, its continued presence in US foreign policy and security discourses, and its allegedly enduring legacy in the 'character' of the US nation and public – was not a natural occurrence. Instead, this 'truth' was objectivized by practices – a multitude of practices that concealed themselves through the process of objectification (Veyne, 1997: 159-160). That is, the discursive invocation of isolationism created isolationism as a policy, history, and naturally occurring characteristic while obscuring this process of creation. When discourses, such as the Nixon administration's, predicated the construction of threats and foreign policy approaches on the 'fact' of isolationism – both as a known danger and allegedly inherent trait of US character – the notion that isolationism occurs naturally was reinforced.

The genealogical approach used in this project will work to reveal the discourses involved in the constitution of isolationism as a threatening past and an aspect of national character (cf. Smart, 2002: 49; Foucault, 1986: 81-82). As covered in the 'Theory' chapter, this thesis theorizes that the construction of isolationism as a threat is predicated on the 'naturalization' of an isolationist past and the sacrifices and debts incurred because of it (i.e. WWII) (cf. Der Derian, 1995: 35; Nietzsche, 1998: 69). Isolationism as an alleged element of both the American national past and a continuing, latent aspect of American 'character' was reproduced as 'natural' and given through security discourse the Nixon administration deployed to promote its foreign policy approach. This discourse both constructed isolationism as a constative context – historical isolationism or the 'fact' of the US public being inclined to isolationism – and as the continuing or potential threat that the public and the US could become isolationist again.

In one respect, in a discourse this thesis conceptualizes as a 'psychological character' discourse, isolationism was presented as a knowable aspect of a US Self. The public's tendency to oscillate between internationalism and isolationism was portrayed as comprehensible, 'measurable' in the American public (via surveys

etc.), and was allegedly apparent in the historical record. This disposition towards vacillation was presented by postwar policymakers as a 'fact' to be dealt with in the present, and constructed as a historical debt to be paid, a sacrifice to be honored with an appropriately engaged foreign policy. During Vietnam, a desire for isolationism was constructed as 'understandable' in terms of public weariness of Vietnam and a generalized US 'overextension' in the world – though the full realization of this isolationism through an isolationist foreign policy approach was still presented as dangerous.

While the potential isolationism in the US public was presented by the Nixon administration's 'psychological character' discourse as an objective circumstance to be acknowledged and pragmatically dealt with, this was not the case in another discourse. In a discourse this project conceptualizes as 'ideological character', the administration constructed a 'vocal minority' Other within the US public. This un-American 'vocal minority' helped define, not just a 'silent majority' of Americans, but also a moral or ideological US character. This project theorizes this discourse as functioning primarily as an electoral discourse targeting voters the administration perceived as inherently isolationist (not just prone to oscillation) and as a broader electoral discourse appealing to morality and respect for authority.

As the administration was appealing to voters it thought were isolationists and were vilifying a 'vocal minority' construct that would not care if they were called isolationists, the discourse did not invoke the terms 'isolationism' or 'isolationist'. Furthermore, the discourse attempted to appeal to the moral strength or courage of a US character as means of supporting the administration's Vietnam withdrawal plan and its wider foreign policy approach. As part of the US exceptionalist moral mission had included 'isolationism' – i.e. withdrawing from the world to perfect the US example – the administration's discourse needed to appeal to another aspect of this moral mission (international engagement), but without vilifying isolationism in this respect. Relatedly, this project posits that, as this isolationism was presented as a historical, exceptionalist US trait, it could not be effectively used against the 'vocal minority' since they were constructed as un-American (and, again, they likely would

not have cared). Both discourses are covered in more depth in the 'Psychological Character' and 'Ideological Character' chapters.

Knowledge of a specific history of US isolationism and foreign policy, as well as a particular American 'character', are theorized in this thesis as having been constituted through discourses that also constructed isolationism as the known past and a threatening present or future. Therefore, as the threat of isolationism was constructed – always with recourse to some element of the US past and/or supposedly latent aspect of an American 'character' – so too was a specific, knowable 'history' of isolationism constructed. As covered in the 'Theory' chapter, in terms of securitization theory this is consistent with Hansen's (2006) observation that securitizations are likely to maintain a consistent link with a narrative of identity to avoid destabilizing structuring discourses (p. 23). These structuring discourses are part of a "discursive terrain that is already partially structured through previously articulated and institutionalized identities" (ibid.).

The concept of structuring discourses – discourses which underpin and are reproduced by a security discourse, thereby providing a continuity and authority to the security discourse – play an important role in the methodological and theoretical framework of this thesis. This project theorizes isolationism discourses as a performative security discourse rather than as an object (e.g. foreign policy, history, etc.) and works from the hypothesis that the 'reality' or 'truth' of isolationism was constructed and sustained by a set of discursive practices.

'Discourse' in the context of this methodology entails more than just language, it also includes, *inter alia*, historically contingent practices, structures, and systems. (Neal, 2006: 41; Foucault, 2002: 54; Veyne, 1997: 156-157). 'Knowledge', what is said and accepted as 'true', is also conceptualized as being constituted through discourse (Bacchi & Bonham, 2014: 174, 179; Bacchi, 2012: 3). Immanent in 'what people say' (i.e. discursive *practices*) are the 'rules' "that explain how it is possible to say (or know) certain things" (Bacchi & Bonham, 2014: 180; Doty, 1993).¹⁷ The

¹⁷ Cf. locution/illocution and conventions in speech act and securitization theory. See: 'Theory' chapter.

‘rules’ regarding the formation of ‘knowledge’ within a discourse are constituted within the discourse itself, along with subjects and objects (ibid.).¹⁸

These ‘rules’ – or sets of relationships that function as rules – act like a grammar, similar to the grammar of securitization covered in the ‘Theory chapter’ (Bacchi & Bonham, 2014: 180; Foucault, 2002: 82; Veyne, 1997: 157). This grammar, contingent on historical practices, constitutes subjects and objects, and presents them as natural, rather than as correlatives of practices (Veyne, 1997: 157). The discourse, and the ‘rules’ within it, construct a ‘reality’ in which certain practices not only became possible, they seem reasonable and unremarkable (Doty, 1993: 308). Within such discursive ‘realities’, if the same type of relations (e.g. between a Self and an Other) can be found across different texts, this is usually indicative of a particular logic. The presence of this relational logic across multiple texts “reasonably suggests” a dominant discourse underlies these texts within a particular time and space (ibid., pp. 308-9).

This thesis theorizes isolationism as having been objectivized within two such broad discursive sets of ‘rules’: the structuring discourses of epistemic realism and US exceptionalism. These discourses are conceptualized in this chapter as having provided the foundation for isolationism discourse and as having been reproduced by isolationism discourse, usually while effacing the function of the structuring discourses in this process. In a broader sense, this project holds that these discourses can be understood as effects or expressions of a wider hegemonic discourse. Briefly, this hegemonic discourse is theorized using Ashley’s ‘paradigm of sovereignty’ concept. In this paradigm, ambiguity is disciplined with recourse to an “ideal sovereign presence”, e.g. an actor, group, political community, etc. (Ashley, 1988: 230). The invocation of a sovereign presence serves as a “principle of interpretation”, imposing a distinction on the ambiguous: the rational, and thus meaningful, versus the dangerous, external, and anarchic “problem to be solved”

¹⁸ While in some readings and applications of securitization theory these ‘rules’ are presented as universal, within this Foucauldian methodology they are conceptualized as historically and contextually specific. As is covered in more depth in the ‘Theory’ chapter, securitization theory is theoretically compatible with the methodology used in this project.

(ibid.). This hegemonic can thus be theorized as having discursively constituted state sovereignty and constructed a Self/Other dichotomy: the domestic versus the international, 'inside' versus 'outside' (Hansen, 2006: 30; Ashley, 1987; Walker, 1992). Through these historically contingent "exclusionary practices", state identity has been understood through a discourse that linked an identity on the 'inside' to be secured against threats located on the 'outside' (Campbell, 1998a: 68; Hansen, 2006: 30).

However, while this hegemonic discourse could be theorized as underpinning the Nixon administration's foreign policy discourse, this discourse is not immediately germane to isolationism security discourse. The Nixon administration did invoke isolationism to garner support for and define its foreign policy approaches – and certainly the future effects of isolationism or inadequate US international engagement were said to be attacks from other states that would threaten US existence. However, isolationism was constructed by the administration's discourse as an internal threat. While threats from communism had also been portrayed as internal threats by politicians over the years (including then-Representative Nixon in the late 1940s), the threat was ultimately from something constructed as un- or non-American (cf. the use of anticommunism discourse against a 'vocal minority' in the 'Ideological Character' chapter). Isolationism was constructed by the Nixon administration as an objective trait of the US public that could become dangerous if it was left unchecked or embraced. While isolationism was portrayed by the discourse as inappropriate, it was not presented as an outside threat.

Before covering the two dominant discourses, epistemic realism and US exceptionalism, the next section returns to the basic discourse concept initially outlined in the 'Theory' chapter to explore its methodological implications.

Basic discourses as methodology

For Hansen (2006), foreign policy debates are "structured" or "bound together" by basic discourses (p. 46). Foreign policy discourses – especially debates over foreign policy – "are constituted through individual texts, but these texts converge around

common themes, around certain constructions of identity and sets of policies considered viable, desirable or necessary” (ibid.). These common constructions of identity may be constructed through a ‘radical’ discourse of otherness – i.e. the inside versus outside distinction discussed earlier – but this might not always be the case (ibid., pp. 30, 198 n. 13). There may also be degrees of ‘otherness’, particularly when multiple (basic) discourses are functioning, because identity may be constructed within a larger system of relationships of ‘sameness’ and ‘differentiation’ (ibid., p. 37). Therefore, identity is theorized as having often been constituted within a network of identities, rather than just a Self/Other dichotomy (ibid., p. 36). These identity constructions undergird and legitimize the conditions of security and foreign policies they constitute (ibid., p. 33). As such, these identity constructions impose constraints on acceptable policies and subjectivities (ibid.).

In the US, specific, historically contingent practices and knowledge – themselves underpinned by a ‘paradigm of sovereignty’ discourse – may be conceptualized as having produced an understanding of US foreign policy as “solely a response to a realm of necessity” (Campbell, 1990: 271; see also: Campbell, 1998a: 61-72). As such, foreign policy discourse in the US holds a privileged position as it elucidates the foremost threats to the nation and state (Campbell, 1998a: 70). In this manner, even abstract foreign policy doctrines involving concepts of “national interests” or “security interests” are “articulated inside discourses on ‘national security’ that draw upon constructions of national identity” (Hansen, 2006: 26).

However, while identities may be partially structured and previously articulated – and thus can function as the justification for foreign policies and constructions of (in)security – identities are also a product of these processes (Hansen, 2006: 23). In this sense, this thesis does not attempt to demonstrate the causal effects of identity on foreign policy or (in)security constructions, but rather their interactions (ibid., p. 24). This thesis conceptualizes two structuring discourses which enabled and constrained isolationism discourses (ibid., pp. 26-7). One discourse, ‘US exceptionalism’, the thesis posits as having functioned as a dominant construction of US identity that enabled the constitution of a US identity through foreign policy and security discourses, and which had to be engaged with even when aspects of

the identity were contested (*ibid.*, p. 27). This thesis proposes a second discourse, 'epistemic realism' for understanding how isolationism discourses were structured. This discourse is conceptualized as constructing 'objective' factors and knowledge of 'reality' in foreign policy and security discourses (e.g. how the international realm works and 'rational' approaches to defense). Though the discourse constituted these factors as objective or universal, they were situated in, or were products of older discourses (*ibid.*).

During the war in Vietnam the idea of what role the US should play in the world was challenged. The concept of an 'epistemic realism' discourse is a useful means for understanding the ways in which the administration's isolationism discourse engaged with these challenges. The administration's discourse constructed the administration as the arbiter of knowledge about how a changing world functioned and the US role within it. The administration constructed its foreign policy approach – including its Vietnam withdrawal plan – as a rational appraisal of a newly multipolar world and a pragmatic reaction to what it perceived as a rising tide of isolationism in the US public. This discourse also asserted the importance of US world leadership as a responsible practice. The administration's approach was thus presented as being in keeping with this identity as well as a rational reaction to the 'historical lesson' that if the US was not internationally engaged, it would come under threat.

The concept of a 'US exceptionalism' discourse also helps frame how the administration's isolationism discourse struck a balance between constructing isolationism as a threat while not denigrating it as an un-American approach. Through constituting exceptionalism as historical, the administration's discourse consigned isolationism as a foreign policy approach to history. However, it also presented a desire for it as understandable – particularly in response to Vietnam and the globalism of the early Cold War. However, while this discourse underpinned the notion that the US wavered between expressions of a US moral mission (i.e. between isolationism/setting an example and internationalism/defending the example abroad), it constructed the existence of a moral mission as immutable and indisputable.

The next two sections further explain these two structuring discourses.

Epistemic realism and an inside/outside relationship

In the administration's discourse – and in much historical isolationism discourse – the threat of isolationism was constructed as enabling a greater threat to the US. In this sense, the predominate threat is not the isolationism itself, but what isolationism will facilitate: to wit, if the US becomes isolationist, it will encourage or allow other states to overrun the rest of the world until it directly threatens or attacks the US. While the threat of isolationism is constructed as internal, the greater resultant effects are presented as external. For this reason, it can be difficult to conceptually separate isolationism security discourse from a more general foreign policy security discourse. This section explores a theoretical link between the two discourses.

As discussed earlier, the 'paradigm of sovereignty' conceptualizes a sovereignty/anarchy dichotomy that disciplines ambiguity in foreign policy through a process of othering (i.e. differentiating a sovereign Self against an anarchic Other) (Ashley, 1988). An integral aspect (or effect) of the 'paradigm of sovereignty' hegemonic discourse is the construction of the concept/practice that Ashley calls 'political realism' (Ashley, 1987: 404). This realism manifests as a 'knowledge' of the international and domestic – an understanding that defines international politics as characterized by an anarchic lack of community/government, compared with the domestic, governed (sovereign) sphere of the state (ibid.). Ashley's (1987) 'political realism' may also be conceptualized as what Der Derian (1995) calls 'epistemic realism'.

The 'paradigm of sovereignty' discourse is theorized by Ashley as having constituted "competent subjects" – those actors empowered to discuss and enact policy – within epistemic realism as 'realist', which signifies their subjectivity is that of a general 'realism' with its allegedly concomitant commitment to a "Western rationalist tradition embodied in the national community" (Ashley, 1987: 418). This supposed "Western rationalist tradition" by which these subjects abide,

(re)constructs the state/community as the font of reason, progress, and enlightenment in need of defense from the “violent reassertion of dark and regressive modes of rule” that exist in the absence of government (ibid.). Moreover, this discourse and the subjectivities it constitutes, defends itself against challenges to the knowledge/power¹⁹ of the discourse – particularly threats to the division between domestic and international (ibid., pp. 418-9).

Another effect of this discourse is its constitution of “a silence regarding the historicity of the boundaries it produces, the space it historically clears, and the subjects it historically constitutes” (Ashley, 1987: 419). The discourse is theorized as constructing the domestic community/state as a “Western rationalist understanding”, differentiated against a “primordial” absence of community (i.e. an anarchical international realm) that necessitated the state in the first place (ibid.). This process is similar to Butler’s (2010) theorization of sex/gender covered in the ‘Theory’ chapter: an epistemic realist discourse constructs anarchy as pre-discursive and natural. Thus, the discourse constructs its own foundations through its performance, whilst effacing the process of construction. Ashley (1987) characterizes this as “genesis amnesia”, and because of this amnesia:

the realm of international politics cannot be recognized for what it is: a historically effected mode of political community vying with other modes and owing its precarious existence to historical practices and the strategic play of power, including the [amnesia] itself. (p. 419)

As such, through this realist discourse the sovereign state becomes a necessary *effect* of anarchy and disorder. This anarchy is assumed to exist prior to and independent of “any rational or linguistic conception of” sovereignty and anarchy, which is a function of the silencing/amnesic effect of the discourse (Der Derian, 1995: 30). In this ‘epistemic realist’ discourse, security being achievable through the sovereignty of the state is not merely a political choice, but a *necessary* reaction to anarchy: the benefits of the state in the “Western rationalist tradition” are not possible without the sovereign state (ibid.). Therefore, in Der Derian’s (1995)

¹⁹ For Foucault there is no disinterested knowledge, knowledge and power are “inextricably interdependent” (Smart, 2002: 58).

reading, “the security of epistemic realism is ontological, theological and teleological: that is, metaphysical” (p. 30).

Invocations of ‘rationalism’ – particularly a “Western rationalist tradition” – may construct an association between liberal or rational practices and political practices (Williams, 2005a: 141-2). Not only does such a discourse seek to define epistemological debates in terms of rationalism and empiricism, it also “implicitly link[s] empiricism to a practical-moral stance equated with *political responsibility*” (ibid, p. 142, emphasis original). Thus, the discourse can be conceptualized as constructing a link between a ‘Western’ rational, empiricist, liberal order and *practical* political decisions, and equating a *lack* of liberal, empiricist-defined objectivity with anarchy (ibid.).

Williams (2005a: 139) finds this “broader liberal-rationalist tradition” in what Rengger (2000) calls ‘cognitive liberalism’. Also called ‘ethical liberalism’ (e.g. Bellamy, 1992), this ‘form’ of liberalism is a combination of philosophical and social theses (Rengger, 2000: 106). The assumption of the social thesis, that societies “would develop in such a way that would lead to the basic harmonization of life plans”, is rooted in:

the thought and practice of the European Enlightenment and, especially, the belief in the methods and requirements of natural science. Science, on these assumptions, is usually held to require a commitment to universalizable or harmonizable knowledge. (ibid., pp. 106-7)

Therefore, in this strand of liberalism there is more than just an *epistemic* claim about the correct method for acquiring knowledge – this discourse also constructs an emphasis on the commitment to objective, empirical knowledge because it is linked with responsible *practice*, which is presented as essential (Williams, 2005a: 139). Therefore, in this ‘cognitive liberal’ discourse, a rationalist/empiricist epistemology governs moral and political theory, which then dictates moral and political practice (ibid.; Flathman, 1989: 18).

Returning to isolationism discourse, the general logic of the threat construction mentioned earlier is predicated on two underlying assumptions. The first assumption is also the ‘lesson’ supposedly learned from interwar isolationism: US

isolationism *will* allow threats to grow and, relatedly, US international engagement is necessary to mitigate these threats. In short, US isolationism will engender threats to allied states and eventually the US. The second interrelated assumption is that, in the absence of US international engagement, enemy states *will* attack allied states and then the US. The administration's discourse (re)constructed these underlying assumptions as a knowledge of how the US and world functioned. Relatedly, the administration's policy was presented as the pragmatic and responsible approach.

The Nixon administration's discourse constructed a world and a knowledge of how this world functioned. Through grounding its discourse in this knowledge, the administration's discourse made a claim to authority and presented itself conducting responsible, moral practices. Though the US role in the world and its responsibility to itself and other states was contested at the time, no elites advocated completely withdrawing from the world. The administration constructed a desire for isolationism in the public as understandable – and linked this to a US moral identity – but presented isolationism as a policy, the isolationism allegedly advocated by foreign policy elites, as dangerous. Potential isolationism in the public was a factor that could be pragmatically engaged with, while isolationism as a policy was constructed as disregarding the 'objective' lessons of the interwar period and WWII.

Through making claims to rationality and 'realism', the administration's discourse constructed isolationism as an object to be dealt with. Rather than a political discourse used to vilify or discredit rival policies or politicians, the administration's isolationism discourse was often framed in 'realist' terms, so that the discourse was presented as the functioning of a scientific, or at least practical, form of knowledge. The gravity of security further afforded an authority to the administration's isolationism discourse.

This epistemic realism discourse also functioned alongside a US exceptionalism discourse. In performing these two discourses through isolationism discourse, the administration presented a 'responsible' foreign policy approach based on a knowledge of the international and rooted in historical US identity tropes. As this

thesis will demonstrate, the administration's isolationism discourse presented a broad US moral character for the public to identify with. The desire for isolationism was presented as an understandable reaction in the public, but one that could be overcome by dint of the public's moral courage. Likewise, the previous globalist foreign policy approach was portrayed as appropriate for its time, but also as having caused an over-extension that had wearied the US public. The administration framed its foreign policy approach as a pragmatic middle ground that presented itself as needing the moral courage of the US public to resist its impulse towards isolationism while also alleviating the over-extension that had caused public weariness through a policy of reduced responsibility.

US exceptionalism

Though, as the 'Ethical Responsibility' chapter will argue, the Nixon administration's discourse was flexible in terms of a US moral example or mission, it still reproduced the concept that the US was exceptional in that it had a moral example or mission to impart to the world. The 'fact' of the US having a moral mission was not contested in the discourse, only which approach should be used to further this mission – in short, be isolationist, perfecting the US example for other states to emulate or actively ensure, through intervention if necessary, other states could follow the US example. Likewise, the 'fact' that without international engagement the US would certainly be threatened and attacked by other states was constructed as given, if not objective. The flexible aspect of the discourse was which path the US public would choose – the administration portrayed itself as giving the US public an appropriate, pragmatic foreign policy approach based on 'known' factors. However, the policy, as well as isolationism discourse, drew on and reproduced durable tropes related to a US exceptionalism discourse.

The historically persistent discourse of US exceptionalism has constructed moralisms – drawn from religious rhetoric and a vague Lockian liberalism – that have undergirded many seemingly disparate US foreign policy pronouncements (Dunn, 2005: 244-245). Or as Dunn (2005) quotes Hirsh (2001/2: 21):

the same self-righteousness that fuels our desire to remain apart makes us convinced that the rest of the world would be better off embracing our values. (p. 245)

These moral foundations of exceptionalist discourse were well established in US foreign policy discourse through the “rhetoric of moral absolutes and imperatives”, by the year 1900 (Hilfrich, 2012: 90). The religious/morality aspect of this discourse tended to cast debates on exceptionalism in absolute terms: there could be no half-measures in terms of ‘defending’ the exceptionalist foundation. (Dunn, 2005: 246).

Dunn (2005), drawing on the work of Brands (1998), conceptualizes two approaches to protecting the exceptionalist nature of the US used by policymakers: the ‘exemplar’ and ‘vindicator’ traditions (pp. 260-261). The ‘exemplarist’ tradition of discourse maintained that the US should lead by example at home (à la John Winthrop’s ‘city upon a hill’), whereas ‘vindicators’ argued for interventionism in “defence of American values and interests” (Dunn, 2005: 245). However, these two approaches were functions of the same exceptionalism discourse (Hilfrich, 2012: 79). As such, even the ‘exemplarist’ approach – as a function of an absolutist exceptionalism discourse – maintained spreading the exceptionalist nature of the US abroad as its ultimate goal; perfection ‘at home’ was just a step towards this goal (ibid., p. 83).

A discourse of US exceptionalism is theorized in this project as having been a foundation for isolationism discourse, which in turn reproduced aspects of exceptionalism. Historically, this exceptionalism could be constructed as an ‘exemplar’ or ‘vindicator’ approach, which was reproduced as being a rational and moral decision, while also reproducing aspects of a supposedly immutable US Self and a US historical narrative of identity. This project’s use of a Foucauldian genealogy and its conceptualization of ‘isolationism’ as a security discourse allows for the inclusion of various ‘historical’ referents while still allowing for the flexibility of isolationism and exceptionalism discourses.

As an example of this interpretation, reperformances of isolationism as a narrative of US identity and as a method of interpretation of US foreign policy have helped obscure US “forceful participation” (or outright imperialism) in the rest of the world

(Blower, 2014: 349). Reproductions of isolationism as a history and foreign policy simultaneously efface US imperialism and reify perceptions of US exceptionalism (Foster, 2010: 4). Zimmerman and Foster argue that this construction of US exceptionalism has served to cut off US history from global history, particularly by setting the US apart from rapacious European imperialism (Zimmerman, 2010: 3; Foster, 2010: 5). In this narrative, the US played only a beneficent role in state-building projects in Southeast Asia through the 1930s, or only imparted agricultural and economic knowledge to West Africa in the early 1900s – rather than enabling and benefiting from colonial systems in these regions (Foster, 2010: 5, *et passim*; Zimmerman, 2010: 249, *et passim*; see also: Hilfrich, 2012).

Exceptionalism discourse also enabled – and was reproduced by – the discursive portrayal of the US as a “reluctant hero” post-WWII (Blower, 2014: 347). In this narrative, isolationism with its allegedly concomitant lack of colonial/imperial aspirations, allowed the US to construct itself as benevolently shouldering the mantle of international leadership (contrasted with self-interested European imperialists, who heretofore only aimed for world power) (*ibid.*). However, though this isolationism is beneficial in terms of constructing a US free from self-interest (in post-WWII presidential discourse at least), it was generally consigned to the past. While it might have been well-intentioned, this isolationism is nevertheless constructed as naïve and more appropriate for a supposedly simpler time. Along these lines, a “reluctant superpower” discourse constituted ‘internationalists’ as rational and cosmopolitan against unreasonable, provincial ‘isolationists’ (Bacevich, 2002: 8).

This again points to a blurred line between inside and outside threats argued in the previous section. In this logic, the appropriate, rational approach for a post-WWII US is international engagement and leadership, while isolationism is dangerous – yet not un-American, as it is potentially underpinned by an exceptionalist desire to see other states assert their own liberal rights to self-governance, or a religious, moral resolve to protect the US so that it may (eventually) protect the rights of other peoples (Hilfrich, 2012: 83). However, this isolationism was still othered, though temporally. Through consigning isolationism to the past – an appropriate

approach in a different, simpler time – and constructing it as naïve in the present, isolationism was othered as a threat without being constructed as un-American.

In the post-WWII era, these discourses of isolationism and exceptionalism can be theorized as having reconstructed a ‘truth’ of US history – especially of the US as a reluctant, benevolent leader – and reproduced a project of liberal ‘internationalism’ as an American vision for world peace (Bacevich, 2002: 9). As these discourses efface conflicting foreign policy perspectives, challenges are rare – Bacevich (2002) considers the interwar period and Vietnam as the only examples (pp. 9-10; Hansen, 2006: 33). Indeed, the Nixon administration’s discourse engaged with these challenges, particularly calls for a recalibration of the extent of the US international role.

The administration’s discourse presented its foreign policy approach as not isolationist, but also as not as aggressively interventionist and engaged as the previous globalist foreign policy. As the administration was advocating this policy of reduced US international responsibility, it constructed the necessity of US international engagement and leadership, including by constructing the potential threats of withdrawal from the world. Furthermore, in terms of Vietnam, the administration constructed withdrawal as both desired by the public and necessary to prevent isolationism. However, it also portrayed a need to withdraw from Vietnam in an appropriate manner and at a measured pace. While constructing withdrawal as necessary to avoid isolationism, it also presented immediate withdrawal as likely to lead to isolationism. In articulating this policy, the administration’s discourse appealed to – and constructed – a moral US identity, where the US kept its word and honored its commitments. Essentially, the administration’s discourse accepted the desire for isolationism as being in keeping with a US moral identity but urged the public to have the moral strength to support Vietnamization. The discourse advocated the need for international engagement but acknowledged the weariness of the public and that this might lead to isolationism, through a policy which reduced US international responsibility. However, this policy was not presented as strictly a moral decision – it was also

predicated on being both a pragmatic response to isolationism in the public and a reaction to the 'objectively' changed nature of the world.

Conclusion

This chapter presented a means for understanding the Nixon administration's isolationism discourse as performative of not just security, but also as reproducing elements of structuring discourses it relied on for continuity. While the epistemic realism and US exceptionalism structuring discourses are not the focus of this thesis, they are conceptualized as inseparable from isolationism discourse. These discourses were not selected beforehand and applied to texts under examination. Rather, a reading of multiple texts revealed the presence of these structuring discourses. While Hansen's framework provided the basis for the broader basic discourses of 'ethical responsibility' and 'spatio-temporal othering', the 'ideological character' and 'psychological character' discourses were likewise formulated as analytical lenses after readings of multiple texts related to isolationism during this period.

While isolationism discourse is theorized as being a security discourse, the grammar of the threat is not straightforward. The use of structuring discourses helps conceptually link the two different threats present in isolationism discourse. While isolationism was constructed as threatening to the US, it was presented as a threat that would enable a more direct threat from other states. The necessity of an internationally engaged US foreign policy appears to have been rooted in a US exceptionalism discourse. This also allowed the potential for isolationism in the public to be presented as inherently 'American', as this was perceived as one side of an exceptionalism coin that flipped between setting an example at home and defending the example abroad. Beyond the moral implications, the epistemic realism discourse allowed the administration to present their policy approach as rational and as a pragmatic reaction to objective factors – particularly in terms of how the world allegedly worked. The administration was able to construct a world in which isolationism would ensure the free world and the US would be existentially threatened by other states, as well as a multipolar world in which states pursued

their own interests. This in turn underpinned the administration's construction of a world in which the US could reduce its international responsibilities – which would also be a pragmatic, responsible response to a US public allegedly drifting towards isolationism.

Chapter four: Ethical Responsibility

NSC-68 and the Truman Doctrine

The Nixon administration's discourse presented previous 'globalist' Cold War foreign policy approaches as a cause of increased isolationist sentiments in the US public and as being inapplicable to a 'changed' world. This previous policy was framed, if not as a direct threat, then as capable of inculcating a threatening isolationism in the public. In this respect, the administration's discourse used anticommunist globalism as a 'rational' limit in terms of future US foreign policy approaches. According to this discourse, the public would react adversely to more globalism and consequently desire even more withdrawal from the world. Furthermore, the Nixon discourse asserted, this type of policy was unnecessary in a 'new' world of polycentric communist states. The administration's discourse attempted to position the Nixon Doctrine as existing between the limit of globalism at one end and isolationism at the other. In this sense, the discourse defined the Nixon Doctrine (and its construction of the 'appropriate' levels of US responsibility to the world) against both isolationism and globalism.

The Nixon Doctrine likely would have been called isolationism in the 1950s and 60s²⁰ and a reoccurring function revealed throughout this thesis's analysis seems to have been preemptively defining the doctrine as not isolationism. This section briefly examines two foundational aspects of this globalism, NSC-68 and the Truman Doctrine. A historical context is necessary to explain the referents used in the Nixon discourse to construct a globalist foreign policy history and to contextualize neoconservative assertions that the world had not 'changed' – that the US was still locked in a bipolar ideological battle with an implacable, expansionist communist/Soviet Other.

²⁰ See, e.g., Pfaff, 1969: "Now events have driven us to retrenchment, to retreat from intervention. Morgenthau's style of dissent has become the conventional wisdom. Senator Fulbright, Arthur Schlesinger – Richard Nixon, dare we say? – have become converts; what once was deprecatingly called neo-isolationism has become the mood of the country."

The Truman Doctrine, first presented in 1947 as part of a framework for sending aid to Turkey and Greece, was sweeping in scope when first articulated by President Truman to a joint session of Congress:

I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures. [...] we must assist free peoples to work out their own destinies in their own way. [...] our help should be primarily through economic and financial aid which is essential to economic stability and orderly political processes. (Truman, March 12, 1947)

Furthermore, though Truman stated that the US would be “giving effect to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations”, the US would be acting unilaterally because “the situation is an urgent one requiring immediate action, and the United Nations and its related organizations are not in a position to extend help of the kind that is required” (ibid.).

The speech did not explicitly mention the USSR or communism (beyond noting that the “terrorists” threatening the Greek state were “led by Communists”) (ibid.).

Nevertheless, the Doctrine was formulated in response to fears that a Soviet takeover of Greece could threaten Turkey or vice versa, and eventually lead to a communist encirclement of Western Europe (Margolies, 2012: 334-6). Truman’s speech did, however, explicitly construct any type of “totalitarian” incursion on a free state as a direct threat to the US:

This is no more than a frank recognition that totalitarian regimes imposed upon free peoples, by direct or indirect aggression, undermine the foundations of international peace and hence the security of the United States. (Truman, March 12, 1947)

However, even at the time, the Truman administration was clear that the Doctrine did not mean the US would automatically respond to similar situations in other states (see: Acheson, March 24, 1947; March 28, 1947; Gati, 1968: 138-9).

In 1950, the Truman administration debated whether to release the findings of NSC-68 and the Korean War started. National Security Council document 68 – “widely regarded as having established the parameters and rationale for postwar United States foreign policy” – constructed the US as being in direct antagonism with an existentially threatening USSR and emphasized the importance of the international

system (Campbell, 1998a: 23-4). Despite an August 1950 Gallup poll saying 70% of Americans would approve raising taxes to fund a larger military, the Truman administration did not publicly advocate full war mobilization or a sustained military build-up (Casey, 2005: 672, 670). The administration's lack of endorsement was part of a public relations campaign initially aimed at rolling out NSC-68 to the public²¹, a campaign designed to limit the possibility of the public demanding an aggressive, preventative war (ibid, p. 665). Indeed, even after the Korean War commenced, the administration avoided publicizing elements of NSC-68 – even avoiding making connections between the USSR and North Korea in public, as they feared a “war psychosis” in the public mind (ibid., pp. 668-9). This appears to be similar to the portrayal of the US public in the Nixon administration's discourse – one prone to oscillation – however, in this case the public was presented as moving in the opposite direction, towards an aggressive interventionism. However, the Nixon administration's discourse, which constructed an oscillatory electorate, was public whereas the Truman administration discourse was mostly in camera.

NSC-68 departed from George Kennan's containment theory in terms of interests, threats, and credibility, all of which were now conceptualized as interrelated. In Kennan's theory, containment strategy was predicated on the presumption of limited resources, thus distinctions had to be made between ‘vital’ and ‘peripheral’ US interests (Gaddis, 2005: 90). NSC-68 stated that “building up strength” would be “costly” and “dangerous”, but “half-measures [would] be more costly and more dangerous” because they could not prevent and might “actually invite war” (‘A Report to the President’ [NSC-68], *FRUS*, v.1, d.85, p. 285). Contra Kennan, NSC-68 argued that there need not be a distinction between vital and peripheral interests (Gaddis, 2005: 92). However, the document also conceptualized the Cold War and the Soviet Union as operating beyond economic and military spheres of action. Since the USSR was perceived as seeking to weaken the “world power position of the US” by whatever means necessary, including by denigrating “everything that

²¹ Though NSC-68 was a secret document, the Truman administration sought to ‘sell’ the document's findings and logic to the US public (see: Casey, 2005).

gives us or others respect for our institutions”, credibility became an asset to be secured (NSC-68 quoted in *ibid.*, p. 90).²²

As covered later in the ‘Spatio-Temporal Othering’ chapter, credibility was interwoven with the perception that due to US unwillingness to use nuclear weapons (unless directly attacked) the USSR would test American credibility through limited proxy wars (cf. Gaddis, 2005: 95). If the US did not adequately respond to Soviet provocations, it would lose credibility and, with it, vital interests (*ibid.*). Thus, by the logic of NSC-68, the perception of a Soviet threat anywhere along the US worldwide ‘perimeter’ of defense meant that the threatened location was now a vital interest (*ibid.*, p. 96). As Gaddis (2005) puts it:

To define interests in terms of threats is, after all, to make interests a function of threats—interests will then expand or contract as threats do. [...] The whole point of NSC-68 had been to generate additional means with which to defend existing interests. But by neglecting to define those interests apart from the threat to them, the document in effect expanded interests along with means, thereby vitiating its own intended accomplishment. (p. 96)

The Nixon Doctrine broke from this logic in that a potential threat to US national interests would now be conceptualized by the administration as an instance of conflicting national interests, rather than an ideologically based attack, and US responses would depend on the context of the issue. Nixon was always clear that the US would not “withdraw from its indispensable role in the world”, particularly because it was “the only way” the US could carry out its “responsibilities” (Nixon, Feb. 18, 1970). However, Nixon also emphasized having a foreign policy that was “based on a realistic assessment of our and others’ interests”, where interests were shaped by commitments and not vice versa (*ibid.*). These commitments were not the reason the US was involved in the world, but a result of the US being involved in the world (*ibid.*). All new commitments, Nixon stated, would be viewed in light of an assessment of US “national interests and those of other countries, of the specific

²² This could also be conceptualized as ‘containment’. Cf. ‘psychological domino theory’ in the ‘Spatio-Temporal Othering’ chapter.

threats to those interests, and of our capacity to counter those threats at an acceptable risk and cost” (ibid.).

In a fundamentally ‘realist’ approach, the Nixon Doctrine would be based on interests, rather than treating disputes with communist states as ideological assaults intended to destroy the US and its supposedly superior moral mission. All nations, including “Communist adversaries” would be regarded “first and foremost as nations pursuing their own interests as they perceive these interests,” just as the US “followed our own interests as we see them” (Nixon, Feb. 18, 1970). As such, neither “cold-war invective” nor “ideological debate” would be used in negotiations, as a matter of policy (ibid.). Any agreements would “come from a realistic accommodation of conflicting interests” (ibid.). Furthermore, interactions with “Communist countries” would no longer give primary attention to “psychological effect” over “substance” and the US would “not become psychologically dependent on rapid or extravagant progress” (ibid.). The US would be “realistic” and not be “discouraged by frustration or seeming failure”, instead seeking “a gradual and practical process of building agreement on agreement” (ibid.).

While the US would have interests globally (since it was an ‘indispensable’ world leader), the nature of the ‘threat’ to these interests would be based on ‘realistic assessments’ of the US and other states’ interests. Moreover, allied states – particularly Asian states – would be responsible for providing their own defense against threats (unless there was a nuclear threat) (Nixon, July 25, 1969). Also, as communist states were to be conceptualized as self-interested rather than ideologically driven, a ‘threatening’ action from one of these states to a ‘free’ state was not necessarily indicative of an ongoing quest for world domination (cf. neoconservative thought below). Thus, incursions to the ‘perimeter’ of the free world would not constitute *ipso facto* a direct threat to US ‘vital interests’.

However, in the administration’s approach to Vietnam (i.e. Vietnamization, the transferring of responsibility for fighting the war to the South Vietnamese), discursive elements from the earlier globalist containment policies remained, particularly ‘credibility’. In 1970, Nixon was still referring to ‘domino theory’ as

being applicable in Southeast Asia. Not only would a precipitate US withdrawal from Vietnam have a “catastrophic effect” on the US and future peace, but it would also leave Asian allies with the message “Watch out, we might be next” (Nixon, July 1, 1970). The threat of falling dominoes was possible because a withdrawal that left the US “humiliated or defeated” would be “ominously encouraging to the leaders of Communist China and the Soviet Union who are supporting the North Vietnamese” and would “encourage them in their expansionist policies in other areas” (ibid.) – in other words, the concept of US credibility was still important.²³

In the context of this analysis, the assumption that a particular type of withdrawal from Vietnam would leave the US “humiliated and defeated” and thus would encourage communist expansionism is pertinent. Essentially, the administration constructed the credibility of the US to ‘successfully’ withdraw as a key factor in terms of preventing future communist expansion. In this manner, there was a shift from the responsibility to literally fight communism at the perimeters of the free world, to the responsibility to appropriately withdraw from Vietnam – to leave when the South Vietnamese could fight the war themselves. In this sense, the boundaries in need of defense did not change, only whose responsibility it was to defend them with soldiers on the ground.

As Nixon stated in 1970:

This is the message of the doctrine I announced at Guam – the “Nixon Doctrine”. Its central thesis is that the United States will participate in the defense and development of allies and friends, but that America cannot – and will not – conceive all the plans, design all the programs, execute all the decisions and undertake all the defense of the free nations of the world. We will help where it makes a real difference and is considered in our interest. (Nixon, Feb. 18, 1970)

²³ Indeed, this can also be viewed as an example of the administration’s linkage between domestic and international ‘peace’ covered in the introduction to this chapter (as well as an overlap with neoconservative linkage between domestic morality and international stability and security). As Nixon put it: “Let us be united for peace. Let us also be united against defeat. Because let us understand: North Vietnam cannot defeat or humiliate the United States. Only Americans can do that” (Nixon, Nov. 3, 1969).

Nixon would go on to say that insisting “other nations play a role is not a retreat from responsibility; it is a sharing of responsibility” and that this did not represent “a way for America to withdraw from its indispensable role in the world. It is a way – the only way – we can carry out our responsibilities” (Nixon, Feb. 18, 1970).

By this logic, the only way the US could carry out its responsibilities both to itself and the world was by devolving defense responsibilities to other states. The US would perform its “indispensable role in the world” with less direct involvement, but the overarching necessity of this role remained. Even if communism was not monolithic and these communist states were driven by their ‘interests’, their threat to allied states and the US remained – as did the boundaries of defense – but allied states could now shoulder more responsibility. This conceptualization of a US perimeter of defense – i.e. the boundary lines between free and communist worlds for which the US was responsible – simultaneously shrinking and remaining static is covered in more detail in the ‘Spatio-Temporal’ chapter (particularly regarding nuclear weapons policies).

Though the ethical responsibility discourse’s construction of a ‘changed’ world was a crucial aspect of the shift in US responsibilities, so too was the constitution of a US public with a specific reaction to Vietnam and globalism. In particular, the administration’s discourse constructed a responsibility of the US to itself – both a Self of the US public and a US national identity – through a framework that also constituted a ‘changed’ world and how it should be interpreted. The administration’s portrayal of itself fulfilling this responsibility to the Self within a changed world, particularly by reacting to the mood of the US public, also functioned as a defense against the administration being charged with isolationism. Specifically, as a means of heading off potential isolationism and preserving US international engagement, the administration could present itself as pragmatically responding to a wearied electorate in the context of a very different world.

As shown in this section, the Nixon administration’s discourse used elements of earlier US foreign policies (NSC-68 and the Truman Doctrine) to both establish a historical globalism against which to define a changed world and a concomitant altered foreign policy approach (the Nixon Doctrine). This discourse also helped to

establish continuity in terms of ongoing threats from the USSR (and other states) and the continuing need for US world leadership vis-à-vis these and other threats that would follow US abdication of its leadership.

US exceptionalism and the construction of ethics of responsibility: Neoconservative criticisms

This chapter's analysis focuses on the Nixon administration's construction of US moral responsibility to the world and itself, and in doing so the constitution of the 'reality' of the world in which such responsibilities are to function. This administration's discourse at the time did not function in a vacuum – it interacted and responded to other discourses. 'Neoconservatism' was one such discourse. It is highlighted here because this discourse was explicitly a rejection of many aspects of the Nixon Doctrine, particularly in terms of US moral responsibility to continue fighting communism/the USSR in a specific manner because of the alleged nature of world communism, and an associated interpretation of the world as bipolar. This section of the chapter will demonstrate not only the interaction between the Nixon and neoconservative discourses, but also how the administration constructed ethical responsibilities through isolationism discourse. A common thread running through the administration and neoconservative discourses (including subsequent academic analyses) was US exceptionalism and concepts of US moral character.

Neoconservative thought, itself a direct reaction to Nixon and Kissinger's foreign policies – particularly the so-called "second age" neoconservatism (see: Vaïsse, 2010) – was (and continues to be) critical of the Nixon and subsequent Ford administrations for a perceived lack of morality, a pursuit of a calculated realpolitik, and a concomitant lack of exceptionalist moral mission with which to engage, invigorate, and unite the US public. If, as this chapter proposes, the Nixon administration used isolationism discourse to situate the Nixon Doctrine as a middle ground, neoconservative²⁴ criticism represented one pole against which it defined itself. While the administration distanced itself from accusations of isolationism by

²⁴ 'Neoconservatives' were at the time often called 'Scoop Jackson Democrats' because of the influence of Washington Senator Henry 'Scoop' Jackson (Vaïsse, 2010: 110).

positioning itself as instead responding to a US public inclined to isolationism with a mitigated policy of reduced US international responsibility, it also had to defend itself from neoconservative accusations that recognition of a multipolar world and détente with PRC and the USSR were acts of appeasement and isolationism.

Much neoconservative writing is quite polemic and often does not appear in widely regarded peer-reviewed journals. Therefore, this analysis concentrates on a highly respected academic text on US foreign policy by Walter Russell Mead. Though this text is not explicitly neoconservative, as is argued below, it evinces many, though not all, aspects of neoconservative thought and analysis – in effect it functions as neoconservative discourse. Contra Mead, and most neoconservative discourse, this chapter argues that the Nixon administration’s isolationism discourse did construct moral and exceptionalist concepts of responsibility, as well as what Morgenthau would call a ‘transcendental purpose’. In this manner the Nixon Doctrine was not an aberration from historical US foreign policy, as Mead argues. Furthermore, this chapter contends that Mead’s discourse in particular – and most neoconservative criticism in general – fails to appreciate the Nixon administration’s so called *realpolitik* approach as a performative discourse. This *realpolitik* or ‘realist’ discourse is presented in this chapter as a means of claiming a middle ground in the name of supposed pragmatism, and the chapter further argues that this realist discourse was used in conjunction with isolationism discourse.

Mead and neoconservatism

Though neoconservatism’s direct antecedents, as an ideology or political persuasion, may have predated the Nixon administration (initially expressed as a liberal anticommunism after WWII) (Cooper, 2010: 4; Vaïsse, 2010: 50-80) the term was largely absent from the political discourse during the Vietnam War. However, Vietnam played a pivotal role in the formation of neoconservatism. As Krebs (2015) sums up the relationship: “It is not too great a stretch to conclude: no Vietnam, no neoconservatism” (p. 261).

Cooper (2010) observes that neoconservatism is often described as the result of a group of Democrats becoming disillusioned by American “defeat” in Vietnam and the Democratic party’s embrace of “McGovernism” (which Cooper notes was used as shorthand for isolationism), and abandoning what they perceived as a “corrupted form of modern liberalism” (ibid., p. 165, n. 5). As Vaïsse (2010) notes, McGovern rejected the label isolationist after being accused of isolationism because his 1972 presidential platform advocated a cease-fire and immediate withdrawal of US troops from Vietnam, and called for large withdrawals of US forces from Europe as well as substantial defense budget cuts and a unilateral freeze on nuclear weapons development (p. 97). Furthermore, McGovern – in a manner similar to the Nixon Doctrine – did not perceive a bipolar world threatened by an ideologically driven, expansionist communist/Soviet threat (ibid.; Semple Jr., Sept. 13, 1972). In this sense, the accusations made about McGovern’s supposed isolationism could have been directed at his 1972 foreign policy proposals. Similarly, such accusations of isolationism, particularly in neoconservative discourse, may have been associated with his rejection of an ideologically driven, bipolar world. Indeed, similar charges were made by Scoop Jackson in 1972 when he compared Nixon’s détente to Chamberlain’s appeasement at Munich (Vaïsse, 2010: 114-5).

Vaïsse (2010) relates a convoluted through-line of neoconservatism over the decades, one which initially emerged to the right of the Nixon administration in the form of Scoop Jackson Democrats’ and the Coalition for a Democratic Majority’s (CDM) vehement rejections of the New Left (including McGovern) and the center-left and center-right consensus on détente (p. 100).²⁵ The Scoop Jackson Democrats/CDM had a strained relationship with President Carter and hesitantly embraced Ronald Reagan, particularly because of his conception of an ideologically based bipolar world and a moral conflict between the US and USSR (Vaïsse, 2010: 180-219). After the end of the Cold War, neoconservative arguments for a moral conflict between good and evil eventually resurfaced in the George W. Bush administration after 9/11 (ibid., 243-51). Cooper (2010) sees neoconservative

²⁵ The entire history is too complex to fully describe here. See: Vaïsse, 2010: *passim*; Hodgson, 1996: 128-57; Williams, 2005b. Vaïsse (2010) categorizes neoconservative thought into three “ages” which overlapped throughout the decades since the 1960s (pp. 11, 284, *et passim*).

unipolar arguments from the 1990s and 2000s as based on mid to late 1970s neoconservative critiques of Nixon-Kissinger²⁶ attempts at détente (pp. 25; 100-24).²⁷

Williams (2005a) echoes this assessment:

in neoconservatism, heroic virtue and national greatness have been recombined as elements of a post-Cold War vision of the American national interest[.] [...] [N]eoconservatism frequently casts itself in direct opposition to Realism (often identified with Henry Kissinger), which it presents as an immoral and manipulative form of *realpolitik* – a manifestation of a broader liberal decadence that erodes the moral fabric of domestic society while being at the same time incapable of generating the domestic support necessary for robust action abroad. (p. 198)

According to Williams (2005a), in contemporary neoconservative foreign policy discourse the core of US foreign policy is the universal value of democracy (p. 199). Without the synthesis of liberal universal values and, importantly, expressions of national greatness, the public will call for “deeper and deeper cuts in defense and foreign-affairs budgets and gradually decimate the tools of US hegemony” (William Kristol and Robert Kagan quoted in *ibid.*).

Such neoconservative reactions to the Nixon administration’s foreign policy – in most cases *ex post facto* – provide a useful analytical lens for examining how an ethical responsibility discourse functioned in the Nixon administration’s isolationism discourse. Highlighting the immutable nature of US exceptionalist morality in neoconservative discourse reveals the flexibility of US moral character (as function of national interest) in Nixon-Kissinger discourse. For the reasons mentioned above, this analysis utilizes Walter Russell Mead’s (2002) award winning book *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How it Changed the World*. Written just prior to 9/11, before the perceived US unipolar moment of the post-Cold War arguably finished (and when neoconservatism returned to prominence) (Halper & Clarke, 2004: 40), the book offers a retrospective of four “foreign policy traditions”

²⁶ NB. The term ‘Nixon-Kissinger’ is used because neoconservatives critiqued not just the Nixon administration, but also Kissinger’s role as Secretary of State in the succeeding Ford administration.

²⁷ Indeed, in the mid-70s and early 80s, Norman Podhoretz, the self-identified neoconservative whose editorship transformed the journal *Commentary* into the leading neoconservative publication, called Kissinger and “isolationist” and the Nixon-Doctrine “isolationism” (Cooper, 2010: 107).

in US history, along with policy recommendations. The book is not explicitly neoconservative, but there is considerable overlap with neoconservative ideas in its approaches and policy proposals.

Mead does provide a nuanced assessment of the constructedness of an isolationist history within a broader Cold War 'myth'. However, Mead does not reflect on how his own analyses function within said myth. Moreover, there is no critical appraisal of the concept of US exceptionalism, nor any substantive engagement with the topic at all in the book. Indeed, Mead's analysis functions on the presumption of US exceptionalism (see, e.g. Mead, 2002: 97). The book also pointedly excludes the Nixon-Kissinger era of foreign policy from a continuous US "tradition". At the center of Mead's analysis of this era is a construction of 'realism' and concepts of 'morality' which are presented as outside of/foreign to a supposed "Anglo-American" tradition.

From the outset, Mead (2002) constructs Nixon as outside of any of the four "traditions" under examination. According to Mead (2002), American history pre-1945 was a "fuzzy blank [sic]" for Nixon, who was also "largely contemptuous of or silent about the traditional aims, methods, and views of American foreign policy, although he frequently and respectfully referred to the foreign policy traditions of other countries with which he had had to deal" (pp. 6-7). Instead, Nixon's foreign policy was founded in a 'foreign' "Continental realism" which lacked a "moral tradition" (compared with the "traditional themes of Anglo-American foreign policy"), thus rendering Nixon's approach "amoral" (ibid., pp. 75-6).

Moreover, according to Mead, as the Anglo-centric establishment lost its foreign policy influence, the US lost a liberal Anglo-American tradition. This tradition disappeared as "turn-of-the-century immigrants" advanced up professional and social ladders, and mass access to higher education produced "academics and foreign policy professionals whose backgrounds owed little to England" (Mead, 2002: 75-76). Mead's analysis constructs a pre-Cold War US exceptionalist foreign policy tradition based in morality and liberalism, contrasted against a European, amoral realist Other – this realist foreign policy was, according to Mead, responsible for producing "a series of major train wrecks" including the Vietnam War (Mead,

2002: 74). Moreover, this analysis lays the blame for the outcome of the Vietnam War squarely on the Nixon administration and its 'Continental realist' approach – also referred to as the “Nixon-Kissinger approach” – which “took the moral element out of the U.S.-Soviet rivalry” (ibid., p. 72). In this reading, because the Nixon administration approached Vietnam as “a practical problem to be addressed in a pragmatic way”, its concern for a gradual withdrawal was only informed by the need to protect US credibility while “it didn’t matter much [to the administration] who would be running Vietnam in ten years’ time” (ibid., pp. 72-3).

Nixon (as well as Presidents Kennedy and Johnson) prioritized the ability of South Vietnamese leaders to rule effectively under US oversight or in concert with US aims – see the case of assassinated South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem, for example – so in this sense they might not have cared too much about ‘who’ ruled. However, the point of Vietnamization was to leave the South Vietnamese in charge of the defense of their own state (the Republic of Vietnam aka South Vietnam). The administration’s entire approach to Vietnam involved a linkage between the preservation of South Vietnam as an independent state and US ‘honor’, as well peace in Asia and the world (see, *inter alia*, Nixon, ‘Address to the Nation’, Nov. 3, 1969). Immediate withdrawal, according to the administration, would lead to a communist takeover of South Vietnam, followed by “massacres”, “defeat” for the US, and a “collapse of confidence in American leadership, not only in Asia but throughout the world” (ibid.).

Under the terms of the Paris Agreement, US forces were withdrawn from Vietnam by the end of March 1973, while the US retained the option to punish breaches of the Agreement with air strikes originating outside of Indochina (Warner, 2014: 1192). However, no major action was taken by the US due to Nixon’s preoccupation with Watergate, along with the administration’s concern with public and Congressional opinion (ibid.). By the summer of 1973, Congress had majorities large enough to override Nixon’s vetoes on military assistance to US allies in Indochina, including South Vietnam, culminating in the passage of ‘The Second Supplemental Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 1973’ which prohibited funds appropriated under any act from being used for direct or indirect support of combat activities across

Indochina (ibid., p. 1194). Throughout the rest of 1973 and into 1974, Kissinger (Secretary of State from Sept. 1973) still linked the survival of South Vietnam to success of wider foreign policy accomplishments, including after Nixon's resignation in August of 1974 (ibid., pp. 1194-5). Congress refused to fund further action and Saigon fell to North Vietnamese forces on April 30, 1975 (ibid., 1195-6).

Rather than simply being an example of reductive or incorrect analysis, it seems notable that Mead directly attributes the administration not caring about the outcome in Vietnam to a "worldview" devoid of morality (though Mead does stipulate this was not due to a lack of "personal morality" on the part of Nixon and Kissinger) (Mead, 2002: 72-3), rather than an accumulation of historical issues, policy failures, and a plethora of intersecting domestic contestations over the war. Mead's evaluation appears to preclude morality from factoring into a "pragmatic" approach to foreign policy. Rather than assessing policy, Mead appears to be repeating the pejorative appraisals of Nixon-Kissinger's alleged *realpolitik* approach made during the 1970s – that *realpolitik* was an "unwelcome import" that went against "noble Anglo-American traditions" with its cynical, pessimistic deals and "backdoor diplomacy" (Bew, 2015: 241-2). Kissinger rarely used the word 'realpolitik' and viewed it as a means of pejoratively labeling him as a German without an American worldview (ibid., p. 257). Indeed, in the US and UK a supposedly amoral *realpolitik* was often asserted as both the outlook and cause of Germany's hostility and actions during WWI (ibid., pp. 124-6).²⁸

In his analysis, Mead (2002) equates 'morality' with a "traditional Anglo-American foreign policy", which "did what amoral geopolitics could never do: defeated the Soviet Union while strengthening the international order whose protection the United States inherited from Britain" (p. 76). On the other hand, during the Nixon and Ford administrations, when "Continental realism" was at the "zenith" of its influence on US foreign policy, "[i]nternational life was seen as a morals-free zone" (ibid., p. 72). Mead (2002) explicitly constructs 'Continental realism' as an Other, contrasted with an 'American' Self of "Anglo-American traditions". In Mead's view,

²⁸ Bew (2015) notes, however, the term 'realpolitik' in the US never gained quite the same negative connotations it had in the UK, and that the US developed its own version of *realpolitik* (pp. 106-22).

the immediate post-WWII policymakers consigned “American traditions of statesmanship to the ash heap of history” in favor of ‘Continental realism’ with all of its “ideas, values, and unconscious assumptions” (p. 65). Mead sees this as paradoxical since the US had just “defeat[ed] the latest and most dangerous of the Continental realist empires”, but nonetheless the “European strategic ideas [...] wafted into the United States” (ibid., pp. 65-6).

As Bew (2015) points out, the Nixon-Kissinger approach “owed as much to Anglo-Saxon precedents as it did to continental traditions of statecraft” (p. 265) – the influence of Castlereagh as much as Metternich, perhaps, in Kissinger’s alleged canon of diplomatic beau ideals (cf. Del Pero, 2009: 46-50). And while détente generally became associated with a realpolitik approach – especially in neoconservative discourse – the notion of US rapprochement with communist states, particularly PRC, had been mooted in establishment foreign policy circles for at least a decade prior to the Nixon administration (ibid, p. 267). The Nixon administration’s critical departure from these historical approaches, this chapter argues, was rhetorically deploying the specter of isolationism on *both* ends of the arc of a US foreign policy pendulum. While previous administrations had warned of the danger of isolationism as they argued for the importance of an internationally engaged foreign policy, the Nixon administration also presented too much international engagement (i.e. globalism) as a potential route to threatening isolationism. In other words, too little or no US engagement with the world was isolationism, and too much involvement would lead to isolationism or exacerbate isolationist sentiments.

The Nixon administration constructed globalism as an untenable policy – both in terms of a ‘changed’ world that was no longer bipolar, and because of a US public increasingly weary after years of global involvement and Vietnam – and in doing so presented the Nixon Doctrine as a pragmatic, middle ground response. However, while the administration continued to present its foreign policy as internationally engaged, and thus in line with traditional conceptions of a moral US mission, this was not uncontested. In discussing national security narratives, Krebs (2015) notes that leaders generally must deploy stories that adhere to “deeper” and relatively

stable narratives of identity (p. 13; cf. Huysmans, 1995: 57; the 'Identity and narrative' section of the 'Theory' chapter). At the heart of such narratives in the US case, Krebs argues, is the concept of American exceptionalism (ibid.). When a story diverges from or challenges the identity narrative, the story is often marginalized – such as elements of the New Left during and after Vietnam (ibid., p. 14). Indeed, this was the case with neoconservative discourse which opposed what it characterized as a portrayal of the US by the New Left as a “sick society drunk on technology and materialism [...] [and of American history as] a dismal tale of dead Indians and double-dealing white settlers, imperialism, and war”, rather than the US as a moral force for freedom (Kirkpatrick [1979] quoted in Vaïsse, 2010: 98; ibid., pp. 14, 260-1). Likewise, stories or conceptions of foreign policy characterized as ‘realist’ or ‘realpolitik’ have often been perceived by the public (and elites) as divergent from a US identity in that they are not sufficiently concerned with a US moral mission, unless they help promote such goals internationally (Krebs, 2015: 14; Dueck, 2008: 23).

Mead, after noting the Nixon-Kissinger approach “took the moral element out of the US-Soviet rivalry”, shrugs off the concept that détente could be “based on common interests” between the US and USSR, as if they could set “aside their philosophical differences, just as Catholic Austria and Protestant Prussia had done” (Mead, 2002: 72). This argument immediately follows an assertion that the US under Nixon-Kissinger (a “morals-free zone”) “would support any distasteful regime, bar none, in the interests of strengthening” the US position vis-à-vis the USSR (ibid.). While the US did enable and support many odious regimes during this period (e.g. Pinochet’s in Chile), this does not necessarily discount the Nixon-Kissinger approach to détente. Furthermore, US foreign policy has interfered with, enabled, or created distasteful regimes before and after the Nixon-Kissinger era – including in Vietnam.²⁹ In this context as well, the Nixon-Kissinger approach to foreign policy was not a radical departure from historical approaches.

²⁹ Referring to South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem – whose assassination the Kennedy administration sanctioned in late 1963 (Kimball, 2006: 73) – *Look* magazine wrote on Jan. 27, 1964: “John Foster Dulles picked him, Senator Mike Mansfield endorsed him, Cardinal Spellman praised him, Vice President Nixon liked him, and President Eisenhower OK’d him” (Morgenthau, 1965).

Essentially, Mead uses a focus on economics and 'morality' in foreign policymaking to construct an exceptionalist (moral) US past and American foreign policy 'tradition', and to discredit Cold War foreign policymaking (i.e. 'Continental realism') by portraying it as an inappropriate foreign policy. For Mead (2002) the "beliefs" of 'Continental realism' (including "the belief that international relations are on at least some levels an amoral struggle of all against all"), "do not apply to American reality" (p. 35). Furthermore, any attempts to "understand American history and policy" through a 'Continental realist' lens would lead "only to one error after another" (ibid.). Mead (2002) reinforces this point in the next paragraph: "The assumptions of Continental realism cannot yield a coherent view of either the strengths or the weaknesses of the American method of foreign policy" (p. 36).

Mead does not believe this realism is necessarily inappropriate for Europe, however. In his analysis, Mead (2002) reproduces the idea of a "moral gap" (p. 48). This is a concept of dual moralities, across the state and international levels where within democratic states there is a "Lockean social contract" and a "moral consensus", but the sovereign states themselves exist in a "Hobbesian state of nature" (Mead, 2002: 48). As such, the "moral air" of "international diplomacy" is "far removed from the morality and habits" of the domestic realm (ibid, p. 49). Since the peace of Westphalia in 1648, Mead (2002) contends, "European states have existed in a moral vacuum" because of this 'gap' (p. 49).

Mead and morality

Mead's (2002) analysis goes on to associate the "moral gap" with a "Jacksonian" tradition in US foreign policy (p. 245). This tradition is apparently associated with "isolationism", and "provide[s] the basis in American life for [...] realism" (ibid., pp. 243-4). However, though "in the last analysis Jacksonian realists are American rather than Continental realists, [...] they are closest to the practitioners of classic European realpolitik" (ibid., p. 244). Mead does not specify what makes this 'realism' American rather than Continental, other than the context. Mead (2002) asserts that while the Jacksonians are often dismissed as "ignorant isolationists", their "worldview" is more complex (p. 246). It is also worth noting that according to

Mead the tradition appears to be one popular with a segment of the US population – a tradition that is appealed to, rather than practiced by politicians (cf. *ibid.*, pp. 242-3).

The Jacksonian worldview is “grounded in classical realism”, a realism which Mead indicates centers on the moral gap: states have “patriotic and communal feelings of their own” and beyond the boundaries of these communities, “international life is and will remain both violent and anarchic” (*ibid.*, pp. 245-6). Mead also states that Jacksonian policies belie claims that “the American people are ‘isolationist’ and ‘uninterested in foreign affairs’”, because the American people will make enormous sacrifices if they “believe” that these will be made in “the nation’s vital interests as they understand them” (*ibid.*, p. 247). As an example, Mead gives US public support of the Cold War, among others (*ibid.*).

Mead’s description of Jacksonian beliefs broadly resembles the attitudes of the Wallace voters during the late 1960s and early 1970s, covered in the ‘Ideological Character’ chapter, who were often assumed to be isolationist. In terms that could certainly be applied to many Wallace voters, Mead describes Jacksonians as supporting the war in Vietnam because the US had given its word, rather than because they believed the strategy was feasible; believing that the US should pursue victory in Vietnam with all available force; and having a “record of racism, and [a] commitment to forms of Christian belief that strike many as both unorthodox and bigoted” (Mead, 2002: 249-50, 252-3, 258-9; cf. ‘Ideological Character’ chapter).

Beyond their supposed belief in a moral gap and states competing in anarchy, Mead seems to categorize the Jacksonians as “grounded in classical realism” because they do not believe the US needs an “unambiguous moral reason for fighting”, instead they are more concerned with defending “vital national interests” (Mead, 2002: 244-6). Furthermore, this foreign policy tradition is ‘American’, according to Mead, having a history stretching from the memories of “the bloody struggles of the British Reformation” in the minds of “Scotch-Irish border people”, through the US Civil War, various wars with American Indians, WWII, Vietnam, and into the Cold War (*ibid.*, pp. 247, 250-1, 256-7). Not having this “very old cultural heritage” (*ibid.*,

p. 254), 'Continental' realism is firmly outside of the US historical foreign policy tradition. These descriptors, American and Continental, are clearly intended to signify more than just the context in which they were originally applied (note that Mead consistently refers to 'Continental realism' when disparaging the Nixon-Kissinger approach). As mentioned earlier, there is a clear differentiation made between 'Continental' or European approaches (including their "immigrant" practitioners³⁰ whose backgrounds "owed" little to England) and 'Anglo-American' traditions, which are presented as correct for the US.

There appear to be two key differences between the 'American' realism of the Jacksonian tradition and the 'Continental' realism of Nixon-Kissinger in Mead's analysis. First, 'American' realism is presented as appealing to an inherent aspect of the American public – or indeed is presented as emerging from the public itself. This realism is portrayed as resonating with the American people, as capturing an essential, patriotic desire to advance nationalistic causes or beliefs. Second, while the 'American' realism is described as very much 'of' the US public, 'Continental' realism – in addition to being 'foreign' – is depicted as something *applied* to foreign policy, an alien and amoral method of interpretation imposed on the US by Nixon and Kissinger (cf. Ledeen's neoconservatism in Williams, 2005b: 331 n. 26; 2005a: 199).

Mead's representations of these two realisms also correspond with the concept of a moral gap. The 'American' realism, intrinsic to the US and an expression of the "patriotic and communal" feelings of Americans, is presented as understandable in the American context and thus moral. Even though this tradition eschews moral reasons for war and believes a world community to be a "moral impossibility", it sees people within the US as bound by a "common morality", whose patriotism is more akin to an "emotion" rather than a "doctrine" (Mead, 2002: 243-4). The 'Continental' realism emanating from the "moral vacuum" of European states is depicted as amoral, anarchic, and "far removed from the morality and habits" of the US. This rather reductive analysis of the Nixon-Kissinger approach reproduces

³⁰ Mead does not specify who these practitioners were.

US exceptionalism as not only 'natural' and unquestioned, but also constructs the Nixon-Kissinger approach as having been unable to utilize or embrace US exceptionalism – particularly due to its supposed inability or refusal to engage with morality. In this manner, Mead's analysis – and indeed much neoconservative discourse – reproduces US exceptionalism as unquestionably 'real' and necessary, while also effacing 'morality' or invocations of exceptionalism in Nixon-Kissinger foreign policy discourse.

Mead does not advance the standard neoconservative argument about the Cold War being an ideological conflict between the US and an immoral USSR determined to destroy the American way of life (cf. Mead, 2002: 72-3). However, this chapter argues his discourse, like neoconservative discourse, presents concepts of US moral character or duty as immutable. Mead's Jacksonian tradition, that only supports war to defend vital interests and national honor, is still within a US moral tradition. Even when they resort to their isolationist tendencies, the Jacksonian, American realists do so because of their deeply held beliefs, stemming from religious, historical, and ultimately (Anglo) American values. Mead is quite explicit that "traditionalism" and the veneration of the founding documents, Fathers, and principles of state are a powerful force in the US, and that these founding principles are responsible for US preeminence in the world (Mead, 2002: 105-6). Furthermore, he states that the public will only understand and support US foreign policies that "follow debates based on analogy from British as well as American experience" and that can be traced back to "the core founding insights and approaches that have guided the country from the beginning" (ibid., p. 106).

Presidential invocations of US founding myths, concepts of moral character, or a US mission are replete throughout US history. This chapter argues that the Nixon administration also relied on these same tropes as it advocated its foreign policy approaches. The only discernable reasons Mead casts the Nixon-Kissinger approach outside of his American traditions are that it was 'Continental' and thus could not understand the US or its history, and that it was amoral (which he claims is also not in line with American tradition). Whether or not Mead's text is neoconservative, it certainly overlaps with neoconservative thought, particularly during the late 1960s

and early 1970s (cf. Vaïsse, 2010: 100). In neoconservative discourse, the terms (continental) realism or *realpolitik* were – and still are – used to denigrate the Nixon-Kissinger approach. As the following sections will show, the Nixon administration used a realist discourse to present its foreign policy approaches as pragmatic, while also constructing its opponents as either naïve or lacking in courage. Furthermore, the administration's realist discourse, in conjunction with its construction of moral/exceptionalist responsibilities, constituted limits on US foreign policy and responsibilities – limits which were constructed relative to, or differentiated against, isolationism.³¹

Morgenthau, limits, moral purpose, and exceptionalism

This chapter argues that the administration's discourse used elements of US moral identity, along with concepts alleged to be objective (including the nature of the US public, the limits imposed by this nature, and the limits of the 'reality' of the world) to construct and/or reproduce moral and exceptionalist responsibilities of the US to itself and the world. Discursively producing these concepts relative to or differentiated against isolationism was critical to the function of this discourse. Rather than relying on unchallenged assumptions of US exceptionalism and a moral mission, as in neoconservative discourse, this section contends that the Nixon administration used a more flexible approach in articulating a US moral example as a function of a national interest – though still within the rather strict confines of existing narratives of identity. To make this argument, this section draws on the discourse of Hans Morgenthau. While Morgenthau's realism was more philosophically sophisticated than the Nixon administration's discourse, and though Morgenthau disagreed with the administration's approach to Vietnam, Morgenthau's discourse on the US moral example and national interest provides a useful tool for interpreting the function of the Nixon administration's discourse.

³¹ The 'Ideological Character' chapter will also argue that the administration's 'vocal minority' discourse, in addition to other functions, vilified members of the public who rejected authority and maligned a US moral character. In a sense, this could be seen as a method for protecting the administration's right flank from neoconservative criticisms, as well as discursively linking a US moral/ideological character with successful foreign policy approaches.

Specifically, Morgenthau's flexible conceptualization of national interest is used in this section as a framework for understanding how the administration constructed limits on US foreign policy within a 'changed' world, while invoking US exceptionalism and a moral character, through isolationism discourse. Rather than using Morgenthau's theory of realism, *per se*, this analysis focuses on how his political discourse functioned relative to the administration's discourse.

In Mead's analysis, the link between moral and political practice – or at least the innate morality of a particular method of political practice – is largely unquestioned. As Williams (2005a) points out, neoconservative discourse constructs 'realism' as reductive *realpolitik* approach. However, certain realisms can also be conceptualized as challenging neoconservative positions because they argue moderation (Williams, 2005a: 203). Morgenthau, for example, attempted to appeal to a "purpose of American politics" and asserted there were limits to rationalist liberalism, "while retaining a politics of self-restraint and limitation, and avoiding a messianic stance" (*ibid.*). See (2001) describes Morgenthau as arguing "against moral universalism and American exceptionalism, articulating instead a consequentialist ethic that purported to judge policy by results, not by abstract moral principles" (p. 422). Thus, for See (2001), when Morgenthau commented on the morality of US policies in Vietnam, he drew on "an American exceptionalism he had long appeared to criticize" and "shifted from an expert critic to a morally engaged opponent of US policies in Vietnam" (p. 443). However, this section argues that, while Morgenthau's stance on Vietnam did represent a change in his views on Vietnam, his stance was still well within his earlier theoretical framework and his comments on limits.

Morgenthau's realism explicitly rejected a focus on objectivity as an unproblematic basis for practice (Williams, 2005a: 126). In Morgenthau's theory and discourse, the only way to ground liberal politics was to critically assess the process of bringing into practice liberal ideals (*ibid.*, p. 144). Morgenthau insisted that the 'sphere' of politics be central and balanced against a "social strategy" (Williams, 2004: 650-1). However, this social strategy must be conceived of as "principled" rather than "mechanistic": a mechanistic process of liberal, material self-interest would fail (and

had failed) to produce actors committed to protect liberal-democratic institutions and defend the autonomous political sphere (ibid., pp. 651-2) – an argument similar to one made by neoconservatives (Williams, 2005b: 313). Thus, Morgenthau's conception of political was not only an analytical concept, but also "a moral and political project" (ibid., p. 652).

For Morgenthau, the political sphere was also one of morality – there was a foundational moral standard in government (Morgenthau, 1945a: 147). Indeed, Morgenthau (1962) stated that he "always maintained that the actions of the states are subject to universal moral principles" (p. 106). Indeed, Morgenthau (1945b) rejected the concept of a moral gap, saying it was based on:

the assumption that the morality of the political sphere, viewed from the standards of individual ethics, is a residue from an immoral age which has been overcome in the individual sphere but still leads a ghostlike existence in the realm of politics. [...] If this is so, then [...] a deliberate effort at reform will bridge over the gulf which still separates political and private morality. "We are at the beginning of an age," said Woodrow Wilson in his address to Congress on the declaration of war in 1917, "in which it will be insisted that the same standards of conduct and of responsibility for wrong shall be observed among nations and their governments that are observed among the individual citizens of civilized states." (pp. 6-7)

Morgenthau (1945b) instead theorized that the "evil that corrupts political action is the same evil that corrupts all action, [...] There is not one kind of ethical precept applying to political action and another one for the private sphere, but one and the same ethical standard applies to both" (p. 14). In Morgenthau's writings, the US moral example was one it set itself – based on history, specifically the American Revolution – and one it must follow (Morgenthau, 1969: 14). Furthermore, because the US presented itself as a moral example to the world, other states judged the morality of its actions more acutely (ibid.). Since, for Morgenthau, demonstrating this moral example could be an expression of the national interest, and because the concept of national interest was a historical, constructed concept without a fixed understanding, "there is no absolute divide between inside and outside" a state (Coser, 1963; Williams, 2005a: 188).

In the mid to late 1960s, Morgenthau worried that US actions in Vietnam – particularly because the US prosecuted the war as one of attrition, measured in body counts – would damage what was “normatively attractive” about the US (Scheuerman, 2009: 172). That is, the state’s example of moral superiority, and with it the ability to influence other states, would be weakened (ibid., pp. 171-2). Morgenthau’s writings argued for defending America’s supposedly unique normative attributes as a “core component of the US national interest” (ibid., p. 166). The US moral example, Morgenthau stated, was the “real source of [US] strength” (Morgenthau, 1969: 15). Moreover, states judged the US – unlike they judged other states – according to the moral example proselytized by the US (ibid., pp. 14-5; Scheuerman, 2009: 172).

Since a liberal morality had historically been posited by the US as an exportable US quality, and because of its perceived acceptance by other states, it was a component of the national interest for Morgenthau (Morgenthau, 1969: 14-5). As the race against the USSR to provide aid to “underdeveloped nations” was “primarily a moral, and if you wish, a spiritual contest [...] between two different philosophies, two different types of social and economic and political organization—two different ways of life”, then providing a moral example (and thus an ‘alternative’ option for government) “through the qualities of our own society” was legitimate expression of the national interest for Morgenthau (Morgenthau quoted in Coser, 1963).

Arguing for the US to demonstrate – or uphold – its ‘example of morality’ in Vietnam, Morgenthau stated in 1969:

the United States, in a unique sense, is being judged by other nations, and it is judged by itself in terms of its compliance with the moral standards which it has set for itself. This is not an invention of historians looking backward, nor is it an ideological justification and rationalization which has now been adopted, according to the highest authorities, by “neo-isolationists.” It is an incontestable fact of the historic experience of America. It was not a contemporary “neo-isolationist,” but Thomas Paine, who said that the American Revolution was not made for America alone but for mankind. [...] [A]nd that the success or failure of this experiment was not just of relevance to the parochial interests of the United States but to mankind. (Morgenthau, 1969: 14; cf. neoconservative accusations of appeasement/isolationism)

Beyond employing “ethics in the abstract [which] judges action by its conformity with moral law”, in the case of Vietnam Morgenthau also applied “political ethics [which] judges action by its political consequences” (Morgenthau, 2006: 12). In the broader sense, a war in which success was measured by killing as an end in and of itself, would cause the US to “[suffer] incalculable moral damage” (Morgenthau, quoted in Bain, 2000: 461). In terms of political consequences and, as discussed above, a national interest was something “in which human beings invest moral value” (Bain, 2000: 461). In this way, Morgenthau made “a means/ends calculation which reasoned US intervention in Vietnam was wrong because it did not represent the efficient functioning of ‘national interest’” (George, 1995: 205) – what Donnelly (2005) calls the “moral dignity of the national interest” (p.50).

Nixon, morality, and limits of responsibility

Again, this analysis does not argue that Nixon or Kissinger necessarily used the same theoretical framework as Morgenthau. Certainly, Morgenthau did not agree with the administration that further prosecution of the war in Vietnam was an efficient functioning of a national interest in terms of a US moral example (as well as for other reasons). However, both Morgenthau’s policy recommendations in Asia and the Nixon Doctrine were predicated on limits (see, *inter alia*, Morgenthau, 1967 [1965]). Furthermore, in a manner similar to Morgenthau, the administration presented its foreign policy approach as a flexible articulation of a national interest by reflecting on the purpose of the US moral example and the limitations of a ‘changed’ world. In this manner it constructed an ethic of responsibility (cf. Williams, 2005a: 188). Though neoconservative discourse may contain critiques of liberal rationalism (Williams, 2005a: 197-198), in the discourse – and Mead’s analysis – there is an objectivization of US exceptionalist liberal traditions and foundations.

Mead’s analysis, by conceptualizing the Nixon administration’s foreign policy as focusing on détente and a multipolar international order at the expense of American exceptionalism, fails to appreciate the exceptionalism in the Nixon Doctrine. The Nixon-Kissinger approach was not amoral – indeed, Zimmer (2011)

asserts that Kissinger was a “moral absolutist”, whose “strategic analysis [was] equivalent to his conception of America’s ‘moral convictions’” and who believes in, in Kissinger’s words, “the universal application of American values” (p. 284; Kissinger quoted in *ibid.*). Kissinger stated he ‘believed’ this in a 2003 book³² – and though it can at times be difficult to reconcile the historical record (including Kissinger’s own discourse) with Kissinger’s later analysis of his own thoughts and actions³³ – this ‘belief’ appears to have been consistent.

However, the US exceptionalism in the Nixon-Kissinger discourse was presented as more malleable – most notably represented in the US public’s tendency to oscillate between isolationism and internationalism. This is where the distinction between an immutable exceptionalist moral mission linked to a rigid foreign policy approach and a flexible national interest representing a US moral example becomes especially pertinent. In the Nixon-Kissinger discourse the inherent ‘greatness’ or ‘correctness’ of the US moral example/exceptionalism was not questioned and was presented as necessary. However, in the context of the new ‘reality’ of a multipolar world, the moral example could be used to justify a dangerous isolationism, or it could lead to an over-involvement that could also become dangerous (and eventually lead to isolationism). Essentially, the administration claimed the US public needed to decide what moral example it was going to set and thus what national interest would be served.

As early as 1956, Kissinger argued that President Woodrow Wilson’s ‘idealist’ internationalism caused the US to overextend itself in terms of a commitment to international change, reduced its willingness to make compromises with allied and enemy states, and when – in Kissinger’s view – the teleological idealist vision failed to materialize, it caused a disillusioned US public to retreat into isolationism (Suri, 2009: 145-6; Del Pero, 2009: 74-5). This viewpoint is echoed in a speech Kissinger gave in 1975, where he described Wilson’s “universal moral objective [...] to ‘make

³² Kissinger, *Ending the War in Vietnam*; Zimmer, 2011: 296 n. 128.

³³ After his time in office, Kissinger attempted to present his foreign policy approaches as aligned with the policy prescriptions of neoconservatives and the New Right which had criticized the Nixon-Kissinger approach (Del Pero, 2009: 11). Furthermore, as Zimmer (2011) argues, Kissinger has often been quite disingenuous in his many memoirs and policy books regarding his positions and approaches while in office (pp. 282-90).

the world safe for democracy” as precipitating an “inevitable disillusionment with an imperfect outcome [that] led to a tide of isolationist sentiment” (Kissinger, July 15, 1975, p. 317). However, while Kissinger may have rejected a Wilsonian or ‘idealist’ US exceptionalism, he did not reject exceptionalism completely. In the same speech, Kissinger averred that

it is time we recognized that as the greatest democracy the world has ever known, we are a living reminder that there is an alternative to tyranny and oppression. The revolution that we began 200 years ago goes on, for most of the world still lives without the freedom that has for so long been ours. To them we remain a beacon of hope and an example to be emulated. (ibid., p. 324)

This exceptionalism, Kissinger had stated a couple years earlier, was necessary for US foreign policies. The US, he said, could not “be true to itself without a moral purpose” (Kissinger, Oct. 9, 1973). According to Kissinger, because the US had “always had a sense of mission [...] [and] held the view that [it] stood for something above and beyond its material achievements” a foreign policy that was “purely pragmatic” could not provide the “criteria for other nations to assess [US] performance and no standards to which the American people can rally” (ibid.). However, for Kissinger there were limits to the expression of this moral purpose through the pursuit of a national interest:

But when policy becomes excessively moralistic it may turn quixotic or dangerous. A presumed monopoly on truth obstructs negotiation and accommodation. Good results may be given up in the quest for ever-elusive ideal solutions. Policy may fall prey to ineffectual posturing or adventuristic crusades. (Kissinger, Oct. 9, 1973)

This does not appear to be merely a critique of ‘idealism’. Rather it is a formula for using pragmatism (or what Kissinger presented as pragmatism) as a means of *using* the US moral example to select the most appropriate policy within a set of prescribed limits (limits discerned through a ‘realistic’ or ‘pragmatic’ knowledge or interpretation of the world). As Kissinger put it, the question was “not whether our values should affect our foreign policy, but how” (Kissinger, July 15, 1975, p. 323). The US must decide if “we will use our moral convictions to escape reality or as a source of courage and self-confidence” (ibid.). Kissinger insisted that any attempts to “escape reality” were “a feature of our isolationist period” and “the counsels of

despair" (ibid.). Instead, the "moral values and policy objectives" of the US were not "irreconcilable": the "ends we seek in our foreign policy must have validity in the framework of our beliefs or we have no meaningful foreign policy" (ibid., pp. 323-4).

In Kissinger's view, the "reality of our situation" was not a choice "between morality and pragmatism" (Kissinger, July 15, 1975, p. 318). The US could not "escape either [morality or pragmatism], nor are they incompatible. This nation must be true to its own beliefs or it will lose its bearings in the world. But at the same time it must survive in a world of sovereign nations and competing wills" (ibid.). Moral fortitude was an asset for a 'realistic' foreign policy approach, not just idealistic folly. "Moral strength" was needed "to select among often agonizing choices and a sense of purpose to navigate between the shoals of difficult decisions. But we need as well a mature sense of means, lest we substitute wishful thinking for the requirements of survival" (ibid.).

Indeed, this was the case during the Nixon administration, where moralism was avoided through the practice of not characterizing anticommunism as a moral duty, and thus not presenting communism as a monolithic, immoral force – but as states with opposing interests. Instead, pursuing stability and détente with the USSR were a means to advancing US moral values – and its moral example – which were presented as coterminous with pragmatic policy decisions, this would in turn ensure the 'correct' choices were made (including preventing nuclear annihilation). In this discourse, the US moral example and mission were inherently 'correct' but for them to be realized or advanced, they needed to be harnessed to conceptualizations of national interest formulated using 'pragmatic' and 'realistic' approaches.

The Nixon administration discourse contained many invocations of 'morals', particularly when urging a moral strength or stamina to encourage the public into supporting US world leadership.³⁴ These homilies on moral character (or strength, stamina, etc.), constructed the US as a "great nation" by virtue of its "moral

³⁴ Appeals to 'moral strength' are also conceptualized as part of a discourse which constructed an innate character of the US public (covered in the 'Psychological Character' chapter). However, in that discourse invocations of 'moral strength' are conceptualized as having been used to reinforce a construct of the US public as prone to oscillation rather than to constitute responsibilities to the world and a US Self.

character”, and used prototypical exceptionalist tropes. For example, Nixon exclaimed that America’s moral strength lit George Washington’s “sacred fire of liberty”, whose flame was the “devotion to freedom and opportunity, a respect for the rights and dignity of the individual” (Nixon, Oct. 28, 1972). In this sense, the Nixon administration’s discourse never divorced constructions of ‘national interests’ from a morality rhetoric or exceptionalist tropes. Indeed, the US public choosing the Nixon Doctrine – i.e. remaining internationally engaged, and pursuing Vietnamization, despite its weariness – was presented as moral courage and an expression of the US moral mission, which was in the national interest. Whereas for Morgenthau, leaving Vietnam would be an expression of the US moral example and would serve the national interest.

Much of the administration’s responsibility and morality discourse was deployed in aid of a ‘credibility’ discourse. If, Nixon stated, the US was “humiliated or defeated in Vietnam, the effect on the United States is what I am concerned about, the people of the United States”, because a rapid withdrawal would result in “a rampant isolationism in this country in which we will not do what we should do in other parts of the world” (Nixon, July 1, 1970).

While, Nixon stated the year before, a precipitate withdrawal from Vietnam would cause “allies” to “lose confidence in America”, the “[f]ar more dangerous” outcome would be that the “we would lose confidence in ourselves” (Nixon, Nov. 3, 1969). For, though there would be relief at first, “as we saw the consequences of what we had done, inevitable remorse and divisive recrimination would scar our spirit as a people” (ibid.). Indeed, Nixon stated, “any hope the world has for survival of peace and freedom” would be determined “by whether the American people have the moral stamina and the courage to meet the challenge of free world leadership” (ibid.). In this sense, the administration’s ‘credibility’ discourse constructed responsibilities. The US not only had the responsibility to protect/lead the world for its own security and that of other states, but the administration also constructed a responsibility to the US public, a responsibility to protect the public from its own ‘natural’ impulses towards isolationism.

As per the administration's discourse, though 'credibility' in the eyes of allies and the world was important, the moral strength and courage to 'stay the course' in Vietnam was a test of America's credibility in its own eyes. As Nixon also stated in his Nov. 3 address: "North Vietnam cannot defeat the United States. Only Americans can do that" (Nixon, Nov. 3, 1969). In 1974, reflecting on the Nixon Doctrine after the end of US involvement in Vietnam (and two months before his resignation), Nixon described this moral force as part of a historical US identity – and therefore necessary to build support for a foreign policy:

It was also clear that both pragmatism and moral force had to be the double prongs of any American foreign policy in the new era. A sense of moral purpose is part of our heritage, and it is part of the tradition of our foreign policy. Pragmatism, realism, and technical efficiency must not be the sole touchstone of our foreign policy. Such a policy would have no roots or inspiration and could not long elicit positive support from the American people and the Congress, and more important, it would not deserve the respect of the world. (Nixon, June 5, 1974; cf. Kissinger's remarks covered earlier in this chapter)³⁵

Furthermore, in portraying the choice between isolationism or international engagement as ultimately belonging to the US public, the administration's discourse was able to construct the responsibility for a moral policy as belonging to the administration and the public. In this manner, the administration's discourse was able to construct the decision to pursue the Nixon Doctrine and Vietnamization as a moral decision – a vote for internationalism over the isolationism the administration claimed other foreign policy elites were advocating. The administration's discourse offered a supposedly 'rational' respite from the overextension of a 'globalist' foreign policy approach without resorting to dangerous isolationist policies which would exacerbate the drift towards isolationism that the administration detected in the US public.

This discursive formulation rhetorically distanced the administration from other foreign policy elites and analysts (whose foreign policy approaches were not substantially different from the administration's): while withdrawal from Vietnam

³⁵ Even individuals who were not necessarily 'neoconservatives' framed détente and engagement with PRC as immoral (see, e.g., Kovach, Dec. 12, 1971).

and the Nixon Doctrine were a necessary reaction to the “turmoil and uncertainty of war” which “strained America’s spirit”, the Nixon administration was not amongst the “apostles of defeatism and self-doubt” who would “chip away at the moral strength of America” (Nixon, Aug. 17, 1971). As the Nixon administration was fulfilling its responsibility to the US, it urged that the American public must not “turn inward and fall prey to a new isolationism, great as the temptations may be to do that. Nor can the American people pass the responsibility of leadership solely to government” (ibid.). Instead, the people must fulfil their responsibility to themselves because that “is the secret of America’s strength” (ibid.). In other words, it was both the Nixon administration and the people who would need to continue US moral greatness after the strain of Vietnam – and the policies that led to it. Concurrently, this discourse constructed isolationist foreign policy elites as not fulfilling this American moral duty to the US public Self and the security of the state.

What canonical neoconservative thought and Mead’s analysis appear not to account for in the Nixon administration’s discourse is a co-constitution of responsibility and limits of ‘reality’. Specifically, administration discourse reproduced moral and exceptionalist responsibilities along with an internationally engaged policy which had its limits defined through isolationism discourse. The administration’s isolationism discourse was predicated on a moral imperative to be internationalist and to *not* be isolationist based on historical ‘lessons’ – which included sacrifices during WWII – as well as the necessity for US leadership based on both the ‘realities’ of the Cold War (in terms of US and world security) and older exceptionalist tropes concerning a US moral mission. However, as noted earlier, the administration presented globalism as a limit itself by constructing a ‘changed’, multipolar world and a wearied US public poised to slide into isolationism.

The construction in the administration’s discourse of a US public inherently inclined to oscillation between isolationism and internationalism underpinned the administration’s construction of limits of responsibility. In the administration’s discourse these limits were presented as realities. Thus, the duty of the administration to advance policies which recognized these limits (including accommodating a war-weary public inclined to isolationism) were constructed as a

moral responsibility to the Self. This moral responsibility included respecting the US public's wish for reduced involvement in the world, while still encouraging an international engagement that would ultimately, in the administration's view, ensure the protection of the US and the world.

The broad moral example that underpinned this responsibility to the Self included a continuation of the post-WWII international engagement of the US, which was a 'lesson' learned from the isolationism of the interwar period and would allegedly guarantee future security and even peace. It also involved reproducing an exceptionalist vision of the US as an example to other states and a force for peace and prosperity. In the 'realist' discourse of the Nixon administration, these examples were presented as being realized through a policy that, while located well within a moral US tradition, was still 'pragmatic'. In other words, the Nixon Doctrine was portrayed as both reacting to the concrete realities of the world and the US people (including its alleged tendency towards isolationism), while still embracing the moral mission of the US.

A critical difference from neoconservative thought was that the Nixon administration did not portray the Cold War in strictly ideological terms, whereas neoconservatives perceived the USSR as being morally incapable of being a responsible actor in the world, as well as morally antithetical to the US (Cooper, 2010: 104). Relatedly, neoconservatives opposed multipolarity, believing that unifocal, US hegemony was both winning the war up until Nixon's détente and remained the only form of world order capable of preserving global stability, as regional allies could not serve as substitutes for hegemonic US power (ibid., pp. 118, 122-3).

Threats and responsibility in a changing world

The Nixon administration's isolationism security discourse was dependent on and co-constituted concepts of US 'responsibility' (to a US Self – public and national – and other states) and the 'morality' of such responsibilities. Isolationism discourse in general drew its pejorative force from associations with interwar isolationism,

and the 'lessons' of Munich and appeasement, as well as perceived debts to honor or heed such lessons. All of these constructs, as well as the performative discourses that reproduced them, functioned according to the 'logic' of specific perceptions of the 'reality' of the world and how it operated, a reality, which as addressed earlier, was also delimited by the administration's discourse. However, amongst foreign policy elites, academics, and journalists there were differing interpretations of how the 'world' operated, particularly regarding the Cold War. In the Nixon Doctrine there were both elements of change and continuity regarding previous foreign policy approaches. The change and continuity in the administration's discourse helped set the limits of possibility for foreign policy approaches and served to situate the Nixon Doctrine in a middle ground between isolationism and globalism (though no foreign policy elites were arguing for either of these options).

However, the broader Cold War narrative – that communism/USSR was in various ways an existential threat to the US (and freedom, democracy, etc. around the world), and as such the US was locked in a simmering, dangerous struggle with another superpower – did not lose its legitimacy or performative power. As Krebs (2015) has shown, the political and academic consensus about the finer details of the Cold War consensus was fraying years before the US direct military involvement in Vietnam escalated. However, the fierce public opposition to the war "curbed the scope of dissent" among the political elite that wished to retain legitimacy, resulting in most foreign policy elites conforming to the main tenets and rhetoric of the Cold War narrative – and thus reinforcing the narrative (Krebs, 2015: 257). For example, Senator Fulbright, though initially opposed to continuing the war, still adhered to the underlying 'logic' of the Cold War (ibid., p. 252). In the early 1970s, Fulbright publicly rejected the essential narrative of the Cold War (particularly in his 1972 book *The Crippled Giant*), beginning with the Truman administration's construction of the Soviet threat, subsequent globalist foreign policies, through to Vietnam

(Woods, 1998: 264-5).³⁶ Fulbright lost his seat in 1975 after 30 years in the Senate (ibid., pp. 278-9; Krebs, 2015: 256).

In the mid to late 60s, while few foreign policy elites or academics contended the world was bipolar, there was not a consensus on the composition of this supposedly changed world. By February of 1970, President Nixon had declared the “postwar period in international relations has ended”, as not only had the Marshall plan revitalized Europe, but also the “monolithic Communist world” of the early postwar period had been “shattered [...] by the powerful forces of nationalism” (Nixon, Feb. 18, 1970). Nixon located the beginning of American postwar era foreign policy in the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall plans of 1947, which for “two decades after the Second World War” guided a successful series of US-led programs and detection of and reaction to “dangers” (ibid.). However, the present world of “stronger allies”, a “community of independent developing nations”, and a “still hostile but now divided” Communist world necessitated the ‘new’ approach of the Nixon Doctrine (ibid.).

Nixon touched on the same theme a year later, saying the “postwar order of international relations – the configuration of power that emerged from the Second World War is gone. With it are gone the conditions which have determined the assumptions and practices of United States foreign policy since 1945” (Nixon, Feb. 25, 1971). Nixon outlined many of the same reasons for this change, as he did a year before, including that the “rigid bipolar world of the 1940’s and 1950’s has given way to the fluidity of a new era of multilateral diplomacy” (ibid.). As a part of this new world, the US would diversify its negotiating approach, tailoring it to the “multipolar” world of independent communist states (ibid.).

Nixon was also careful to contrast his administration’s foreign policy approach for this ‘new’ era against US postwar foreign policy in general, rather than President Johnson’s approach specifically. For example, in 1971, Nixon referred to the beginning of his administration in 1969 and the “nascent isolationism in reaction to

³⁶ NB. Around this time Fulbright modeled his arguments along the lines of Hans Morgenthau’s criticism of the war (Berman, 1988: 98), though Morgenthau considered him “dangerously naïve” for underestimating the threat posed by the USSR and PRC (Woods, 1998: 284).

overextension” in the US, as an “old path” the US could not continue down (Nixon, Feb. 25, 1971). Later in the speech, Nixon spoke of an American people that had “grown somewhat weary of 25 years of international burdens”, a “weariness” that “was coming in any event, but the anguish of the Vietnam war hastened it, or at least our awareness of it” (ibid.). These “international burdens” were then described as the “undifferentiated involvement” which threatened to cause “the pendulum to swing” which would sweep the US “toward an isolationism which could be as disastrous as excessive zeal” (ibid.). Thus, the administration constructed a ‘changed’ world – both in terms of multipolarity/polycentric communism and a US public drifting towards isolationism – which necessitated a new foreign policy approach.

Essentially, the Nixon administration’s discourse situated the Nixon Doctrine as *not* isolationism (to make it clear that the foreign policy would not be an abdication of world leadership or involvement as per the traditional narrative of interwar isolationism), but it also constructed postwar policy of ‘unlimited’ engagement worldwide (“sweeping range”, “overseas preoccupation”, “over-involvement” (Nixon, May 3, 1973)). This middle of the road policy and US alliances would, in light of the polycentric nature of world communism, no longer be focused on “containment” of the USSR and PRC (see: Nixon, Feb. 9, 1972; May 3, 1973). In Nixon’s Guam remarks in July 1969 that formed the basis of the Nixon Doctrine, he stated that, while the US would keep its treaty commitments, “as far as the problems of military defense, except for the threat of a major power involving nuclear weapons” the US would “encourage” and “expect” Asian states to take “responsibility” and “handle” any problems (Nixon, July 25, 1969).

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the Nixon administration advocated that the US must pursue its interests in aid of a “transcendental purpose” which would give meaning to the operation of its foreign policy, in a manner similar to Morgenthau (cf. Williams, 2005a: 187). In this way, the national interest would become a strategy for harnessing unstable questions of responsibility to more durable aspects of

responsibility: concepts of responsibility rooted in historical tropes would become bound to elements of “political leadership based in self-conscious construction and limitation” (ibid., p. 188). The chapter claimed that the administration’s discourse drew on a ‘transcendental purpose’ in the form of exceptionalist tropes and ‘lessons learned’ from the interwar period and WWII, and concepts of responsibility based on these tropes and lessons – including the importance of international engagement. Furthermore, the chapter argued that the administration’s discourse used these elements of US identity, along with concepts alleged to be objective – including the nature of the US public, the limits imposed by this nature, and the limits of the ‘reality’ of the world – to construct moral and exceptionalist responsibilities to the Self and the world.

While the Nixon administration’s discourse presented its foreign policy approach as a pragmatic reaction to a changed world, it still anchored a national interest to a US moral example. Isolationism in this discourse was still constituted as dangerous if it were to become the active policy of the US – something immediate withdrawal from Vietnam could exacerbate as the US would lose confidence in itself and withdraw from the world, according to the administration. However, while the discourse acknowledged the desire of a war-weary public to disengage from the world – itself presented as a pragmatic approach to an ‘objective’ fact – as being within the US character, the discourse used the flexibility of US exceptionalism and morality tropes to frame the Nixon Doctrine as a choice for the US public. This foreign policy approach was constructed by this discourse as a pragmatic expression of a US moral example which would require the moral courage of the public to support it, as it still required US international involvement, but which also presented a reduction of US responsibility as both appropriate and acceptable. The threat in this discourse was not expressing a US moral example by *embracing* – rather than simply desiring – isolationism. Essentially, through constructing isolationism as an abdication of a US moral example and globalism as an initially moral, but unsustainable (and unnecessary) approach because of over-extension, the administration’s discourse constructed limits to US responsibility. The threat of isolationism to the US was constructed at both ends of a spectrum – no

international engagement (the abandonment of a US moral example) and too much international engagement (moral, but unnecessary and likely to lead to isolationism). As long as the US public had the moral courage to support Vietnamization and the Nixon Doctrine, the US would remain true to a moral example and continue to safely exist.

Chapter five: Spatio-Temporal Othering

Spatio-temporal othering: Theory and the nuclear age

‘Spatial othering’ is a general term, though one grounded in a specific, modern Western political context (Prozorov, 2011: 1274 n. 3). Essentially, spatial othering is a discursive method of defining a Self against an Other; the division of territory “into a plurality of sovereign states, separated by territorial boundaries and containing particularistic political communities, whose sovereign equality [precludes] the possibility of the existence of any overarching political identity above them” (ibid., p. 1276). Thus, the very concept of the spatially defined state is predicated on and reproduces a specific ‘knowledge’ of how states work. In its most basic sense, this knowledge is Westphalian IR (i.e. ‘a state is a state is a state’) (see: Devetak, 2005: 150; Cox, 1981: 127).

The relationship between spatial and temporal othering is complex and interwoven. Temporal othering – generally defined as being when a state constructs its own past as an Other (see: Wæver, 1996; 1998; Diez, 2004) – necessarily involves the (re)construction of an identity, including the delimitation of the physical borders of the state. In terms of constructing identity through a securitization, the ‘security’ of a state may be ‘ontologized’ – transforming its insecurity “into an inescapable condition of international politics” (Mälksoo, 2015: 222). In a political imaginary where the supremacy of sovereign states is an unquestioned given, a state may demarcate “the limits of the inside of a state from the outside world by naturalizing the policing of the borders of the self from the perils of the other” (ibid.; cf. Walker, 1992). Whilst positing “mnemonical security” – “the idea that distinct understandings of the past should be fixed in public remembrance and consciousness in order to buttress an actor’s stable sense of self as the basis of its political agency” – Mälksoo (2015) argues that policymakers often frame “historical remembrance” as an issue of ontological security (pp. 222-6).

Essentially, Mäliksoo (2015) theorizes that ‘memory’ or “the biographical self-narrative of the state” may become ‘ontologized’ through a government “setting legal frames on how ‘our story’ can be remembered” – that is, the securitization of memory (pp. 222-3). Though this chapter, and the entire project, does not suppose that the process of ‘remembering’ was securitized in the US during the Vietnam War, Mäliksoo’s work does point to the interconnectedness between a state’s ‘past’ and its ontological foundation as a physical entity. In Mäliksoo’s (2015) words, “the survival of a physical body is not sufficient without the survival of a combination of ideational features of a state, the intactness of which is equal to its physical endurance” (p. 224).

During the Cold War, the process of spatio-temporal othering was challenged by the existence of nuclear weapons. When the USSR developed nuclear weapons – and technologies capable of rapidly launching nuclear warheads and delivering them to targets across the globe – America’s physical borders, including its buffering oceans, were rendered strategically irrelevant. No target in the US was unreachable by another state’s nuclear weapons (initially only the USSR), just as the US could obliterate cities deep inside other territories. While its borders and physical territory still underpinned a US Self, in the event of nuclear annihilation the narrative of identity would obviously be reduced to a mere history, with no present or future Self. Even this history would no longer exist:

The significance of the possibility of nuclear death is that it radically affects the meaning of death, of immortality, of life itself. [...] It destroys the meaning of immortality by making both society and history impossible.
(Morgenthau, 1961)

Regardless of the challenges presented by the existence of nuclear weapons, defensive and deterrent policies were still justified in the name of US sovereignty, and thus were fixed to an identity of the US as an ongoing political community (cf. Walker, 1992: 91). The physical borders of the US remained an important anchor (i.e. an ontological foundation) for a US identity/narrative. However, the Nixon administration’s discourse invoked concepts of deterrence and containment to alter the borders of the US defensive perimeter. In what the discourse constructed as a pragmatic response to a US public turning towards isolationism, the Nixon Doctrine

proposed reducing US international responsibilities. Vietnamization was presented as an example of this policy: the US would gradually turn over the fighting to the South Vietnamese forces, just as the US would “not transfer burdens too swiftly” to other allied states, but would instead “strike a balance” between doing too much and too little (Nixon, Feb. 25, 1971).

Though the Nixon Doctrine would not do ‘too much’, which would prevent “self-reliance”, it would not do so little that it undermined “self-confidence” (Nixon, Feb. 25, 1971). Key to this balance would be a US “defense posture” of providing “the nuclear shield of the Nixon Doctrine” to allied states (ibid.). In terms of US international involvement, this foreign policy proposal reduced the territory the US would be responsible for defending with conventional force – especially with US soldiers. As this chapter argues, through presenting the concept of the nuclear shield in lieu of conventional forces fighting wars in other states (as was the case in previous ‘globalist’ foreign policies), the Nixon discourse performed two functions.

First, the administration was able to present a policy of reduced responsibility that shrunk the territory the US would have to defend with its own soldiers – thus staunching a desire for the isolationism it perceived in the public. At the same time, the discourse could present a foreign policy that was internationally engaged and still defended the borders of the free world as well as the borders of the US, which would allow the policy to be presented as being in keeping with a US moral identity, and which still constructed the USSR as a threat.

Secondly, as the following sections demonstrate, the administration was then able to construct calls for unilateral reductions of US nuclear weapons as a threatening isolationism, a policy that would abandon US defense of the borders of the free world (and its own borders). Relatedly, the administration was able to construct an approach – one it claimed was held by some unidentified elites – in which the US would only have a nuclear deterrent and no international US engagement or leadership. This approach, the administration claimed, would be isolationism.

The Nixon administration's nuclear policies

The Nixon administration's nuclear weapons policies – particularly those related to the concepts of deterrence theory and nuclear proliferation – are outlined here as an analytical starting point for conceptualizing the administration's discursive construction of a 'knowledge' about how the international realm functioned. The administration's discourse did not directly engage with "nuclear death" in the same philosophic manner as Morgenthau's above quote. Indeed, the administration's conceptualization of the effect of nuclear weapons on how the world operated contrasted sharply with Morgenthau's assessments – particularly in terms of the 'rationality' of possessing nuclear weapons (see: Morgenthau, 2018 [1977]).

However, as mentioned in the 'Ethical Responsibility' chapter, the administration's discourse presented negotiating with the USSR regarding nuclear weapons as a 'moral imperative' aimed at *preventing* nuclear war. This was possible, according to the administration, because the USSR shared with the US "a common interest in preventing the dread specter of nuclear holocaust" (Nixon, Oct. 19, 1968).

Furthermore, in the 'changed' international arena of "multipolar Communism marked by a variety of attitudes toward the rest of the world" presented "new opportunities for improving relations" which could help the US avoid "confrontations which [could] pose an agonizing choice between paralysis and holocaust" (Nixon, Feb. 25, 1971).

In 1968, Nixon's immediate predecessor President Johnson signed the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). However, wider Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT), a linkage of the NPT to SALT, including an Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABMT), along with US Senate ratification of the NPT were halted after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in response to the Prague Spring on August 20, 1968 (Brands, 2006: 254-5, 280-2). Once in office, the Nixon administration moved quickly to get the NPT ratified by the Senate, making sure it passed by 85 to 15 votes on March 13, 1969 (Cameron & Rabinowitz, 2017: 843). Indeed, the administration would go on to negotiate the ABMT and SALT with the USSR in 1972, both landmark agreements limiting specific nuclear weapons and delivery systems (Gavin, 2012: 104).

However, though the Nixon administration negotiated and signed these arms reduction treaties, non-proliferation was not prioritized, nor were treaties such as SALT conceptualized as an extension of the NPT in the administration's discourse (Cameron & Rabinowitz, 2017: 842, 844)³⁷. As Gavin (2012) has shown, Nixon and Kissinger did not maintain that the presence of nuclear weapons fundamentally altered how states interacted with each other – if anything, proliferation was likely to be inevitable and possibly strategically advantageous, but not a goal worth jeopardizing other geopolitical aims (p. 105, *et passim*). Rather than blanket adherence and enforcement of the NPT, and in line with the Nixon Doctrine, the administration's approaches to proliferation were ad hoc calculations, based on specific state/regional contexts³⁸ which placed greater responsibility and decision-making on allied states – though still within a broader Cold War free-world/communism framework (Cameron & Rabinowitz, 2017: 847-8). However, for the administration this broader Cold War struggle was an expression of underlying great power conflicts – the continuation of state interactions as in the time of Metternich and Castlereagh, rather than an ideological conflict (i.e. 'linkage', covered later in this chapter).

The administration's spatio-temporal othering discourse was co-constituted with a distinct 'realist' approach to foreign policy, particularly through discourse related to the concept of US 'credibility' in the international realm. In this analysis, credibility is conceptualized as a rhetorical and theoretical crossroad, linking nuclear deterrence theory, the Nixon administration's 'realism', the concepts of 'limited' war and 'images' of state power, and the security discourse of isolationism – all anchored to and constitutive of representations of states through spatio-temporal othering. The administration's spatio-temporal isolationism discourse constructed a world in which US international engagement was demonstrated through leadership and a nuclear shield for allies. Rather than a world of conflicting interests, this

³⁷ "[US SALT delegation leader Gerard Smith's] whole line has been, Henry, that this [SALT] is the outgrowth of the Nonproliferation Treaty. It has not a goddamn thing to do with the Nonproliferation Treaty, and the Test Ban treaty and all the rest" (Nixon, June 13, 1972, , *FRUS*, V. E2, D. 58; Cameron & Rabinowitz, 2017: 844).

³⁸ E.g. the administration 'allowing' Israel to have nuclear weapons. See, *inter alia*, Cohen & Burr, 2006.

approach more closely reflected earlier Cold War policies in that it was essentially a policy of containment, aimed at preventing communist infringement of the borders of a free world. Another aspect of this discourse constituted a multipolar world of states with interest in which it was not only possible, but pragmatic, for the US to reduce its international responsibilities and engage with communist states individually. In this world, the borders of states were their physical borders, rather than the ideological borders of bipolarity and containment.

As this chapter will show, though the Nixon administration moved away from the early Cold War approach of 'containment' – using military threats and actions to stop communism spreading into other states – it retained a policy of *defensive* containment via the threat of nuclear weapons. In this sense, credibility was also critical because it was alleged by analysts and the administration that the US needed to demonstrate its credibility, i.e. its willingness to use nuclear weapons. This credibility was to be projected through the prosecution of 'limited' proxy wars. In demonstrating this credibility, so the logic went, the US would ensure its nuclear deterrent remained effective. While the Nixon Doctrine advocated shifting responsibility to allies to provide their own soldiers to defend themselves, the administration stated the US would still provide a nuclear shield to these states – effectively 'containing' nuclear aggression from the USSR.

The following sections argue that the Nixon administration used isolationism and nuclear discourses to construct its foreign policy as a middle ground and to reinforce the concept of credibility. While still emphasizing the necessity of defensive nuclear weapons, the administration constructed the possibility of the US only having a nuclear deterrent, rather than an international presence, as a form of isolationism that would thus lead to war – but also insisted further globalism would push the US public into isolationism (and globalism was furthermore unnecessary in the now multipolar world). The administration also stressed the importance of credibility in terms of withdrawal from Vietnam. If the US were to immediately withdraw from Vietnam, the administration insisted US honor and credibility would be damaged. This discourse was intertwined with a domestic electoral discourse

that linked US morality at home with the ability of the US to effectively execute its foreign policy.

'Real' worlds

Candidate Nixon had invoked isolationism multiple times in the run up to the 1968 election, usually as a defense of his foreign policy approach. Referring to Korea and Vietnam, Nixon had pressed his case for a new foreign policy approach where other states took more responsibility for their own protection. However, he was quick to add that this approach was “not a new isolationism”, but instead a “new internationalism” (Nixon, August 8, 1968). In this speech, Nixon immediately pivoted from this “new internationalism” – in which the US was to enlist its allies “in those struggles in which their interest is as great as ours” – to addressing the “leaders of the Communist world” with the couplet “After an era of confrontation, the time has come for an era of negotiation” (ibid.).

This negotiation, candidate Nixon stated in an earlier speech, was an important tool for bringing the war in Vietnam – a “new kind of war” – to a “successful conclusion” (Nixon, March 7, 1968). The Johnson administration had “failed to understand the nature of this new kind of war” and was thus incapable of negotiating with the Soviet Union – an essential aspect of concluding the war, Nixon stated (ibid.). Nixon said his approach was not a “retreat from responsibility, and not a new isolationism”, but instead one that recognized specific “fundamental facts” (ibid.). In another candidate speech, Nixon, after attesting that his approach was “not a retreat into a new isolationism”, maintained that,

[r]ather, it faces up to one of the *blunt facts of life in the world today*: that even if the United States had the will, it no longer has the capacity to do all that needs to be done. (Nixon, October 19, 1968, emphasis added)

When the “era of negotiation” arrived in early 1970, the administration presented ‘interests’ as the basis of discussions with communist states – an explicit departure from NSC-68. Neither ideology nor “cold-war invective” would be the basis for negotiations. Rather these states would be regarded as “nations pursuing their own

interests as they perceive these interests”, just as the US pursued its own interests (Nixon, Feb. 18, 1970).³⁹ In 1969, Nixon spoke vaguely of the “calculated, not foolish risks” that the administration would take “for peace” (Nixon, June 4, 1969). The administration was “prepared for new initiatives in the control of arms” in order to “reduce tensions around the world” (ibid.). These ‘calculated risks’ – about matters of US defensive power – were to be made on the “*hard realities* of the offensive capabilities of our potential adversaries, and *not on the fervent hopes about their intentions*” (ibid., emphasis added).

The idealistic “dream world” of “unilateral disarmament” must be discarded, Nixon stated, “because in the real world it wouldn’t work” (Nixon, June 4, 1969). The problem for the Nixon administration was not arms per se, but the conflict that led to states arming themselves. What was necessary for peace was for states to learn “peaceful ways to resolve their conflicting national interests” (ibid.). Discordant ‘national interests’ between states were at the heart of conflict, not the presence of weapons. This comment is consistent with Nixon’s earlier statement in the same speech about taking calculated risks for peace based on the “hard realities of offensive capabilities” rather than “hopes” about adversaries’ “intentions” (ibid.). The unilateral disarmament of the US would not settle its conflicting national interests with the USSR (or any other ‘adversary’), and thus would only leave the US defenseless and vulnerable. Any indications of a state’s intentions regarding disarmament were nothing more than “a disarming smile or charming words” until actual disarmament took place (ibid.). And this literal disarmament could only occur if conflicting national interests were resolved, according to Nixon.

Further highlighting this approach to interests and arms, is a Kissinger memo to Nixon in which he stated, “Our reading of history indicates that all crises have been caused by political conditions, not by the arms race as such” and a Nixon call to the Soviet ambassador to the US Anatoly Dobrynin, where Nixon said “History makes it clear that wars result from political differences and problems [rather than] “freezing

³⁹ NB. By April 1972, the US negotiating strategy with the USSR was, according to Nixon, “we will keep our chins up and keep kicking them in the balls” (‘Transcript of Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)’, April 9, 1972, *FRUS* V. 14, D. 87).

strategic weapons” (Gavin, 2012: 108; ‘Memorandum from Kissinger to President Nixon’, February 15 1969, *FRUS*, V. 12, D. 13; ‘Ambassador Dobrynin’s Initial Call on the President’, February 17 1969, *FRUS*, V. 12, D. 14).

The administration’s focus on national interests, political conditions, and differences – particularly as being paramount over ‘idealistic’ concerns – appears broadly ‘realist’. It is not relevant to this analysis whether the Nixon administration was or was not realist (or, indeed what kind of realist), much as describing someone as isolationist would be largely useless analytically. What is relevant is the broader logic of the administration’s foreign policy discourse – the constructions of threats and knowledge within a framework of ‘rationality’ and universal rules – not the specifics of any one IR theory.

Nuclear policy, credibility, isolationism, and different worlds

This section argues that the Nixon administration’s isolationism discourses constructed two different ‘worlds’, and that this process was interrelated with its discourse on nuclear policy. The administration constituted a foreign policy approach in each world which functioned as two far ends of a spectrum. The Nixon Doctrine was presented as a middle ground between these two poles, between two policy approaches no elites were advocating. In one world, the administration’s discourse constructed a US public prone to oscillation between isolationism and internationalism. Here, the over-extension of the US providing troops to fight wars in states on the boundary between the free world and communism would lead to threatening isolationism. On the opposite pole, the discourse constructed a world in which, if the US only maintained a nuclear deterrent to defend the borders of the free world, there would be isolationism because of the lack of US leadership or involvement in the world. Safely in the middle, the Nixon Doctrine was constituted in a ‘reality’ where states were rational, with their own interests, and could therefore shoulder their own defensive burdens. The US would still be the leader of the free world (thus preventing isolationism), protecting the perimeter of the free world against the USSR with an American nuclear shield (as this was in the US

interest), but with on-the-ground combat operations turned over to allied states (thus preventing an over-extension that would lead to isolationism).

While the Nixon administration did engage with US nuclear policy, it did not maintain that the presence of nuclear weapons *fundamentally* altered how states behaved in the international arena, in terms of their own interests or their interactions with other states (Cameron & Rabinowitz, 2017: 842, 842 n. 10; Gavin, 2012: 108). However, the administration's discourse did conceptualize differences between the worlds of conventional and nuclear warfare, particularly in terms of the limits of American responsibilities for the defense of other states. In this respect, the Nixon Doctrine constructed different 'borders' for US interests based on possible types of warfare. The administration's isolationism discourses would reinforce these different conceptual worlds in aid of situating the Nixon Doctrine as a middle ground approach. The conceptual linchpin in this chapter's theorization is the administration's universalization and reification of states' interests and rationality, an ostensibly realist framework.

The Nixon administration took it as given that states pursue their national interests and when national interest conflicted there was the potential for animosity, and possibly war. In terms of nuclear weapons, the administration's ambivalent attitude towards proliferation stemmed from both the belief that proliferation was likely unavoidable (even with the NPT) and that non-proliferation in allied states – i.e. if allied states were not able to acquire nuclear weapons – could potentially harm US long term interests (Gavin, 2012: 117). Regarding the USSR, resolving conflicting interests took on greater importance because of nuclear parity between the US and USSR (i.e. the two states had enough offensive and defensive nuclear weapons to obliterate each other with first and second strikes). Moreover, because both states possessed nuclear arsenals, the concept of proxy or limited wars – and the idea of credibility which underpinned both limited wars and nuclear deterrence – would feature prominently in public discourse (as well as in theoretical analyses), rather than a policy of 'massive retaliation'.

The Eisenhower administration (which ended in January 1961) had, in the wake of the Korean War, enacted Secretary of State John Foster Dulles' policy of nuclear

‘massive retaliation’ or ‘brinkmanship’. The policy, which dovetailed with the strategy of ‘containment’ – particularly in its assumption of a monolithic communism – dictated that at the beginning of any crisis or conflict, the US would threaten an overwhelming nuclear attack in the hope that the enemy would capitulate (Schell, 1976: 347). When the Kennedy administration came to power in 1961 it implemented a strategy of ‘flexible response’ which set out different degrees of response, from conventional through to nuclear, which continued in succeeding the Johnson administration – though Gavin (2012) maintains that the flexible response strategy was mainly rhetoric and a “myth”. The actual strategy, he argues, remained a predetermined, inflexible, massive nuclear retaliation against multiple targets, while flexible response was the strategy presented to the public (pp. 113, 30-56).

As early as 1957, Kissinger had written about the ineffectiveness of the ‘massive relation’ nuclear strategy, particularly because he thought it would reduce US ‘credibility’ (see: Kissinger’s *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy*, 1957). Essentially, his argument was that if the US threatened nuclear holocaust in response to all infractions, even minor ones, then no one – particularly the perceived enemies of the US – would believe American leaders would follow through on nuclear war (Schell, 1976: 347-8). For Kissinger, this was an effect of the reasoning associated with the potential use of nuclear weapons. The US, Kissinger posited, was paralyzed by the enormity of potential nuclear war: the state would not actually launch nuclear weapons for fear of their catastrophic destructive capabilities (ibid., pp. 344, 346).

A policy to counteract this paralysis, formulated by Kissinger (among others), was that of ‘limited’ war. In this concept, conventional forces could be used in proxy battles, rather than resorting to nuclear brinkmanship. This strategy, it was posited, would allow the US to combat communism across the globe using conventional arms and would hopefully reduce the chances of nuclear war (Schell, 1976: 350). Nuclear weapons, as per deterrence theory, would still be used to prevent nuclear attack (i.e. through a second strike policy), but would not be deployed as a means of first resort (ibid.). For Kissinger, nuclear weapons were useful as an image, not as a

weapon – the appearance or presence of nuclear arms could act as a deterrent, but if they were actually used, everything would likely be destroyed, thus rendering them useless (ibid. p. 354).

As General Maxwell Taylor⁴⁰ described it in a 1960 book, there was a “psychological factor” involved in deploying a nuclear deterrent, particularly the need for clear indications that the state had the “will and determination” to launch nuclear forces if necessary (Taylor quoted in Schell, 1976: 352). As mentioned above, for Kissinger this so-called psychological factor also involved an enemy’s (or the public’s) perception of what a nuclear response would be (“until power is used, it is... what people think it is”) (ibid., p. 354, Kissinger quoted in ibid.). The administration’s discourse further normalized and naturalized the psychological factor as a rational, scientific, and accepted concept in deterrence theory. This discourse of deterrence, through constituting particular understandings of international relations (i.e. where deterrence theory worked to guarantee peace), hierarchized and normalized the site in which it operated (Joenniemi, 1989: 45). By constantly reproducing this understanding, the discourse of deterrence provided a representation of ‘reality’ (ibid.). In this manner, the discourse had a “world ordering and normalizing” function, whilst making the claim that deterrence had provided peace and protection from “the unknown” (ibid.). In turn, these claims of rationality, knowledge, and security imbued the concept of deterrence with authority. As such, criticism of nuclear deterrence could be equated with insecurity, disorder, and the dangerous, violent unknown, while critical policy options and their proponents were othered or trivialized (ibid.; Krause & Williams, 1996: 246-7). As shown below, the Nixon administration would attempt to portray elites who did not want to pay for more nuclear weapons as ‘unilateral disarmers’ and thus isolationists. However, it would also construct elites who wanted a strictly domestic nuclear deterrent in place of international engagement as isolationists as well.

⁴⁰ Army Chief of Staff under President Eisenhower; Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff under President Kennedy; Chair of President’s Intelligence Advisory Board under Presidents Johnson and Nixon (1968-1970).

The political construction and projection of a will to use conventional or nuclear weapons – i.e. ‘credibility’ – echoes the statements by Nixon and Kissinger covered earlier regarding how political conditions create arms races, not the arms themselves. This closely resembles Morgenthau’s theoretical anchoring of power in the political realm. For Morgenthau, in political power there was a “psychological relation” between those in power and those under it (Morgenthau, 2006: 30). Real power, in Morgenthau’s theory, was in the political, not the military sphere. The power or force in the political sphere was the *threat* of violence, for when violence was employed, the psychological element was lost and power transferred to the military sphere (ibid., p. 31). Indeed, this is similar to the administration’s approach regarding nuclear weapons. Nuclear strategy was constructed as rational as it furthered a national interest, however actually using nuclear weapons (or causing them to be used) was irrational because the true power of nuclear weapons was the threat of using them – and because nuclear war would likely annihilate everyone.

In this manner, the concept of credibility in the limited war/nuclear deterrent approach functioned as a crucial psychological component. US commitment to winning a hypothetical limited war would, the administration hypothesized, demonstrate its credibility to its allies and enemies alike – both in terms of its commitment to protect itself by combatting communism through conventional means, and by demonstrating its resolve to use nuclear weapons if necessary. In Schell’s (1976) words, “credibility was the device by which small wars were meant to cast a long and fearful shadow” (p. 95). Schell (1976) linked credibility with what he termed the “psychological domino theory” (pp. 9-10). The “domino theory” was the hypothesis that one state ‘falling’ to communism would endanger its immediate neighbors, possibly causing them to ‘fall’ as well. The “psychological domino theory” posited that if a state such as Vietnam fell to communism, states around the world would lose their confidence in US power, and thereby be discouraged from relying on it and thus compelled to negotiate with America’s enemies, who would be emboldened by a US credibility collapse (ibid.).

The logic of the psychological domino theory appears to be implicit in the administration’s ongoing credibility discourse – particularly how isolationism or lack

of self-belief in the US public would cause the dominoes to fall. Credibility, as a concept associated with nuclear deterrence (itself predicated on monolithic communism), predated the Nixon administration (see, e.g.: Gaddis, 2005: 87-115). The domino theory was, of course, integral to the concept of containment (discussed in the 'Ethical Responsibility' chapter) in previous Cold War foreign policies. The original domino theory was predicated on states-as-objects in a wider battle between two ideological forces (free world vs communism). However, invocations of the 'domino theory' by the Nixon administration explicitly reinforced a conceptualization of distinctly bound states, with interests and agency, which conformed with the Nixon Doctrine formulated in 1969.

As Nixon said in a television interview in 1970 (and would repeat almost verbatim in a speech four years later), "Now I know there are those who say the domino theory is obsolete. They haven't talked to the dominoes" (Nixon, July 1, 1970, *FRUS* V. 1, D. 67; see also: Nixon, February 26, 1974). In this interview, Nixon was at pains to name all the states in Southeast Asia and their leaders, and to remind the interviewer that he has spoken to each one (Nixon, July 1, 1970, *FRUS* V. 1, D. 67). Nixon also explained that he was "not saying that automatically if South Vietnam should go the others topple one by one", only that the neighboring states would all think "'Watch out, we might be next'" (ibid.). "That's what is real", Nixon added at the end of the interview (ibid.).

With the portrayal in NSC-68 of the USSR as seeking to weaken the "world power position of the US" by whatever means necessary, including by denigrating "everything that gives us or others respect for our institutions", credibility was presented as an asset to be secured (NSC-68 quoted in Gaddis, 2005: 90). In this sense, 'securing' credibility could be conceptualized in the Nixon administration discourse as containment as well: engaging in proxy wars would contain perceived threats to US credibility concerning the will of the US to prosecute conventional wars and use nuclear weapons. Though the administration advocated shifting (non-nuclear) defensive responsibilities to allied states (as it was in their interests to do so in a 'changed' world), the older concept of a bipolar ideological conflict which

underpinned containment theory remained in terms of nuclear weapons policy and credibility.

Linkage

Though the Nixon administration's discourse constructed a world of individual states with interests, these states were still portrayed as 'linked' to a wider 'great power' conflict between the US and the USSR/communist states – where the *loss* of South Vietnam would primarily be significant because of its effect on the US (or *preserving* South Vietnam would have a similar effect on the USSR and PRC) (Schell, 1976: 196). In a sense, this was a holdover of global anticommunism and containment, in that two forces were conceptualized in a worldwide struggle. In this respect, individual states were important as representations of an ongoing battle, and furthermore as representations that were inherently linked – a loss in one area could affect the US position elsewhere, potentially globally (i.e. the psychological domino theory).

Relatedly, in the administration's discourse these representations of an ongoing battle were also representations of credibility, and thus images of power for the administration itself. As Schell (1976) argues, since the administration – particularly Nixon himself – saw his credibility as coterminous with US credibility, the doctrines of credibility and linkage seeped into the domestic realm (pp. 196-7). US credibility had to be protected by withdrawing from Vietnam at an appropriate, 'honorable' pace, and defended from those domestic voices that called for rapid withdrawal from Vietnam and beyond (i.e. 'isolationism'). Instances of this linkage are examined in the 'Ethical Responsibility' and 'Ideological Character' chapters. Furthermore, linking domestic character or behavior with the ability of the US to act internationally (or to be perceived to have the will to act by other states) was not novel to the Nixon administration. Indeed, this was a central indictment of neoconservative discourse.

Schell (1976) sees this defense of credibility as a "struggle" that "was carried forward on a single, boundaryless field of action, against a single, undifferentiated

foe. And [...] in this far-ranging, often abstract and symbolic combat, the foe abroad was indistinguishable from the foe at home, and the President's political foes were indistinguishable from the nation's foes [...]" (p. 197). However, the Nixon administration's isolationism discourse helped construct Nixon's foreign policy as a middle of the road policy by constituting globalism on one side and isolationism on the other (see, e.g.: Sulzberger, March 9, 1971). Contra Schell, this thesis argues that, while the administration's discourse certainly constructed internal enemies (e.g. the vocal minority, 'communists') and presented isolationism as threatening, it did not constitute the 'silent majority's' tendency to waver between isolationism and internationalism as a "foe at home". This discourse explicitly accepted the US public's weariness of over-extension and incorporated it into a foreign policy situated in a world of individual states with their own interests and responsibilities (see the 'Psychological Character' chapter). In this respect, the Nixon Doctrine was a rejection of a 'single, undifferentiated foe', however it was not a rejection of the threat allegedly posed by the USSR or other communist states. Continued US global leadership was reproduced by this discourse as still being necessary for the security of the US and the world.

The Nixon Doctrine's proposal for a shift of defensive responsibilities to allied states also appears to have been predicated on the concept of an inherently vacillatory 'silent majority' – though the administration did not publicly acknowledge this. The concept that states had their own interests and responsibilities underpinned the validity of the Nixon Doctrine in terms of responding to the 'reality' of the world and as a wise domestic strategy to prevent isolationism. In this respect, the administration's discourse constructed threats from (communist) states, and thus the necessity for internationalism and world leadership, while presenting a multipolar world of states with interests which would enable the US to shift some responsibilities to its allies.

The 'Ideological Character' chapter will argue that the administration's discourse reinforced a US 'ideological' character through the construction of a threatening 'vocal minority', in part through a bipolar, moralistic anticommunism discourse. However, this is not exactly the same 'world' constructed in the discourse analyzed

in this chapter. While the administration's nuclear discourse presented what was essentially a bipolar world, this construction was based on which other state possessed a substantial nuclear arsenal (the USSR). The administration stressed repeatedly that it would avoid an ideological approach to the world, thus its approach was founded on multipolarity and negotiating with states based on their perceived interests, as well as "look[ing] at the facts" (e.g. "The Soviets now have three times the missile strength (ICBM) of ourselves") (Nixon quoted in Sulzberger, March 9, 1971).

'Superhawks': Isolationism from another angle

Maintaining the US nuclear shield for allies was a key plank of the Nixon Doctrine (Nixon, Nov. 3, 1969). In terms of this shield, and through maintaining a defensive nuclear deterrent for the US, nuclear threats or even the presence of US nuclear weapons could be used to advance US interests (Gavin, 2012: 106). The nuclear shield was predominantly presented as addressing Soviet missiles – especially as a defense of US territory – because the PRC's nuclear weapons program, with its first detonation occurring in 1964, grew slowly through the 1960s and 70s (Haynes, 2016: 139).⁴¹ In this nuclear sense, the Nixon Doctrine presented a bipolar world of US nuclear weapons versus Soviet nuclear weapons. However, a nuclear strategy was only part of the Nixon Doctrine. Nixon specifically constructed a policy of only having a nuclear deterrent as being isolationism, saying the "superhawks" believed that if the US couldn't "handle a distant little war [Vietnam], why then let's just pull out and build up our strength at home. Their logic also favored isolationism, but from another angle. And they want to develop a Fortress America at home and cram it full of missiles" (Nixon quoted in Sulzberger, March 9, 1971). Moreover, Nixon said, this policy "would ultimately lead to war" (ibid.).

⁴¹ Indeed, even as of 2016 the PRC likely possessed around 55 warheads capable of reaching the US (Haynes, 2016: 95). Cf. Nixon: "The People's Republic of China has substantial military forces. But those forces pose a more limited and less immediate threat in Asia than do the forces of the Soviet Union in Europe. Chinese nuclear capabilities are still in an early stage of development" (Feb. 25, 1971).

Portraying these 'superhawks' as isolationists within a bipolar world of nuclear powers resembles the ideological character discourse covered in its own chapter later in this thesis. This superhawk discourse constructed an inherently isolationist segment of the population who, though they "stood by their Commander in Chief, the President", still wanted to "pull out of the world" (Nixon quoted in Sulzberger, March 9, 1971). The administration's ideological character discourse also constituted George Wallace voters as patriotic, concerned with US honor, and defense-minded, but inclined to isolationism. However, the administration never explicitly invoked isolationism when targeting Wallace voters – even though it appealed to what it believed were their inherent isolationist sentiments. While the ideological character discourse may have overlapped to a degree with the superhawk discourse, the administration's references to superhawks appear to have been primarily concerned with elite debates about nuclear policy and strategy.

Though it does not use the term 'superhawk', Nixon's discourse from 1969, especially his 'Address to the Air Force Academy' in June, targeted a similar group of elites. Nixon did not present these elites as a threat, per se. Instead, Nixon said he fundamentally disagreed with "the skeptics and the isolationists" because they "have lost the vision indispensable to great leadership" (Nixon, June 4, 1969). These isolationists "observe the problems that confront us; they measure our resources and then they despair", rather than believing in themselves and the US. (ibid.). According to Nixon, only "when a nation means something to itself can it mean something to others" (ibid.). This self-belief would allow the US to "continue to be a source of world leadership, a source of freedom's strength, in creating a just world order that will bring an end to war" (ibid.). While Nixon was likely trying to attack elites alleged to support unilateral disarmers, the general logic of the isolationism discourse is similar the superhawk discourse: the key to any successful US foreign policy is an aspirational, moral leadership, which necessarily includes international engagement.

As mentioned earlier, the administration claimed a 'moral imperative' compelled it to negotiate with the USSR regarding nuclear weapons (which, it stated, was also in the Soviet interest), particularly in the context of a multipolar world. However, early

in the administration's first term and in advance of a major Congressional vote on an anti-ballistic missile program (the ABM) called Safeguard, the administration's discourse invoked isolationism discourse to frame debate over Safeguard as one between isolationists calling for unilateral disarmament and withdrawal from the world, and the Nixon administration advocating the US not be allowed to "fall behind in maintaining the defenses necessary for the strength of this Nation" (Nixon, June 4, 1969). Essentially, the administration's discourse – particularly Nixon's 'Address at the Air Force' – presented Soviet possession of a greater number of nuclear weapons as a threat, not a conflict of interests which could be negotiated. The threatening intentions of the USSR were presented as given. As with the older bipolar, globalist rhetoric, it was presumed that the USSR would, by virtue of its 'nature', take advantage of a nuclear imbalance to destroy the US. In this sense, the administration attempted to construct a bipolar world.

Due in part to Secretary of State McNamara and President Johnson's decision to hold the number of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) steady in 1965, as well as an intensive Soviet ICBM building program, the USSR had by 1969 achieved a rough parity with the US for the first time (Nelson, 1991: 202). Though the Nixon administration could have regained the lead in this nuclear arms race by deploying multiple independently targeted warheads (MIRVs), there was little support amongst the public and Congress for the increased spending necessary for achieving nuclear superiority (ibid., pp. 202-3; Gavin, 2012: 112). While Nixon would practice brinkmanship (threatening a nuclear response) and the 'madman' strategy (Gavin, 2012: 113-6) behind the scenes with other state leaders ⁴², publicly the administration promoted détente and negotiation through resolution of conflicting interests as the appropriate strategies, contrasted against what they portrayed as a hopeless and dangerous strategy of unilateral disarmament. However, no elites were advocating for unilateral disarmament, only not paying for additional nuclear weapons. The administration would portray those opposing Safeguard as unilateral disarmers and isolationists. However, as with the superhawks discourse a couple of

⁴² This strategy involved Kissinger telling other leaders that Nixon was uncontrollable and implying that the president might use nuclear weapons rather than acquiesce to demands or admit defeat (see: Gavin, 2012: 115-6).

years later, the administration also constructed a nuclear deterrent only option as isolationism as well.

An article published in the June 5, 1969 edition of the *Nashville Tennessean* (via The New York Times Wire service), commented on the Senate reaction to Nixon's Air Force speech (Finney, June 5, 1969). The article stated that Nixon had "abbreviated, if not terminated, his administration's period of good feelings on Capitol Hill" (ibid.). Going on, the article declared that amidst the

prevailing centrist coalition in the Senate, Democrats were openly outraged and Republicans were privately distressed over what they regarded as the 'hard line' in the speech and the suggestions that military critics in Congress were either isolationists or unilateral disarmers. (ibid.)

Specifically, the Congressional "resentment" towards Nixon's speech

sprang in large measure from what was regarded as the innuendo in the President's speech that senators who have been opposing the Safeguard antiballistic missile system, protesting the size of the military budget or complaining about the extent of the nation's global commitments were either isolationists or neo-isolationists. (Finney, June 5, 1969)

Indeed, the "common presumption on Capitol Hill", the article asserted,

was that Nixon took the 'hard line' approach in an attempt to rescue his Safeguard Missile defense program, which has run into near-majority opposition from the centrist Democratic-Republican coalition in the Senate. (Finney, June 5, 1969)

However, "the speech had the political effect of polarizing the struggle developing in the Senate over the safeguard program in particular and military policy in general" (ibid.).

Senator Alan Cranston, Democrat from California, said the President had employed "a technique of setting up straw men and then knocking them down", a technique "strongly reminiscent of the style of argumentation perfected by the previous administration" (Cranston quoted in Finney, June 5, 1969). Cranston stated:

I know of no responsible American who advocates that we alone lay down our arms. I see no wave of isolationism sweeping America. What is sweeping America is a demand that we readjust our priorities and goals so that we tackle the immense problems we face at home and abroad with realism and not with rhetoric. (Cranston quoted in ibid.)

An editorial in the same edition of the *Nashville Tennessean* followed a thread similar to Cranston's comments, calling Nixon's invocation of isolationism an "overstatement" (*Nashville Tennessean*, June 5, 1969). The editorial claimed that Defense Secretaries McNamara and Clifford in the preceding Johnson administration "had assured the nation of the adequacy of its nuclear deterrent strength" (ibid.). However, a few months later Nixon's Defense Secretary Melvin Laird had "thrown up a scare of what the Russians are doing and what they are capable of doing" and the President was now asking for a new anti-ballistic missile program (Safeguard) "whose initial cost was misstated by the Pentagon and whose future cost nobody knows" (ibid.).

In his Air Force speech, the editorial claimed, Nixon had "pounded on this criticism [of the costs, presumably] as the 'new isolationists' [sic]" (*Nashville Tennessean*, 'June 5, 1969). These 'isolationists', Nixon stated, wanted unilateral disarmament, and a withdrawal from the world and American's role as "protector of the peace" (ibid.). For the writers of the editorial, this was "an overstatement of the case":

Nobody in a leadership role in the Congress or the nation is arguing that the nation ought to disarm itself as a 'best means of reaching an understanding with Russia and Red China'. The argument is for sterner civilian control of the Pentagon. The argument is also whether the ABM [anti-ballistic missile system] is needed, whether it is workable and whether domestic needs aren't more pressing than this Safeguard system. And finally, the argument is whether it might be more logical to try to find an agreement with the Russians on limiting the spread of nuclear weapons. (ibid.)

Regarding negotiations with the Soviets, the editorial quoted Nixon's campaign speech of August 8, 1968: "After an era of confrontation the time has come for an era of negotiation" (*Nashville Tennessean*, June 5, 1969). However, the editorial challenged, "there have been few signs that Mr. Nixon has initiated any negotiation on the subject of arms" (ibid.).

Months later, on August 5, 1969 – before a key vote on Safeguard – Senator Jacob Javits (R-NY) echoed this perception of Nixon's comments. Javits invoked the Air Force speech, saying that in Nixon's "Air Force Academy speech, the President characterized opponents of the ABM program as 'new isolationists' and said our objective was 'unilateral disarmament'" (Javits, August 5, 1969, C.R. p. 22374).

Though there was still considerable Congressional opposition, the Nixon administration won a key vote on August 6, 1969 which approved the first phase of Safeguard construction (two sites in North Dakota and Montana, both to protect Minuteman nuclear missile silo fields) (Spinardi, 2010: 319). This measure passed in the Senate by the closest possible margin – 50 Senators for and 50 against, with VP Agnew casting the tiebreaking vote. However, Spinardi (2010) views this vote as “the highpoint of Congressional opposition to Safeguard, with other votes being carried more easily by its supporters” – though just in regards to Safeguard specifically (p. 318; cf. Clotfelter, 1973: 177 quoted in Laurance, 1976: 248; *ibid.*, p. 221).

The US nuclear shield option would allow the US to reduce some responsibilities. However, as seen in the 1969 Safeguard discourse, this would of course require nuclear weapons. Though no elites were advocating unilateral disarmament, the administration accused those of opposing Safeguard as unilateral disarmers and thus isolationists who lacked the qualities needed for great leadership. According to the administration, this leadership required self-belief – specifically America’s belief in itself and a boldness to pursue risks despite the material costs. In tarring critics with the unilateral disarmament and isolationist brushes, the Nixon administration portrayed itself as pragmatic and internationally engaged. Though the administration would not be fooled into bad faith mutual disarmament, it would keep the option open while still maintaining a nuclear deterrent. Furthermore, while these elites did not want to spend money on nuclear weapons, so that more money could be spent domestically, they failed to appreciate the importance of a US global leadership role in terms of US self-confidence and world security – both constructed as necessary for continued US greatness.

Furthermore, the nuclear deterrent appears to have played an important rhetorical part in the Nixon discourse. The nuclear shield of the Nixon Doctrine allowed the administration to present its policy as still defending the borders of the free world against communism, and created a way for the US to continue to be an international leader. Vietnam was constructed as the crossroads of credibility and US moral leadership. In this discourse US international engagement and leadership

was paramount for US success and safety. The administration presented this international engagement and the nuclear shield as the way forward in a changed world with a war-wearied public. For withdrawal from Vietnam to be successful, the administration argued, the US would have to maintain its honor and credibility so that it could continue its international leadership and ensure that other states did not doubt the US resolve to use its nuclear deterrent. The administration used isolationism discourse to define this position. Precipitate withdrawal would cause isolationism because such a move would be antithetical to the US moral character as the US would not honor its word. Interrelatedly, this would then cause the US to lose confidence in itself and withdrawal from the world. This, in turn, would then discredit the US resolve to use the nuclear deterrent. Even if the US were to maintain its nuclear deterrent for its own protection, this would be isolationism as there would be no international engagement, which would be counter to the US character and the 'lessons' of the interwar period and WWII, and thus threaten the US.

This discourse constructed a link between a US nuclear deterrent and an internationally engaged US foreign policy. No elites were advocating unilateral disarmament, or isolationism for that matter. However, presenting the options as no nuclear weapons or nuclear weapons, allowed the administration's discourse to emphasize the importance of the nuclear deterrent. Concurrently, as the administration's discourse constructed isolationism amongst these elites, the discourse was able to present the need for international engagement and US leadership – which it presented as being fundamental to a historical US identity. This link allowed for the presentation of a US nuclear shield as a means to reduce US involvement overseas without reducing US or world security (particularly within the context of the 'changed' multipolar world). However, this reduction would only be effective with continued US leadership and engagement. In terms of Vietnam, this leadership (discursively tied to a moral US character) would be adversely affected by precipitate withdrawal, according to the administration.

Conclusion

This chapter argued that a spatio-temporal othering aspect of the Nixon administration's isolationism discourse constituted different worlds. Specifically, the discourse constituted one world in which a nuclear shield was necessary to defend the borders of the free world (i.e. the borders of allied states) against communist aggression. In another multipolar world, states were driven by their own interests. The Nixon discourse constructed the nuclear shield as both a necessary defense for the US and the free world, and as a means of allowing the US to reduce its international responsibilities. While the discourse predicated reduced responsibility on a multipolar world (and as a pragmatic reaction to potential isolationism in the US public), its nuclear shield discourse constructed a threat from the USSR that appears more appropriate to a bipolar world. This flexibility allowed the discourse to present US international engagement as important in two different ways.

First, a nuclear deterrent was constructed as necessary for US safety and as a means of international engagement via providing a deterrent for the free world. Unilateral disarmament could thus be presented as isolationism. Second, maintaining US international engagement and leadership was constructed as a part of the US moral character and necessary for US security. In this manner, the superhawk approach of only defending the US with nuclear weapons and drawing down US involvement internationally was constructed as isolationism. Through linking US international engagement to a US moral character and credibility, the Nixon discourse constructed international involvement as a critical factor in an effective US foreign policy. The administration's discourse used isolationism to reinforce/construct the necessity for this international involvement. The discourse concerning withdrawal from Vietnam exemplified this linkage and the use of isolationism discourse.

In the administration's discourse, immediate withdrawal from Vietnam would endanger South Vietnam and cause other states to doubt the ability or willingness of the US to protect them from communist aggression. The dual threats constructed by immediate withdrawal were that other states would be less likely to rely on the US for support and possibly move into a communist orbit, and that the US would lose confidence in itself, causing it to withdraw from the world (which would lead to further threats caused by the lack of US international engagement and leadership).

Only adhering to Vietnamization, asserted the administration, could ensure that US credibility was preserved. The US would withdraw its troops from Vietnam but would do so in a way that would leave South Vietnam capable of defending itself. This would assure allied states and the US public that the US honored its word and was capable of international leadership. Furthermore, the adversaries of the US would be shown that the US was willing to do whatever was necessary to fulfil its commitments – including, according to this logic, using nuclear weapons.

The lynchpin in this discourse was upholding a US moral character and self-confidence because this was constructed as underpinning US international involvement – including engagement with states based on their interests (e.g. détente) and demonstrating a resolve to use nuclear weapons defensively against an alleged worldwide Soviet threat – which the administration presented as critical. While a general desire for isolationism by a war-weary public was presented as understandable, a US public which lost faith in itself and its moral character would become isolationist and thus existentially threaten the US.

Chapter six: Ideological Character

This chapter focuses on one of two subsets of isolationism discourse used to reproduce an aspect of an American 'character': 'ideological character' othering. This chapter uses the ideological character conceptualization to interpret the aspects of the Nixon administration's isolationism discourse that reproduced a US identity, specifically the characteristics of the US as a nation (rather than a rationalized, 'scientific' interpretation of the American public's innate behavioral predispositions, as in the 'psychological character' discourse covered in the next chapter). The ideological character was generally reproduced using historical tropes of American greatness and moral boldness, and during the Cold War often differentiated against an amoral or immoral, atheist communist Other. While this chapter will argue that much of this discourse functioned as an electoral discourse – i.e. a targeted attempt to win votes from a segment of the population – this discourse was also intertwined with the 'psychological character' discourse. The vilification of a 'vocal minority' also helped to construct a broader 'silent majority', particularly through emphasizing its 'Americanness' by constituting it as characterized by supposedly innate US moral qualities. Indeed, the segment of the population targeted by this electoral discourse was also constructed as a part of this 'silent majority'.

An ideological character discourse is theorized in this chapter as having reproduced a specific Self threatened by a particular Other. In the context of this analysis, the Self was a US national character and the Other was un- or anti-American individuals that demanded immediate withdrawal from Vietnam. This discourse was also used by the administration to co-constitute a 'knowledge' of the world, as well as a 'history'. As covered in the 'Spatio-Temporal Othering' chapter, the knowledge of international relations reproduced through this discourse was often not presented as that of a world of interests and rational states as in the Nixon Doctrine foreign policy approach, but a simpler world of good versus evil and US versus communism reminiscent of formerly traditional Cold War discourses. The US ideological

character reproduced by this discourse was generally one of historical international engagement, moral probity, and bold leadership, predicated on a history of intermittent world peace interspersed with war.

This chapter proposes that the 'ideological character' othering discourse was different from other elements of the administration's isolationism discourses in that it was partially directed towards an audience the administration believed was isolationist – again, it would have appealed to/constructed a 'silent majority' as well. In targeting potential voters for third party candidate George Wallace, the administration attempted to present the Nixon foreign policy approach as a middle ground. On one end of the spectrum the discourse constructed a Wallace/LeMay ticket as one likely to escalate the war in Vietnam through inexperience and aggression. Playing on a perceived inclination of these voters as wanting to preserve US 'honor' by winning in Vietnam (despite their dislike of getting involved in Vietnam in the first place), the administration's discourse constructed the Nixon approach as honorable. Nixon's peace with honor was contrasted against the dishonorable, immoral, and un-American approach of a 'vocal minority' of student radicals, antiwar, and pro-civil rights legislators. As the Nixon campaign's own internal discourse suggests, vilifying this 'vocal minority' was also a part of a strategy to boost Nixon's popularity with a section of the electorate that expressed a visceral antipathy to desegregation and civil rights legislation, which usually extended to animosity towards antiwar protestors.⁴³

The 'vocal minority' approach appears to have been part of a wider strategy in 1968 of linking the Democratic Presidential candidate Hubert Humphrey (at the time President Johnson's vice president), to Johnson's escalation and continuance of the war. While presenting himself as the candidate who would end the war, Nixon also assured the public that his approach was not isolationism. After the 1968 election, the focus of this discourse shifted. First, between Wallace's declining appeal among voters and active strategies by the Nixon administration, the threat from a second

⁴³ This approach to the 'vocal minority' likely also served to protect the administration's right flank against denunciations from neoconservatives concerned with a lack of respect for authority in the US and a denigration of a US moral example. Cf. the 'Ethical Responsibility' chapter.

Wallace run began to diminish as early as June 1970, with the threat of a split Republican ticket lessening as Wallace announced he would run as a Democrat in January 1972. After Wallace was shot and paralyzed in May 1972, his campaign for president effectively ended.⁴⁴ Secondly, Nixon had maintained US involvement in Vietnam – though not at the same levels as during the Johnson administration – as he pursued Vietnamization and an ‘honorable’ peace. Nixon’s Democratic opponent in the 1972 presidential race, Senator George McGovern, was now the candidate of peace, having advocated immediate withdrawal from Vietnam. Since the strategy and discourse seems to have changed by 1970, this chapter focuses on the administration’s discourse specifically between 1968 and 1972.

The main function of the ‘ideological character’ discourse appears to have been constructing a US ideological character – one of honor, of a nation that keeps its word – by vilifying a ‘vocal minority’. While this discourse did not directly accuse the ‘vocal minority’ of isolationism, the ‘vocal minority’ construct was used to help define this US ideological character – the ‘vocal minority’ functioned as an Other to a US Self. The most striking aspect about this discourse was that it rarely invoked the term ‘isolationism’. During this period – particularly during the campaign, but also during 1969 and in 1970 while Wallace remained a credible threat – Nixon was advocating withdrawal from Vietnam (as well as reduced US responsibility for defending the world) and appealing to voters that were commonly accepted as isolationist, including by the Nixon campaign and administration. Johnson, and by extension his VP Humphrey, was pursuing a peace in Vietnam, but refused to withdraw precipitately.⁴⁵ The Nixon campaign nevertheless portrayed Humphrey as a representation of escalation, ineffectiveness, and continued quagmire in

⁴⁴ In July 1970 Nixon had pressed the IRS to follow up on an initial investigation of Wallace and his family (Carter, 2000: 400). Around this time, Wallace had started privately mooting a run for president as a Democrat in 1972 (ibid. pp. 410-1). After an intensive Justice Department investigation into the Wallace administration (particularly Wallace’s brother Gerald who was essentially openly corrupt), including a grand jury empaneled for 18 months and one Wallace aid going to federal prison for four years, the Department briskly announced it was dropping the investigation on January 12, 1972 (ibid., pp. 401-12). The next day, Wallace announced he would run as a Democrat (ibid., p. 412). Attorney General Mitchell would later say the investigation as run from the White House, not the Justice Department (ibid.).

⁴⁵ Humphrey had desperately tried to present himself as likely to withdraw more quickly than Johnson, which Johnson effectively prevented (Dallek, 1998: 574-81).

Vietnam. In this sense, the discourse seems to have functioned as a defense against accusations of isolationism while attempting to appeal to alleged isolationists.

This chapter begins by outlining the electoral context, as the discourse examined in this chapter appears to have been primarily, though not exclusively, concerned with election strategy – both during the 1968 campaign and by assuming Wallace would continue to be an electoral threat in 1972. Then the analysis situates the Nixon administration's ideological character discourse relative to broad pro-segregationist and anticommunist discourses of the time. Securitization theory is then used to analyze the relationships between the administration's discourse, other electoral and security discourses, and the construction of threats and audiences. The Nixon administration's discourse in late 1969 will next be examined as a security discourse which reflected the rhetoric of some segregationists and constructed a 'vocal minority' Other. The chapter concludes that this discourse appealed for support in gradually withdrawing from Vietnam by making it a matter of national 'honor', as well as security from the threat of a generalized communism, represented externally by an ideological communist Other and internally by a 'vocal minority' Other. Though this discourse likely was targeted primarily at Wallace voters, these voters were also constructed as part of a 'silent majority'.

'Realignment' and George Wallace: A brief electoral context

Before analyzing the Nixon administration's discourse, it is necessary to briefly examine the electoral context. This explanation is required because this chapter posits that the administration's ideological character discourse functioned as, or interdependent with, its electoral strategy discourse. Moreover, an explanation of the administration's strategic discourse helps clarify why the ideological character discourse – a discourse which this chapter argues functioned as a defense against accusations of isolationism and targeted alleged isolationists – did not explicitly use the terms 'isolationism' or 'isolationist'.

An important aspect of the electoral context was 'realignment' – the major shift of voters between Democratic and Republican parties in the 1960s – and particularly,

the strategies employed by Republicans to expand their electoral base to include individuals who formerly voted Democrat, particularly Southern voters opposed to Democratic President Johnson's passage of the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts (1964 and 1965 respectively) and enforcement of school desegregation (Mason, 2012: 258-59). Another crucial element of this context, interwoven with realignment, was the 1968 third-party presidential candidacy of George Wallace, the once and future Democratic governor of Alabama (in office 1963-7; 1971-9; 1983-7, First Gentleman 1967-8), presidential candidate in 1964, and, in the late 1960s and earlier 70s, a presumed 1972 presidential candidate.

In June 1964, Senator Barry Goldwater (R. - AZ) had broken with the Republican party and his own voting record to vote against the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Ward, 2011: 145). Though Goldwater was adamant that he was "unalterably opposed to discrimination of any sort" – he believed the current law had "provisions which fly in the face of the Constitution and which require for their effective execution the creation of a police state" (Goldwater, June 18, 1964, p. 14319; *ibid.*). Goldwater added: "If my vote is misconstrued, let it be, and let me suffer its consequences" (*ibid.*; Ward, 2011: 145). Though Goldwater was not a segregationist, as Southern segregationist politicians situated their objections to desegregation within a broader critique of liberalism and federal overreach, Goldwater was able to meet segregationists halfway on policy (Ward, 2011: 146; see also: McGrory, June 23, 1964).

Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina – who had run unsuccessfully for president in 1948 on a segregationist 'Dixiecrat'⁴⁶ ticket (Clymer, 2003) – endorsed Goldwater for president in 1964, while also switching parties from Democrat to Republican (Ward, 2011: 145). Among the many changes of the 1960s and 70s, transformations in political parties and demographics had caused many white Southerners to move from the Democratic to the Republican party – a shift

⁴⁶ 'Dixiecrats' was the nickname for the 'States' Rights Democratic Party', a group of Southern Democrats unhappy with FDR's New Deal and wider progressivism in the Democratic Party. Their ultimately unsuccessful goal was to force the 1948 presidential election into the House of Representatives so Representatives of Southern states could exact concessions for the South (including blocking integration) in exchange for electing Truman (Frederickson, 2001: 3).

imbricated with the growing civil rights movement (Greene, 2015: 489). Though Goldwater's opposition to the Civil Rights Act in 1964 may have been rooted in a desire for less federal government activism rather than in racism or a preference for segregation, in the presidential election Goldwater was still able to win five 'Deep South' states (that had not voted Republican since Reconstruction a hundred years earlier) – however he lost every other state, save his home state of Arizona, including the moderate Southern states previously won by Eisenhower (Mason, 2012: 257; Ward, 2011: 146). While Goldwater's strategy proved untenable in terms of winning a general election because it failed to win moderate Southern votes, the endorsement from Thurmond appears to have demonstrated the potential viability of a Republican candidate winning deep South Democratic voters through strategically indicating an opposition to civil rights and desegregation legislation. As will be elaborated upon further in the next section, Goldwater's 1964 performance in the South regarding escalation in Vietnam would also inform Nixon's 1968 Southern campaign strategy in terms of appealing to allegedly inherent isolationism and anti-civil rights sentiments.

Nixon's campaign discourse presented an approach to Vietnam and antiwar demonstrators that appealed to public dissatisfaction with war, but a dissatisfaction that was rooted in a moral, ideological US character – as opposed to vociferous, un-American calls for immediate withdrawal. Upon accepting the Republican nomination for the 1968 presidential race, Nixon had painted a bleak portrait of the US: "we see cities enveloped in smoke and flame. We hear sirens in the night. We see Americans dying on distant battlefields abroad [...] hating each other; fighting each other; killing each other at home" (Nixon, Aug. 8, 1968; see also the Nixon campaign's TV and radio spots). "Did American boys die in Normandy, and Korea, and in Valley Forge for this?", Nixon asked (*ibid.*). The answer, he claimed, could be heard if one listened to America – it was "another voice [...] the quiet voice in the tumult and the shouting" (*ibid.*). This was "the voice of the great majority of Americans, the forgotten Americans—the non-shouters; the non-demonstrators" (*ibid.*). While Nixon described this great majority using almost every demographic descriptor available (they were "black", "white", "young", "old", "serve in

government”, etc.), he also explained they were “not racists or sick [...] not guilty of the crime that plagues the land” (ibid.). Instead, “they are decent people; they work, and they save, and they pay their taxes, and they care” (ibid.). The “real voice of America” came from these people that “give drive to the spirit of America [...] lift to the American Dream [...] steel to the backbone of America” (ibid.).

Nixon’s nomination speech was also replete with calls to restore domestic order and links⁴⁷ between this supposed civic unrest and the lack of respect for the US internationally, for example:

A nation that can't keep the peace at home won't be trusted to keep the peace abroad. A President who isn't treated with respect at home will not be treated with respect abroad. [...] If we are to restore prestige and respect for America abroad, the place to begin is at home in the United States of America. (Nixon, Aug. 8, 1968)

Parmet (2008: 82) and Drew (2007: 20-1) both see this ‘forgotten Americans’ theme as a key element of Nixon’s 1968 campaign strategy and indicative of Nixon’s efforts as president to achieve a new majority (i.e. to take advantage of realignment) (Mason, 2012: 254-5). However, scholars such as Parmet and Drew disagree as to whether the impetus for this realignment was fear of social (particularly racial) change – including opposition to civil rights advocacy, youth ‘radicalism’, and protest against the Vietnam War – or if it was a result of the weakness or disintegration of the Democrats’ liberal New Deal coalition from the 1930s (or a combination of both) (ibid.). Regardless, the concepts of a silent, forgotten American majority and an un-American vocal minority protesting against the war would be at the center of the Nixon administration’s overlapping campaign (particularly regarding realignment and the ‘Southern Strategy’) and foreign policy discourses throughout Nixon’s first term.

Nixon’s discourse presented his approach as an appropriately American view of foreign policy and domestic politics – not a unique tactic, in and of itself. However, Nixon’s discourse linked this ‘American’ approach with a perceived domestic discomfort, amongst a large segment of the population who did not protest, with

⁴⁷ Cf. the concept of ‘linkage’ in the ‘Spatio-Temporal Othering’ chapter.

'loud' protestors who misrepresented a concept of American character. In the context of this discourse, this 'vocal minority' was presented as advocating immediate withdrawal from Vietnam which was presented as antithetical to a particular idea of US character that emphasized 'honor'. Moreover, the segments of the population targeted by this discourse were perceived by Nixon to be wary of US involvement in Vietnam (and 'isolationists' in general), but against withdrawing in a way that impugned US honor. This chapter contends that this population segment represented part of the realigning Southern voters that the Nixon campaign wished to capture in 1968 and retain in 1972.

Early in the '68 presidential campaign, Nixon specifically addressed realignment with an entire speech broadcast on radio (Nixon, May 16, 1968). In this address, Nixon described the "Silent Center", an element of "new alignment" that was a "non-voice" (ibid.). This 'silent center' was the "millions of people in the middle of the political spectrum who do not demonstrate, who do not picket or protest loudly", yet they were "no less committed to seeking out this new direction" (ibid.). These "great many 'quiet Americans' have become committed to answers to social problems that preserve personal freedom" (ibid.). Wills (1970) saw this speech as a "cover" for the campaign's actual interest in pursuing an election strategy based on opposition to civil rights, similar to the approach used by Republican candidate Barry Goldwater's supporters in the 1964 presidential election (p. 264; Mason, 2012: 254). Mason (2004) also holds that the 'silent Americans' were the same group Goldwater identified in 1961 as the target for expanding the Republicans electoral base – with Nixon's messaging even retaining an antigovernment appeal (p. 28).⁴⁸

The 'silent center' was constructed as a majority of the American public which agreed with the administration, in one way or another. In this sense, former Wallace voters would be included in this construct since they would presumably 'recognize' themselves in this audience. However, this chapter focuses on a separate subset of this discourse, one which reinforced a rather vague 'ideological'

⁴⁸ Indeed, Nixon's "preserve personal freedom" comment is strikingly similar to the 'federal overreach' justification in Goldwater's 1964 speech about segregation addressed earlier.

US character which appears to have been primarily targeted at these Wallace voters. Though the discourse reinforced a historical, moral ideological character, it primarily vilified a 'vocal minority' in a manner similar to Wallace's campaign discourse which was apparently perceived by the administration as part of a potentially successful campaign strategy. Essentially, this discourse appears to have focused more on appealing to a specific segment of the population by denigrating a constructed 'vocal minority', through references to a vague moral US identity and appeals to anti-civil rights sentiments, rather than presenting a clearly defined ideological US Self.

Wallace voters and Vietnam

George Wallace's third-party presidential run in 1968 threatened to split the traditional Republican and Democratic votes. Between April and July 1968 Wallace's national polling numbers had leapt from 9 to 16 percent (Gallup, July 14, 1968). By September 22nd Wallace's numbers had grown to 21 percent, to Democratic candidate Humphrey's 28 percent and Nixon's 43 percent (Gallup, Sep. 29, 1968). Concurrently, in mid to late September (when Wallace made a two-point gain within two weeks) Wallace was featured in (overwhelmingly negative) cover stories in the three largest US weekly news magazines: *Life*, *Time*, and *Newsweek* (ibid.; Carter, 2000: 343). In the September 27-30 polls, Wallace failed to register a gain for the first time in five consecutive national surveys since July, falling to 20 percent – before dropping to 15 percent in late October⁴⁹ a week before the election (*New York Times*, Oct. 10, 1968; *Boston Globe*, Oct. 27, 1968).

In May of 1968, Thurmond had been encouraged by Nixon's eagerness for anti-ballistic missiles, history of anticommunism, and assurances he was not a liberal on civil rights issues (especially segregation), which included an implied promise to provide Thurmond a veto of Nixon's VP candidate, and to appoint "strict constructionist" judges (i.e. non-activist judges) (Clymer, 2003; Mason, 2004: 29; Bass, 1998: 323). Thurmond was also swayed by Nixon's promise that his campaign

⁴⁹ A drop likely due to comments by Wallace's running mate concerning the use of nuclear weapons in Vietnam on Oct. 3, 1968 (Carter, 2000: 358-60).

would fight against the openly segregationist Wallace winning the South (and thus splitting the Republican vote and handing the election to Democratic candidate, Vice President Humphrey) (Clymer, 2003). With Thurmond's help, Nixon was able to beat out Ronald Reagan – heavily favored by delegates – for the Republican presidential nomination at the National Convention in August 1968 (Greene, 2015: 496). Though Thurmond's support for Nixon over Wallace may have surprised many political pundits at the time (Greene, 2015: 496), Thurmond believed Nixon would heavily court Southern voters as a means of realigning a Republican majority, which would in turn increase Republican power in the South positioning Thurmond as a White House insider with the President in his debt (Bass, 1998: 325-38). And with these potential Republican voters from the South, would come fervently held views on race and social issues, as well as on foreign policy.

In terms of foreign policy, a quick overview of *national* survey data from 1968 shows Wallace voters were more inclined towards escalation in Vietnam. A 1968 survey of Wallace voters showed that 64% believed that the US should have “stayed out of Vietnam”, however 67% thought the US should take a “stronger stand” to win the war (Noer, 2003: 155; Carlson, 1981: 93). In a November 1968 University of Michigan Election Year Survey, 34% of Americans favored taking “a stronger stand” in Vietnam (Lunch & Sperlich, 1979: 27). While 62% of Nixon voters thought the US should have “stayed out” of Vietnam, only 40.5% of these same voters thought the US should take a “stronger stand” in Vietnam, with 39.5% saying the US should “stay, try to end” and 20% believing the US should “pull out” (Carlson, 1981: 93). For sake of comparison, in October of 1968 a Gallup poll showed 54% of Americans believed the US “made a mistake” sending troops into Vietnam; broken down by party, this number was 57% for Republicans; by region, this number for the South was 51% (Erskine, 1970: 141, 147).

Incidentally, Carlson (1981) found that “Wallace voters are more likely to reflect the isolationist attitude than are other voters” (p. 91). While this thesis is not concerned with deciding whether policies or attitudes were isolationist, the fact that these voters were *perceived* as isolationist is relevant for this analysis. Indeed, this perception can be found in public discourse from the mid to late 1960s and early

1970s, for example in newspaper articles which portrayed Wallace voters as more likely to be isolationist – despite them being more inclined to support escalation in Vietnam (see, e.g., Greider, May 31, 1970). The assumption that Wallace voters were isolationist or had isolationist tendencies seems to have been an important consideration in the Nixon administration’s realignment-based electoral strategy (the ‘Southern Strategy’). This also helps explain the lack of explicit uses of the terms ‘isolationism’ and ‘isolationist’, as it seems highly unlikely that a strategy to win over voters assumed to be isolationists, would appeal to these voters by vilifying isolationism or isolationists.

The Nixon’s campaign strategy in the South was laid out quite clearly in a memo sent to Nixon in 1968. The memo – undated but judging by its attached polling data likely to be from late September/early October 1968 – was sent by a campaign analyst named Kevin Phillips to Nixon campaign worker (and later consultant, acting counsel, and assistant to President Nixon) Len Garment. Titled “Last Four Weeks’ Strategy”, the memo, which carries Nixon’s handwritten order of “Len Carry out”, presents a comprehensive campaign strategy (Phillips, n.d.). Relevant for this analysis is the section of the memo which indicates a perception of Southern Wallace voters as being inherently isolationist, and that this ‘trait’ should be addressed in a different manner from supposed isolationism in the broader ‘silent majority’ (though this category would still include parts of the South and Wallace voters).⁵⁰

In terms of this broader, ‘silent majority’ isolationism, Phillips recommended that this “growing isolationism on both the Right and Left [...] can be appealed to with generalities along the lines of ‘The U. S. can’t be the world’s policeman’ or ‘We must get our Allies to fight their own battles----and begin to de-Americanize the Vietnamese war’” (Phillips, n.d., p. 3). Furthermore, as the electorate was “growing increasingly isolationist in the hope of avoiding any further Vietnams”, Phillips advised Nixon to assure the public that he could avoid further such entanglements,

⁵⁰ The ‘Psychological Character’ chapter argues that the Nixon discourse constructed a trait of oscillation between internationalism and isolationism in the general US public. That the public was sliding towards isolationism because of Vietnam and globalism was constituted by the administration as a fact to be pragmatically dealt with.

which Humphrey would be unable to do (ibid.). This tactic about avoiding entanglements was also to be used against Wallace, but in a much more targeted way.

Phillips' recommended plan for outmaneuvering Wallace was two-pronged. The first, more general approach was to avoid attacking Wallace's "social stances", including calling Wallace a "racist or crypto-Fascist", because conservative voters "torn between" Nixon and Wallace disliked "such Establishmentarian anti-Wallace inuendo" (Phillips, n.d., p. 4). Though Phillips did not explicitly advocate appealing to racist sentiments in this memo, in other his strategy pronouncements he was equivocal about denouncing it (see, e.g. Mason, 2012: 257). The second approach, Phillips advised, should be focused on the "Peripheral South"⁵¹, an area "where Goldwater fell far below" Nixon, and attack the Wallace/LeMay ticket as "inexperienced and trigger-happy" (Phillips, n.d., p. 4). Phillips stated that the Peripheral South was "isolationist and trended against Goldwater" and thus was "very sensitive to jingoist and trigger-happy imagery" (ibid.).

Phillips' references to "[t]rigger-happy imagery" which "undercut the appeal of Goldwater's social conservatism in 1964 and [...] will do so again" (Phillips, n.d., p. 4) refer to Goldwater's comments about Vietnam in 1964. During his '64 presidential run, Goldwater had argued publicly that nuclear bombs should have been used during the 1954 battle of Dien Bien Phu (the French defeat in Vietnam that effectively ended the First Indochina War). Moreover, Goldwater had also publicly contended that "low-yield atomic weapons" should be used as defoliants in South Vietnam – comments that significantly contributed to his landslide defeat to President Johnson (Tannenwald, 2006: 695-696; see also: the Johnson campaign's 'Daisy' TV advertisement). For Phillips this tactic would only be applicable to the peripheral South, not the deep South states that went for Goldwater in 1964 (cf. Ward, 2011: 146), and whose appetite for escalation in Vietnam seems to be reflected in the polls of nationwide Wallace voters noted above. Not long after this

⁵¹ What Phillips describes as "the Ozarks, Appalachian uplands, rural Missouri, Virginia's Shenandoah, the Nashville Basin and North Carolina Piedmont" (Phillips, , n.d., p. 4).

memo was published, Wallace's running mate, Curtis LeMay would play right into this strategy.⁵²

The understanding of isolationism Phillips employed in this memo is very similar to Samuel Lubell's conception of isolationism as a trait with emotional and ethnic roots in particular regions (see, e.g. Jonas, 2002: 338). Indeed, Phillips' 1969 book, *The Emerging Republican Majority*, written during his work on Nixon's 1968 campaign, both praises and relies on Lubell's *The Future of American Politics* (1952), and takes as given Lubell's theory that isolationism had ethnic/demographic roots and therefore regional strongholds. In Phillips' (2015 [1969]) book, he links supposed isolationism in the peripheral (or "mountain") South, Vietnam, and civil rights legislation. Specifically, Phillips (2015) argues that strong Republican support in the 1966 midterms was due to "isolationist resentment" of an apparent stalemate in Vietnam and "a dislike of Great Society civil rights and welfare legislation" (pp. 211, 234 n. 18). This approach – along with the specific focus on subregions (e.g. the peripheral/mountain South) – appears to be mirrored in the strategy memo. To wit, this strategy outlined a method of presenting Wallace/LeMay as liable to exacerbate the war, while presenting Nixon as an option for de-escalation and peace. Furthermore, this discourse would, in the case of the peripheral South, not denigrate Wallace's 'social stances' (i.e. his positions concerning civil rights and racism). However, in the case of the deep South the discourse would appeal to such 'stances'. The next section argues that Nixon used an anticommunism discourse to frame attacks on the 'vocal minority' whilst appealing to a US ideological character as a means to co-opt Wallace votes whilst presenting the Nixon Doctrine as appropriately 'American' – and also as not isolationist, without mentioning isolationism.

⁵² LeMay, a general in the Army and then the Air Force, had a storied military career. However, during the Kennedy administration LeMay developed a reputation as a fervent, even fanatical, advocate of nuclear strikes (Carter, 2000: 357). At LeMay's first press conference as Wallace's running mate in late September 1968, LeMay responded to his first question with a lengthy, meandering commentary on nuclear weapons and Wallace had to physically push LeMay away from the podium – all whilst LeMay continued speaking about nuclear weapons (Goudsouzian, 2019: 119; Carter, 2000: 358-60).

Wallace voters, anticommunism, and the ‘Social Issue’

Events since 1939 have given the contemporary right-wing paranoid a vast theatre for his imagination, full of rich and proliferating detail, replete with realistic cues and undeniable proofs of the validity of his suspicions. The theatre of action is now the entire world, and he can draw not only on the events of World War II, but also on those of the Korean War and the Cold War. (Hofstadter, 1964: 81)

Though Hofstadter's (1964) concept of a "paranoid style" in American politics is perhaps over-psychologized, the above passage hits upon the broad vocabulary and mise-en-scène of anticommunist rhetoric available to politicians during the Cold War. In the 1968 campaign, Wallace combined elements of racism, xenophobia, and anti-elitism to construct and amplify concerns amongst segments of the public that social changes (particularly via government policies) were evidence of 'moral' corruption (Carter, 2000: 345). Using anticommunism rhetoric allowed Wallace to discursively connect religious and moral anxieties to government domestic and foreign policies (ibid.). In this manner, Wallace was able to construct himself and the people he claimed to represent as, in Hofstadter's words, "manning the barricades of civilization" (Hofstadter, 1964: 82).

Though many Wallace voters, and other segregationists, generally believed the US should not have gotten involved in Vietnam – a war they claimed was evidence of the foolishness of internationalism and reliance on elitist 'experts' – they tended to be overwhelmingly pro-military (Noer, 2003: 155). Additionally, amongst these Wallace voters, there was vehement opposition, even hatred for the antiwar movement (particularly where this overlapped with the civil rights movement) (ibid.). Indeed, though he was more than just an avatar of racism, one of the primary sources of Wallace's national appeal amongst his supporters was the perception that he was "antiblack" (Carter, 2000: 344). These voters' antipathy towards antiwar and civil rights movements was often framed by Wallace in an anticommunist discourse. Discursively aligning antiwar, civil rights, and elitism with an immoral communist Other allowed Wallace to present a moral US Self under attack.

Throughout the mid to late 60s, Wallace espoused a heated combination of anticommunist and pro-segregationist (and often outright racist) rhetoric, claiming, for example, that Moscow created the civil rights movement to distract the US from the Cold War and that Cuba had organized urban riots in the US – all moves that he believed should be punished by the US withdrawing from engagement with these states and the UN (Noer, 2013: 154-5). When Wallace kicked off his 1964 campaign for president in Wisconsin, he deliberately did so in Appleton, the hometown of Joseph McCarthy (the censured Senator best known for aggressively hunting ‘communists’ in the Army and then Hollywood during the ‘Red Scare’ in the 1950s) (Carter, 2000: 204). From Appleton, Wallace warned voters of the negative impacts of civil rights legislation and posited links between the Soviet Union and civil rights supporters (ibid., p. 205).

Even before US involvement in Vietnam escalated, anticommunist and pro-segregationist discourses were often combined by Southern politicians. Strom Thurmond used similar discourses throughout the 60s. In 1963-4, as civil rights legislation gained momentum, Thurmond alleged that the leaders of the pro-civil rights March on Washington had conspired with ‘communists’ (Watras, 2013: 119; see, e.g., Lisagor, June 20, 1964). When FBI director J. Edgar Hoover corroborated Thurmond’s allegations in secret testimony before Congress, Thurmond made the accusations public (Watras, 2013: 119). By 1967, Thurmond was asserting that remarks made by Martin Luther King Jr. on the Vietnam War had an “extremist tone” and demonstrated an “irresponsible character” (Thurmond quoted in *The Boston Globe*, April 7, 1967). Thurmond was “disturbed” that King would “link the defense of this nation with the so-called civil rights movement”, and in doing so “King demeans his race and retards the advancement of his people” (ibid.). A few months later, Thurmond accused ‘communists’ of catalyzing race riots in cities across the country (Mears, Aug. 2, 1967). Though this time Hoover advised that “there is no intelligence on which to base a conclusion of conspiracy” in terms of

the causes or instigators of the various riots (Hoover quoted in Spivak, Aug. 2, 1967).⁵³

Nixon's 1968 campaign speeches often echoed this strategy by appealing to "silent centers" and "non-shouters". These themes of 'vocal minorities', 'old values' under attack, etc., were not new, having been observed since at least the mid-1960s in newspaper and academic articles (indeed, Hofstadter (1964) specifically referenced the Goldwater "movement" deriving "political leverage" from "the animosities and passions of a small minority" (p. 77)). On October 7, 1968, Dick Allen – the Nixon campaign's "Foreign Policy Research Campaign Coordinator" and future Nixon administration deputy national security advisor – sent Nixon (via chief of staff H.R. Haldeman) an October 2, 1968 article by Thornton Read on the "rise of ideological politics" (Allen, October 7, 1968). The article, annotated by Allen, presaged the 'Social Issue' concept that would define the Nixon campaign and foreign policy discourse in 1969 through to the 1972 election.

In early 1970, Richard Scammon and Ben Wattenberg would publish *The Real Majority*, a book which popularized the term 'Social Issue'. The book argued that Wallace in 1968 had correctly surmised that a white, middle-class segment of the electorate felt the Democratic Party had lost touch with them. The 'Social Issue' centered on the belief that America was in a crisis of crime and social unrest because 'law and order' had broken down and the cultural values which undergirded America had eroded (Carter, 2000: 377-8). With beliefs rooted in fear, rather than policy, Scammon and Wattenberg claimed these voters were more likely to respond to attacks on civil rights and antiwar demonstrators rather than specific policy pronouncements (ibid., p. 378). Scammon and Wattenberg's claims about the 'Social Issue' would substantially influence the administration's discourse

⁵³ It should be noted that by the late 1960s (Democratic) President Johnson also believed civil disorder was linked to antiwar protestors and the civil rights movement was instigated by foreign communists and/or had foreign communist support, so much so that he had domestic and foreign intelligence agencies investigate and even infiltrate antiwar and civil rights groups (Schell, 1976: 59-60). Moreover, Hoover saw communists at work in many areas and had taken it upon the FBI to disrupt the 'left' – including antiwar and civil rights groups (see, *inter alia*, Schell, 1976: 114). The key differences were that Wallace and Thurmond *publicly* linked demonstrators with 'communists' in attempt to delegitimize them, and their rhetoric was decidedly anti-civil rights.

(Schell, 1976: 122-3).⁵⁴ Indeed, a tendency to issue broad attacks on demonstrators rather than focus on policy specifics was a strategy reflected in the administration's – particularly VP Agnew's – ideological character discourse.

Furthermore, Kevin Phillips' (2015 [1969]) aforementioned *The Emerging Republican Majority*, echoed many of Scammon and Wattenberg's key themes while putting more emphasis on the power of fear regarding race – specifically white voters' fear of their own perceptions of black people (including the fears of white “ethnic” groups, whose anxieties Wallace had successfully played upon in 1968) (Carter, 2000: 379). However, these former Wallace voters would have to be won over without alienating the existing Republican base (Mason, 2004: 48), as Goldwater's failed strategy had in 1964. Though published in September 1969, Nixon did not read the book until over Christmas that year. In January 1970, Nixon told Haldeman that the administration should “[u]se Phillips as an analyst – study his strategy – don't think in terms of old-time ethnics, go for Poles, Italians, Irish, must learn to understand Silent Majority... don't go for Jews & Blacks” (Nixon quoted in *ibid.*, p. 380).

Even in the October 1968 article Allen sent to Nixon, the author had noted “The current demand for ‘law and order’ is the inevitable consequence of the erosion of the attitudes and beliefs that are the foundations of moral and civic order” (Read, 1968: 1). Read (1968) goes on to quote Richard Scammon (n.d.) saying “[Wallace is] calling for a return to those middle-class values that are prized by millions of Americans” (p. 3). Echoing Hofstadter, Read (1968) quotes a Norman Miller (Sept. 27, no year) *Wall Street Journal* article: “George Wallace has conveyed to his followers a sense of enlistment in a common man's crusade against the Establishment” (p. 3). Read (1968) also uses the term “vocal minority” for the “intelligentsia”, which he describes as an articulate, educated minority out of touch with an inarticulate majority of “Middle America”. Clerics of a “new secular religion”

⁵⁴ See, e.g., an Aug. 24, 1970 ‘Memorandum for the President’ from speechwriter/strategist Patrick Buchanan which claims *The Real Majority* “contains a credible and workable blueprint for our defeat in 1972”. Buchanan's appended Republican counterstrategy was annotated by Nixon. On the second page, Nixon underlined a section on the “Social Issue” and noted (in the third person): “RN wants hard line on these issues” (Buchanan, Aug. 24, 1970). See also: Buchanan, [Tips for campaign], Aug. 24, 1970; Nov. 6, 1970).

and morality, this “vocal minority” is deemed to have aggravated a “silent majority” who feel unrepresented and believe eroding moral standards are to blame for breakdowns in “civic order” (Read, 1968: 4-6).

Threats and securitization theory

After being elected president in 1968, Nixon expanded this domestic electoral strategy of depicting a nation in crisis by yoking it to concerns about the security of the US. The administration attempted to discursively connect the trope of moral ‘old values’ being under attack from a wayward, secular intelligentsia with antiwar protestors threatening the US ‘character’ and thus the country’s continued existence. If a ‘vocal minority’ of out of touch intellectuals *and* civil rights/antiwar protestors could be presented as threatening ‘local’ security (i.e. through crime and ‘unrest’), and therefore US security (as Nixon had linked them in the campaign, e.g. “A nation that can't keep the peace at home won't be trusted to keep the peace abroad”, etc.), then the administration could leverage these domestic fears to increase the president’s authority to create and pursue his specific foreign policy goals (including ‘peace with honor’ in Vietnam, which would include aggressive bombing campaigns and ambiguous US troop withdrawal timetables) (Schell, 1976: 123). This strategy echoes Read’s (1968) article which quoted journalist James Reston (July 16, 1964) as saying there was “a deep feeling that is seldom reported: That the nation... has drifted into attitudes and policies that debase and weaken the American character, and threaten the security of the nation” (p. 5).

Again, this chapter posits that the Nixon administration used an ideological character aspect of isolationism discourse to both reproduce the concept of a historical and moral US national identity and construct a ‘vocal minority’ Other. Moreover, this analysis proposes that the administration deployed this discourse as part of an election strategy to win Southern Democratic voters – particularly former Wallace voters, some of whom apparently favored escalating US involvement in Vietnam. However, the general perception of the Nixon administration appears to have been that, regardless of the method, all of these voters were primarily concerned with preserving US honor (which essentially meant that the US had lived

up to its word in defending South Vietnam from communism). Furthermore, the administration attempted to appeal to their supposed inherent isolationism. It should be noted that Nixon discourse did not present this trait as a tendency to oscillate between internationalism and isolationism, but as a predilection for isolationism (cf. the 'Psychological Character' chapter).

As will be covered in the 'Psychological Character' chapter, the Nixon administration's discourse linked the globalism of past US foreign policies (including Vietnam) to a supposed drift towards isolationism in the US public. The administration positioned its foreign policy approach as a pragmatic approach to globalism, which would accommodate a war-weary public and function more appropriately in a 'changed' multipolar world. However, this foreign policy would not be isolationist, as that would also be dangerous for the US and the world. This psychological character discourse constructed a vacillatory and weary public as a fact to be dealt with, while also presenting the Nixon Doctrine as a middle ground. This was a discourse of pragmatics and the 'realities' of changed worlds, alliances, and diplomacy – along with the threats from isolationism and other states. The ideological character discourse was also a discourse of threats, but it used a more visceral language.

In 1969 Nixon publicly rejected "immediate withdrawal" from Vietnam even though it would attach the blame to President Johnson, thus avoiding "Johnson's war" becoming "Nixon's war" (Nixon, Nov. 3, 1969). The question facing the US, Nixon stated, was instead "Now that we are in the war, what is the best way to end it?" (ibid.). "[P]recipitate withdrawal" was out of the question because it would be a "disaster not only for South Vietnam but for the United States and for the cause of peace" (ibid.). There would be a repeat, Nixon said, of the "massacres", murders, and "atrocities" – particularly for the "million and a half Catholic refugees who fled to South Vietnam when the Communists took over in the North" (ibid.). In the US this "first defeat" in the country's history would "result in a collapse of confidence in American leadership, not only in Asia but throughout the world" (ibid.). This would "promote recklessness" amongst "those great powers who have not yet abandoned their goals of world conquest", "spark violence" across the world, and

ultimately “cost more lives” and “bring more war” (ibid.). For these reasons a “nation cannot remain great if it betrays its allies and lets down its friends” (ibid.).

Though this discourse did articulate threats to the US and the world from other states, it was primarily concerned with US ‘greatness’ – its moral superiority demonstrated through keeping its word – as the object under threat. Though, in the administration’s estimation, most of these Wallace voters did not support getting involved in Vietnam in the first place, and many did not favor escalation, they still had firm convictions related to an ideological or moral US character. Through discursively constructing a ‘vocal minority’ that wanted immediate withdrawal from Vietnam and was pro-civil rights and desegregation, the administration constructed an un-American Other. The administration was able to define its approach to Vietnam against this Other as upholding a moral American character with an honorable route out of Vietnam through Vietnamization.

As stated above, politicians and candidates of this period had ready access to a toolbox of anticommunist discourse with which they could conjure enemies and reproduce ideas of ‘Americanness’. However, with the full force of the presidency and the executive branch, the Nixon administration – as was the case with administrations before and since – had unparalleled authority to dictate foreign policies, and to designate threats (and thus what was threatened). Though the creation of domestic policies would involve input from other branches of government and the public, the conduct of US foreign policy, and related interpretations of ‘international relations’, have historically been understood as “solely a response to a realm of necessity” (Campbell, 1990: 271; see also: Campbell, 1998a: 61-72). According to this logic, foreign policy discourse in the US has held a privileged position as it elucidates the foremost threats to the nation and state (Campbell, 1998a: 70).

However, this does not mean that the administration’s efforts to present threats (and foreign policy responses to them) were not contested or that individuals listening to or targeted by a discourse lacked agency or subjectivity. As was covered in more detail in the ‘Theory’ chapter, the ‘audience’ is constituted through a securitization – it is created as a subject within the security discourse, rather than

pre-existing it (Hansen, 2011: 360-361). Often, an audience is constituted in a security discourse via detection of its 'opinion' through polls or elections (or interpretations of its beliefs in the wake of protests or other actions) (ibid., p. 360). Regardless, an audience is still constituted through the security discourse.

The next chapter, 'Psychological Character', will focus on such an audience – a supposed element of the American public (the 'silent majority') – while this chapter's analysis is concerned with the 'threat' of the 'vocal minority' that was also alleged to be a segment of the public. As was covered in the 'Spatio-Temporal Othering' chapter, the Nixon administration's foreign policy approach relied on a conceptualization of the world as composed of individual states, guided by their interests and capable of responsibilities – rather than a world locked in a two-sided ideological power battle. However, the administration's isolationism discourse, which constructed a 'vocal minority' and the ideological character of the US, relied on (and reproduced) such a two-sided, bipolar interpretation of the world. This discourse, through its overlap with the administration's 'Southern Strategy', worked within a repertoire of anticommunist discursive tropes. Specifically, it constructed a 'vocal minority' as threatening to a US character because it wanted to withdraw immediately from Vietnam. The discourse reproduced a moral, powerful US ideological character which was under threat from a 'communist' and anti-American Other. Furthermore, the discourse appealed to Wallace voters by compounding the vilification and supposed immorality of the 'vocal minority' by aligning them with pro-civil rights demonstrations.

This chapter theorizes an ideological character security discourse which constructed an audience of individuals who responded positively to the discourse, based on campaign and election research (including surveys, etc.). Though this audience would likely have overlapped with elements of a 'silent majority' audience, much of this discourse appears targeted at Wallace voters. This was an anti-elite discourse, concerned predominantly with domestic political issues (e.g. segregation), which engaged with foreign policy in so far as was necessary to reinforce a US ideological identity. In the case of Vietnam, this included discourse related to 'making a stand' and escalating the war until the US 'won' or left with its 'honor' intact. Furthermore,

the invocation of anticommunist tropes and discourses provided a setting or ‘universe of audience imagination’, in which the individuals targeted by the discourse could identify with or see themselves as a part of a US ideological Self.

Salter’s (2008) reading of securitization through Goffman’s dramaturgical theory provides a useful framework for understanding the function of this anticommunist discourse. Salter’s (2008) theory argues that different types of “securitizing moves” (attempts to designate a threatening Other and threatened Self) have their own “conventions, narratives, characters, and tropes” which can be thought of as a “setting” (p. 328). According to this theorization, a securitizing move relies on more than just an internal grammar (i.e. x represents a situation that must be addressed with means beyond the realm of ‘normal’ politics), also relying on a “social grammar” (ibid. pp. 329-30). This social grammar represents a “universe of audience imagination” – a setting within which specific “tropes, images, metaphors, histories” can be invoked by a securitizing move (ibid. p. 330; cf. Hofstadter’s ‘theater of imagination’).

In this reading of securitization theory, with the individuals capable of making securitizing moves dependent on the setting, someone like candidate Wallace would have had an authority to pronounce threats to society or morality through an anticommunist discourse (cf. Salter, 2008: 331). Anticommunism discourse, often rife with ‘internal enemies’ and distrust of intellectuals or elites, allowed Wallace’s (or Thurmond’s) discourse a mechanism with which to designate threats, particularly amongst traditionally Othered groups (e.g. people of color)⁵⁵. Using this discourse, segregationist politicians never offered substantive foreign policy positions beyond portraying civil rights and antiwar demonstrators as threatening agents of a global international communist conspiracy to destroy the US from within (Noer, 2003: 142).⁵⁶

Many politicians could and did invoke anticommunist discourses to broadly disparage individuals or groups as threatening, by accusing them of being

⁵⁵ Cf. the overlapping persecution of perceived communists and homosexual people during the McCarthy-led Red Scare in the early 1950s (see, *inter alia*, Charles, 2012).

⁵⁶ Again, a strategy similar to Scammon and Wattenberg’s regarding the ‘Social Issue’.

communists or influenced by communists. Particularly in terms of electioneering or domestic politicking, the social grammar of anticommunism discourse represented a rather reliable method of reinforcing a concept of a US Self while both reinforcing the notion of a communist Other and constructing a domestic communist Other – all without having to present detailed or coherent foreign policy positions. Indeed, this approach appears to be consistent with the aforementioned ‘Social Issue’ strategy, regarding an appeal to fear over specific policy pronouncements.

Wallace’s most comprehensive pronouncements about Vietnam during the 1968 campaign were light on detail, but almost always emphasized the ‘Otherness’ of the opposition and invoked a broad communist enemy. For example, in 1968 Wallace said of Vietnam “To oppose the war was dissent—to advocate victory for the enemy was treason [...] I believe in the right of dissent. But when somebody advocates a Communist victory, he’s advocating killing of American boys and that’s treason” (Wallace quoted in Noer, 2003: 156). Asked about the Ku Klux Klan, Wallace had responded “At least a Klansman will fight for his country. He don’t tear up his draft card” (Wallace quoted in *ibid.*). In terms of strategy, Wallace often stated he would turn the prosecution of the war “over to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, ask them what they need to win and get on with doing it . . . we’ve got to pour it on. We’ve got to win this war. If that means stepping-up the bombing, step it up” (Wallace quoted in *ibid.*).

However, Wallace’s foreign policy statements were mainly given in aid of furthering a divisive Othering discourse, rather than an articulation of a foreign policy approach. As mentioned earlier, Wallace’s foreign policy statements suggested suspicion of international engagement – particularly through an anti-elite discourse of distrust, while maintaining a broad, yet absolute bipolar, US versus communism framework (usually by attributing civil rights and antiwar protests to communist influence/conspiracies). When Wallace’s running mate, former Air Force chief of staff Curtis ‘Bombs Away’ LeMay advocated the possibility of using nuclear weapons in Vietnam, Wallace immediately distanced himself from the remarks (Noer, 2003: 157). Of course, in this instance it is just as likely that Wallace was conscious of

Goldwater's 1964 remarks and thus how LeMay might be perceived, or that he simply recognized just how extreme LeMay's comments were.

Regardless, Wallace's foreign policy discourse was not concerned with the tactics of 'winning' the war, or even formulating a broader geopolitical context that explained why it should be won (beyond a general anticommunism). Wallace's discourse, like his election slogan "Stand Up for America" was an attempt to create an audience – a specific segment of the public – and present them as under threat from an immoral, un-American domestic Other, influenced by 'communism' abroad. However, 'standing up' for America was not a discourse concerned with promulgating or theorizing *specific* 'foreign' enemies – beyond a general Other of 'communism' – or policy options to address them, but instead concentrated on domestic 'threats' (see, e.g., *Washington Post*, Oct. 9, 1968: "Certainly [Wallace] has not been identified with the quasi-religious fervor of General LeMay on the subject of foreign communism").

Constructing threats, relationships, and identity

As discussed above, though an audience is theorized as being constituted by a securitizing discourse, it is presented in the discourse as an observable, pre-existing phenomenon by referencing surveys, events, etc. Securitization theory also posits that certain conditions can facilitate the construction of a threat. Specifically, if in a security discourse "certain objects can be referred to that are generally held to be threatening—be they tanks, hostile sentiments, or polluted waters", then it becomes more likely the issue may be presented as threatening (Buzan, et al., 1998: 33). Buzan, et al.'s Copenhagen School securitization theory relies on speech act theory and hence concepts of an audience 'accepting' a securitization, thus making it 'successful' (i.e. a speaker associating the issue with these 'threatening objects' make audience acceptance more likely, and thus the securitization is more likely to be 'successful'). While this thesis does not use this speech act framework, the Copenhagen School's concept of 'facilitating conditions' is still useful in this analysis.

Just as the discursive construction of an audience is conceptualized as a matter of “which codes are used when actors relate to each other” (Wæver, 2002: 26-7; Hansen, 2006: 15-35), the construction of threats theorized here is relational. Similar to how an audience is constituted through the securitizing discourse using facilitating referents (e.g. surveys, referencing events) so that those listening to security discourse can possibly identify themselves with the audience, a threat is theorized as being constructed with reference to historically threatening objects so that the issue is clearly recognized as a threat. By associating the issue with the threatening objects, the discourse situates the threat within a recognizable set of tropes and relationships – i.e. the setting discussed earlier – which would be familiar to the listener (and which is also recognizable as a security discourse to an analyst). Whether an *individual listener* ‘accepts’ an issue as threatening is not relevant because audience acceptance will be constituted within further securitizing discourses – which will draw on facilitating referents like surveys.

In this chapter, as in the wider thesis, the focus of the analysis is what the Nixon administration’s discourse *did*. Regardless of whether their election strategy was accurate, or the administration deliberately devised it as such, the administration’s ‘vocal minority’ discourse appears to have functioned in a manner similar to anticommunism discourses – particularly the Wallace campaign’s discourse. Furthermore, the discourse operated similarly to historical isolationism discourses in that it maligned immediate withdrawal from Vietnam. However, the critical difference in the administration’s discourse was that it was still promoting withdrawal from Vietnam and reducing US responsibility in the world. The inclusion of a US moral or ideological character was used to emphasize the threat of immediate withdrawal and to undergird the appropriateness of gradual withdrawal. Moreover, the ideological character tropes and appeals allowed the administration to make an internationally engaged foreign policy pitch to an allegedly isolationist audience. Similar to how security discourses may function in relationships with particular contexts (e.g. ‘detections’ of audience disposition and invocations of historically threatening objects) – including broader contextual settings, such as

anticommunism discourse – different security discourses can also be conceptualized as functioning in relationship to each other.

This analysis theorizes that the Nixon administration's isolationism discourse functioned in relation to the administration's previous discourse and Wallace's campaign discourse – including historical discourse from the 1968 campaign against Wallace and discourse related to Wallace's candidacies for governor of Alabama in 1970 and presidency in 1972. Beyond electioneering, the administration's 'vocal minority' discourse was also correlated with increasing domestic opposition to the Vietnam war, particularly in late 1969 through late 1970. Though Wallace voters generally were against getting involved in Vietnam in the first place, they overwhelmingly were in favor of 'taking a stronger stand' to win the war.

As the administration's discourse othered antiwar demonstrators as a 'vocal minority' who wanted immediate withdrawal at the expense of US honor, the discourse presented its Vietnamization plan as a policy for 'winning' the war – or at least the US exiting the war with its honor still intact. In this manner, the administration's discourse was able to vilify a 'vocal minority' of un-American antiwar protestors while reinforcing the notion that 'winning' or 'preserving US honor' were noble American traits. Beyond this apparent appeal to former Wallace voters, the administration's discourse constructed this un-American Other as being, among other things, 'communist' (i.e. immoral and atheist) and allied or coterminous with pro-civil rights activists and desegregationists.

Through constructing a threatening 'vocal minority', the administration's discourse constituted audiences. Generally, this discourse could have appealed to many different individuals, not just those targeted by the 'Southern Strategy'. However, the methods with which the administration's discourse presented this 'threat' and the US Self it threatened, were very similar to Wallace's discourse. Again, if the constitution of an audience is conceptualized as a matter of "which codes are used when actors relate to each other" (Wæver, 2002: 26-7; Hansen, 2006: 15-35), then there appears to have been an overlap in the constitution of audiences (as well as threats) in both the administration's 'vocal minority' discourse and Wallace's campaign rhetoric.

Wallace for governor

Prohibited by the Alabama constitution from serving a consecutive term as governor, in 1966 Wallace had run a successful campaign to install his wife, Lurleen, as governor so that he could stay in control of state politics and maintain a national profile (Carter, 2000: 263). Despite having been diagnosed with terminal cancer in late 1965 (a biopsy had detected a possibly cancerous growth in 1961 as well, though Wallace had never told her), Lurleen Wallace became governor of Alabama in 1967 with Albert Brewer as lieutenant governor (*ibid.*, pp. 277-80). On May 7, 1968, Lurleen Wallace died, and Brewer became governor (*ibid.*, p. 320). Wallace promised Brewer he would not run against him in the 1970 gubernatorial race and on May 27, 1968, announced he was returning to the presidential campaign trail (*ibid.*, pp. 322-3).

By mid-July 1969 Wallace had a newspaper contact announce that it was likely Wallace would run for governor as a stepping off point for a presidential run in 1972, though the Nixon administration already assumed in early July 1969 that he would (Carter, 2000: 383), if not earlier. By September 1969, Wallace began calling for parents to ignore school desegregation orders in contravention of federal court orders and federal guidelines, and implying the current governor was one of many “sissy folks” who had done little to resist the federal government, widely perceived as an early campaign maneuver (*ibid.*, Wallace quoted in *ibid.*).

Around this time, Nixon’s nomination of the conservative Southerner Clement Haynsworth to the Supreme Court was beginning to falter, with Senate opposition centered around accusations that Haynsworth was pro-segregationist (as well as “anti-labor”, and concerns about conflicts of interest in some of his rulings as a Circuit Court of Appeals judge) (Barnes, Nov. 23, 1969). By October 4, 1969, former Vice President and 1968 Democratic Presidential nominee Hubert Humphrey was openly accusing Nixon of appointing Haynsworth to repay political debts to “Southern allies” who had enabled Nixon’s nomination as the Republican candidate in 1968, including Senator Thurmond (Mooney, Oct. 5, 1969; see also: Kotlowski, 1996: 74).

Haynsworth would be rejected by the Senate in late November 1969, after which Nixon would nominate G. Harrold Carswell, another conservative Southern judge, in January 1970. The Senate would hear, among other things, that in 1948 Carswell said he believed segregation was “proper” and that he would “always” be “governed” by a “firm, vigorous belief in the principles of white supremacy”; in 1956 Carswell had helped transfer a golf course to private hands to avoid an integration requirement; and that Carswell had apparently knowingly misrepresented the facts about the golf course transfer to the Senate Judiciary Committee (Schell, 1976: 81-2). The Senate would reject Carswell’s nomination in April 1970 (ibid. p. 83).

During this period, issues of race and desegregation were prominent, particularly in the South. Both Wallace and the Nixon administration resisted desegregation – however with Wallace, who famously asserted “segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever” (Carter, 2000: 11), obviously resisting it much more vigorously. The Nixon administration was not as fervent in its opposition, but attempted to appoint the aforementioned judges and delay the implementation of school desegregation orders (Schell, 1976: 40-2).

Moratorium Day and Vice President Agnew

On June 30, 1969, the organizers of the “Vietnam Moratorium Committee” announced they would hold a “Moratorium” on the Vietnam War (Wells, 2016: 312). Activists associated with the Moratorium would spend the next few months organizing on university campuses and on October 15, 1969, would hold vigils and other events nationwide to build a base for a two-day protest in November (ibid.). In a statement announcing the Moratorium, one of the activists stated “We want to make it clear that the 2 percent that people talk about on the campuses are really 70 percent— that they’re not just ‘crazy radicals’ but ‘your sons and daughters’” (ibid.).

On October 14, 1969, several members of Congress attempted to keep the House in session for an all-night debate on the war, in solidarity with the forthcoming

demonstrations. However, Republican congressional leaders stopped the debate after four hours (Wells, 2016: 348). Also on October 14, the Premier of North Vietnam, Pham Van Dong released a letter of support for the demonstrations, after which the Nixon administration let loose Vice President Spiro Agnew. Agnew, approved of by Strom Thurmond as Nixon's VP choice in 1968, was a Southern former governor of Maryland with a reputation as a moderate regarding race (Levy, 2013: 717, 710). However, on April 11, 1968 in a meeting with Maryland's Black leaders, a week after Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination and a day after subsequent riots in Baltimore had calmed, Governor Agnew had accused the leaders of both kowtowing to and enabling Black "radicals" and "militants", (ibid., pp. 709-11).

Moreover, in this speech Agnew had implicated liberals more broadly by refusing to endorse the Kerner report (which had concluded racism was the primary cause of the rolling riots of the 'long, hot summer of 1967') and likewise rejecting that racism or a lack of opportunity for Black people was a factor in the Baltimore riots (ibid., pp. 711-2; Agnew, April 11, 1968, p. 4). However, Agnew's previous record as a moderate, along with his less aggressively racist rhetoric – even after the April 11 speech – gained him support among "racial moderates" who preferred Agnew's language of 'law and order', rather than outright pro-segregationist discourse (Levy, 2013: 714). In this respect, Agnew – and Agnew's discourse – can be conceptualized as a bridge between the outright racist and divisive rhetoric of Wallace and the often more veiled discourse of the Nixon administration.⁵⁷ Phillips, in his 1968 campaign memo to Nixon, had suggested that Agnew be "used in the peripheral South and Border, where he is regarded somewhat more favorably than in the Northeast", but cautioned that his remarks should be "carefully planned" to avoid "bloopers" and warned that Agnew was "not a plus factor", partly because of his "bad press", and thus "should not be overexposed" (Phillips, n.d. p. 4).

⁵⁷ This 'bridge' concept could even be extended to geography, as Maryland – though it is technically just south of the Mason-Dixon line that separated North from South in the US – represents more of a liminal space between North and South. This is particularly so in Southern culture, where Maryland is often not considered a part of the South.

The North Vietnamese letter, addressed to “dear American friends” commended the protests as “a very appropriate and timely answer to the attitude of the US authorities who are still obdurately intensifying and prolonging the Vietnam aggressive war”, and said the North Vietnamese were “firmly confident” that the “struggle of the Vietnamese people and US progressive people against US aggression” would be victorious (Letter quoted in Miller, Oct. 14, 1969). The message concluded with the line “May your fall offense succeed splendidly” (ibid.). The letter was first read on Hanoi radio, then published in Paris, after which the administration quickly had copies of the letter printed and sent to Republican Congressional leaders, where the letter was read in both the House and Senate (Naughton, Oct. 14, 1969). Afterward, Senator Gordon Allott (Republican, Colorado), alleged that the “basic strategy” of the Moratorium was planned at the “Communist-oriented” world peace conference in June, and that undisclosed radicals were linked to the Moratorium organizers (Allott quoted in Miller, Oct. 14, 1969).

As per White House Press Secretary Ziegler, Nixon instructed Agnew to call on the Moratorium leaders to repudiate the “Hanoi letter” (Naughton, Oct. 14, 1969). Whilst denying that he was attempting to discredit the protests – though it was generally interpreted in the media as such – Agnew claimed the letter represented a “shocking intrusion in the affairs of the American people” (Agnew quoted in ibid.). Agnew insisted, “We didn’t send this letter. This letter was sent by a foreign power seeking to divide the people of the United States” (Agnew quoted in Miller, Oct. 14, 1969). What the administration feared, he claimed, was that “the real purposes of many people, who simply want to express an unrelenting desire for peace in the world, which we all share and the President shares more than anyone I know, may be misunderstood as having really voiced an expression of support for an enemy power” (ibid.).

On October 15, 1969, across the country approximately two million citizens expressed some form of dissent against the US war in Vietnam, including white, middle-class demonstrators (Wells, 2016: 348). Businesspeople, students, federal employees, organized antiwar groups, soldiers, mothers and children, all

participated in rallies, teach-ins, discussions, mural paintings, and listened to speeches by celebrities, politicians, and academics as well as readings of the names of those killed in Vietnam (ibid., pp. 349-350; MacPherson, Oct. 16, 1969). After a rally at the Washington Monument, Coretta Scott King, widow of Martin Luther King Jr., led a solemn procession of demonstrators towards the White House, carrying no signs, only candles (Wells, 2016: 350). A line of demonstrators, stretching back towards the Washington Monument, wreathed the perimeter of the White House (ibid.).

After Moratorium Day, Agnew's public discourse regarding demonstrators intensified. At an October 19, 1969 Republican fundraising dinner in New Orleans, Agnew denounced Moratorium Day as the result of "[a] spirit of national masochism [which] prevails, encouraged by an effete corps of impudent snobs who characterize themselves as intellectuals" (Agnew quoted in Hunter, Oct. 20, 1969). Agnew also criticized those taking part in the demonstrations for failing to consider that the leaders of the protests "had billed it as a massive public outpouring of sentiment against the foreign policy of the President of the United States" and that "[m]ost [demonstrators] did not care to be reminded that the leaders of the moratorium refused to disassociate themselves from the objective enunciated by the enemy in Hanoi" (ibid.). Furthermore, Agnew warned of the "hardcore dissidents and professional anarchists" in the antiwar movement who were planning a "wilder, more violent" demonstration on November 15 (the proposed date for the Moratorium March) (ibid.).

Agnew's remarks clearly constructed a 'vocal minority' Other that sided with an enemy of the US and planned on unleashing more violence in the future. Agnew did not invoke the terms 'isolationism' or 'isolationist', not just because the administration likely wanted to keep Wallace voters on board, but also because isolationism had historically – and in the administration's psychological character discourse – been an American trait. The 'vocal minority' of the public was constructed as un-American. On the other hand, in the psychological character discourse the 'silent majority' was constructed as *the* American people. Though they were wearied by the Vietnam War, they were 'decent', patriotic taxpayers –

including Wallace voters. The ‘fact’ of their desire for isolationism was presented as a known aspect of the US psyche and something to be dealt with through the introduction of the Nixon Doctrine.

The ‘vocal minority’ constructed by the administration was presented not just as a minority of the general US population, but was also limited to specific demographics – students and intellectuals. Use of the pejorative ‘isolationist’ – its rhetorical power tied to the ‘fact’ of internationalism being a means of protecting US security and a ‘lesson’ learned the hard way through WWII – had been a predominately elite discourse. For this reason, such a pejorative would likely have had little power to discourage such a ‘vocal minority’⁵⁸ and furthermore would carry little weight as this ‘minority’ was presented as not having the power to dictate policy. In addition to this, the former Wallace voters targeted by the Nixon administration’s ‘Southern Strategy’ had often been accused of isolationism. The administration’s discourse, by not accusing the ‘vocal minority’ of isolationism directly, was able to construct these Wallace voters as part of the ‘silent majority’ – as being like the rest of ‘Americans’, prone to a desire for isolationism (rather than just inherently isolationist). By drawing on discourse similar to those of Wallace and other segregationists, the administration (particularly through Agnew) was able to further sharpen a distinction between the concerns of Wallace voters and this ‘vocal minority’ and emphasize an opposition to antiwar (and by extension pro-civil rights) protestors, as well as ‘communism’ and immorality.

In an October 30, 1969 speech at a Republican dinner in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, Agnew again went after the Moratorium Day demonstrators, having earlier in the day been publicly commended by Nixon who said Agnew was doing a “great job” (Edstrom, Oct. 31, 1969). In this speech, Agnew’s language was even more divisive:

It is time for the preponderant majority, the responsible citizens of this country, to assert their rights. It is time to stop dignifying the immature actions of arrogant, reckless, inexperienced elements within our society. The

⁵⁸ Again, this ‘vocal minority’ was discursively constituted – many people across wide spectrums of the population opposed the war. However, the administration’s discourse presented this group as only being intellectuals, youths, and other ‘radicals’ – individuals who likely would not have cared about (or would have embraced) the label of ‘isolationist’.

reason is compelling. It is simply that their tantrums are insidiously destroying the fabric of American democracy. (Agnew quoted in *ibid.*)

In response to this 'immaturity',

America must recognize the dangers of constant carnival. Americans must reckon with irresponsible leadership and reckless words. The mature and sensitive people of this country must realize that their freedom of protest is being exploited by avowed anarchists and Communists who detest everything about this country and want to destroy it. (Agnew quoted in Edstrom, Oct. 31, 1969)

Beyond being immature, reckless, and manipulated by communists, those in the minority had no right to dictate policy to this 'American majority', according to Agnew – rhetoric that would later show up in Nixon's discourse. "By accepting unbridled protest as a way of life we have tacitly suggested that the great issues of our time are best decided by posturing and shouting matches in the streets" (Agnew quoted in Edstrom, Oct. 31, 1969). In doing so, the US was in danger of becoming "a degenerating democracy – a democracy that permits the voice of the mob to dominate the affairs of government" (*ibid.*). The country's founders, Agnew claimed, had never intended that "elected officials should decide crucial questions by counting the number of bodies cavorting in the streets" (Agnew quoted in Edstrom, Oct. 31, 1969).

According to Agnew, there was "among us a glib, activist element who would tell us our values are lies, and I call them impudent [...] I call them snobs for most of them disdain to mingle with the masses who work for a living" (Agnew quoted in Edstrom, Oct. 31, 1969). This 'activist element' was dangerous: "America cannot afford to divide over their demagoguery or to be deceived by their duplicity or to let their license destroy liberty" (*ibid.*). Agnew's solution to this 'danger' was rather blatant Othering. "We can however, afford to separate them from our society – with no more regret than we should feel over discarding rotten apples from a barrel" (*ibid.*).

Agnew's discourse on behalf of the administration brazenly categorized those demonstrating against the war in Vietnam (particularly the alleged leaders/organizers of the demonstrations, who were portrayed as either militants or intellectuals) as being both against the US and not truly American. While this discourse was not explicitly 'foreign policy' oriented, the underlying theme was

consistently the Vietnam War, particularly immediate US withdrawal from the war. A key aspect of Nixon's 1968 campaign had been a promise to end the war, and by 1969 the public debate had shifted to how the war should end. In a November 3, 1969 speech, Nixon would begin constructing immediate withdrawal from Vietnam as potentially dangerous – particularly as a form of isolationism or potential cause of isolationism, with all the usual associated 'dangers' – while also presenting a slower, more deliberate withdrawal process of Vietnamization in aid of achieving peace, specifically an "honorable" and "lasting peace".

Meanwhile, back in Alabama

On Moratorium Day (Oct. 15, 1969), Alabama governor Albert Brewer⁵⁹ gave a speech that both echoed some of the Nixon administration's previous discourse and presaged some of the tropes in Nixon's November 3 'Silent Majority' speech. The October 15, 1969 front page of the *Birmingham* [Alabama] *News* was dedicated to the Moratorium protests, complete with a large photo of an American flag and a quote from Nixon: "Our road is not easy, not simple... But right" ('The Birmingham News Counterdemonstration', Oct. 16, 1969, p. 30451). Brewer's speech was also included on this front page. In the speech, Brewer characterized the current period as yet another "time of testing" in the course of American history where the US "as a nation" would have "to decide between the easy way and the honorable way, both at home and abroad" (Brewer quoted in *ibid.*). In this short speech, Brewer would use this concept of historical morality to construct a US character and a "vocal minority". While they "have not always been universally popular", historically the "decisions to stand firm in behalf [sic] of freedom and justice" were always "supported by the great majority of American people" (Brewer quoted in *ibid.*).

Though

at home there are those who would have us believe that our people have lost the will to meet our commitments [...] this vocal minority does not speak for the tens of

⁵⁹ Though initially wary of Brewer – who had not proven to be a very charismatic or adept political operator – Nixon would eventually support Brewer's 1970 gubernatorial campaign against Wallace, though not publicly. Using slush funds squirreled away during the 1968 campaign, Nixon sent Brewer's campaign \$100,000 in March 1970, followed by \$300,000 in May 1970, all in cash, which provided nearly a third of Brewer's entire campaign budget (Carter, 2000: 387-9, 391-2).

millions of silent Americans whose deep desire for peace burns as brightly as the fires of our warriors' camps but who know that a peace without honor and justice is no peace at all. (Brewer quoted in *ibid.*)

This speech was read into the Congressional Record by a Republican Senator from Alabama (Buchanan, Oct. 16, 1969, p. 30430). It was also read into the record by Strom Thurmond, who included a letter from the publisher and Thurmond's response to the publisher, thanking and commending him (Oct. 16, 1969, p. 30451). Thurmond's response also contained a previous public statement of his which read:

I do not agree with the National Moratorium Committee's October protest movement to withdraw all U.S. troops from Vietnam. I support President Nixon's current initiatives for a lasting and honorable peace. Such withdrawal proposals strengthen Hanoi's position, prolong the war, forfeit all the objectives supported by four Presidents and break faith with our brave men who have given their lives for their country, world security and freedom. (Thurmond quoted in *ibid.*)

Both of these speeches constructed a vague ideological US character, a US that was honorable and desired peace but that was also a warrior, a US that would not shy away from making important decisions. Nixon's 'Silent Majority' speech would expand on these tropes, further separating a 'vocal minority' Other from a US 'silent majority' Self.

The 'Silent Majority' speech

Much of Nixon's November 3rd, 1969 'Silent Majority' speech helped construct a 'psychological character' of the US public, which was prone to vacillation between isolationism and internationalism. Furthermore, a 'silent majority' was obviously differentiated against a 'vocal minority'. However, there are aspects of this speech which are relevant to this analysis of a 'vocal minority'/ideological character discourse.

The speech reproduced an idea of a historical, moral US character, situated a 'silent majority' in this history (and thus portrayed this 'majority' as having attributes of this character), and separated the 'minority' from this tradition. As in Brewer's Oct. 15 speech, Nixon described a 'history' of challenges:

We have faced other crises in our history and have become stronger by rejecting the easy way out and taking the right way in meeting our challenges. Our greatness as a nation has been our capacity to do what had to be done when we knew our course was right. (Nixon, Nov. 3, 1969)

Nixon then acknowledged that citizens disagreed with his “plan for peace”, and that these were “[h]onest and patriotic” Americans. Out of all the “different conclusions as to how peace should be achieved”, the one Nixon highlighted was a demonstrator’s sign in San Francisco which read “Lose in Vietnam, bring the boys home” (Nixon, Nov. 3, 1969). While affirming that the right to reach this conclusion was indicative of the strength of America’s “free society”, Nixon vowed it would not be implemented into policy. Using the same logic Agnew employed in an earlier speech (mentioned above), Nixon stated he would be “untrue to my oath of office if I allowed the policy of this Nation to be dictated by the minority who hold that point of view and who try to impose it on the Nation by mounting demonstrations in the street” (ibid.).

Pivoting back to concepts of history and US character, Nixon asserted that for

almost 200 years, the policy of this Nation has been made under our Constitution by those leaders in the Congress and the White House elected by all of the people. If a vocal minority, however fervent its cause, prevails over reason and the will of the majority, this Nation has no future as a free society. (Nixon, Nov. 3, 1969)

However, this characterization of immediate withdrawal being the “point of view” of a minority appears inconsistent with Nixon’s comments earlier in the same speech. Outlining the “situation” Nixon encountered upon his inauguration, he described a “war [that] was causing deep division at home and criticism from many of our friends as well as our enemies abroad” (Nixon, Nov. 3, 1969). “In view of these circumstances”, Nixon continued, “there were some who urged that I end the war at once by ordering the immediate withdrawal of all American forces [from Vietnam]” (ibid.). Doing so from a “political standpoint [...] would have been a popular and easy course to follow” (ibid.).⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Cf. Nixon’s comments in June 1969 “It would be easy, easy for a President of the United States to buy some popularity by going along with the new isolationists” (Nixon, June 4, 1969).

As is covered in more detail in the 'Psychological Character' chapter, the desire for immediate withdrawal by the 'majority' was constructed as a rational reaction to a long war – an understandable, momentary faltering of moral strength for which this 'majority' would need to summon its moral stamina. This 'vocal minority', however, was not at the crossroads of decision, was not poised to choose between "rejecting the easy way out and taking the right way in meeting our challenges", it had taken and was continuing to take the 'easy way out' (in the administration's view, this was immediate withdrawal and isolationism) rather than the 'right way'. Not only were the policy views of this 'vocal minority' contrary to the US 'character' and nonrational, but they were also constructed by Nixon's discourse as being a threat to the nation itself. The attempts by this 'vocal minority' to express their viewpoints were inherently un-American as they ran counter to the democratic nature of the US (and its very character, as evidenced by the fact they were a 'minority').

On November 10, 1969, a week after Nixon's 'Silent Majority' speech and five days before the planned Moratorium March in Washington, Agnew again cracked open his thesaurus and criticized antiwar demonstrators, this time as a "strident minority" raising an "intolerant clamor and cacophony" in their "carnival in the streets" (Agnew quoted in Rosenbaum, Nov. 11, 1969). On the same day, Nixon's Transportation Secretary, John A. Volpe said at a news conference that the majority of the organizers of the demonstrations were "Communist or Communist-inspired" and did "nothing but break down our democracy" (Volpe quoted in *ibid.*).

The 'vocal minority' discourse was clearly used as a means of denigrating select groups of individuals opposed to the war in order to delegitimize wider opposition to the war and Vietnamization. The 'vocal minority' was presented as not acknowledging the 'rational' world of the Nixon Doctrine or the supposedly historical essence of US identity. This un-Americanness was rhetorically compounded by aligning the minority with communism – which in turn cast the battle between 'vocal minority' and US ideological character in a bipolar, ideological context the administration said it was leaving behind. Finally, whether specifically designed as an electoral discourse or not, this discourse nevertheless overlapped

with the administration's 'Southern Strategy' and mirrored much of the divisive rhetoric coming from segregationists like Wallace.

Conclusion

This chapter argued that an ideological character aspect of the administration's isolationism discourse constructed the Nixon Doctrine and Vietnamization as appropriately 'American' and in keeping with a moral US character – a character that was co-constituted through the discourse. Furthermore, this chapter argued that this discourse constituted a 'vocal minority' that was un-American, using an anticommunist discourse that broadly overlapped with Wallace's discourse. Essentially, this discourse attempted to present immediate withdrawal from Vietnam as un-American because such a policy would not only threaten the security of the US, but would also not be in line with a US moral character – which itself could be dangerous to the US.

This discourse, however, did not invoke the terms 'isolationism' or 'isolationist'. This chapter claimed there were three broad reasons for this. First, one of the target audiences for this discourse appears to have been a segment of the public perceived by the administration as isolationists. In some ways, 'selling' Vietnamization and the Nixon Doctrine to Wallace voters was done in a manner similar to how it was presented to a general public sliding towards isolationism – by situating the administration's foreign policy approach as a middle ground. Second, through an interrelated psychological character discourse, the administration constructed a desire for isolationism as understandable and an American trait to be dealt with. Third, as the 'silent majority' constructed in this psychological character discourse included Wallace voters and the 'silent majority' was presented as *the* American people, a drift towards isolationism in the public was constructed as inherently American. As the 'vocal minority' was constructed as un-American, it was not portrayed as specifically isolationist because this was an American trait.

The supposedly inherently isolationist Wallace voters were constructed as belonging to a 'silent majority', just as some of the administration's anti-

demonstrator and anti-civil rights discourse likely appealed to non-Wallace voters. This ideological character subset of the discourse appears to have justified the administration's foreign policy approach by referencing – and reproducing – a moral US character. These appeals were focused on fulfilling commitments and maintaining US honor, as they were important both in and of themselves and as providing a bulwark against communism and general un-Americanness. The administration's discourse leveraged this aspect of the discourse to appeal for support in gradually withdrawing from Vietnam by making it a matter of honor and security – specifically protection from the threat of a generalized communism, represented externally by an ideological communist Other and internally by a 'vocal minority' Other.

Chapter seven: Psychological Character

With some new ammunition from the Russians and some massive help from old Democrats, President Nixon appeared today to be subduing the Senate rebels who want to cut the American Army in Europe by half this year. In fact, the President flew to Florida this afternoon believing the battle of the moment won – for the moment.

But the week's skirmish over the Mansfield amendment – to recall half of the 310,000 soldiers in Europe by Dec. 31 – belongs to a larger struggle over American foreign policies. It will erupt again and again and will be waged long after Americans are out of Vietnam. It will be defined as the struggle between isolationism and internationalism, between the priorities of national defense and domestic order, between Congressional rights and Presidential prerogatives. (Frankel, May 15, 1971)

This chapter demonstrates how the Nixon administration constructed an aspect of a US 'character' - a 'psychological' ⁶¹ character' – through its isolationism discourse. By reproducing as unquestioned fact the concept that the US public was inherently prone to oscillating between internationalism and isolationism, the administration was able to present its foreign policy approach (the Nixon Doctrine) and its plan for ending US involvement in Vietnam (Vietnamization) as rational reactions to an understood entity (the US public). This, in turn, reinforced the administration's representation of itself as functioning within a broader policy framework that rationally and pragmatically responded to a changed world of states with interests and limited US resources.

Furthermore, in constructing a 'moral strength' within this US public and then appealing to said strength, the administration's discourse was able to present 'moral strength' as innate, a flip side to an inherent disposition to isolationism. The administration then discursively linked the US public's moral strength with domestic leadership and US international leadership. Finally, as the administration's discourse broadly constructed foreign policy elites as isolationists for proposing immediate or

⁶¹ The term 'psychological' has been chosen to reflect how the discourse presented these aspects of the US 'character' as being both innate and having been detected 'scientifically'.

negotiated withdrawal from Vietnam (or withdrawal from other parts of the world), it also presented them as both liable to the same oscillations as the rest of the public and portrayed them as unable to produce adequate foreign policy approaches.

American 'character': The differences between 'Psychological' and 'Ideological'

This chapter analyzes a 'psychological character' subset of isolationism discourse used by the Nixon administration to reproduce an aspect of American 'character'. In some respects, this discourse was interwoven with the 'ideological character' discourse examined in the previous chapter. However, whereas the 'ideological character' discourse was primarily focused on the reproduction of specific moral and historical national identities, this chapter is concerned with the construction of character based on a rationalized, 'scientific' interpretation of the American public's allegedly innate behavioral predispositions.

A critical difference between the two discourses was that the 'psychological character' discourse constructed a US Self, while the 'ideological character' discourse constructed an Other. The 'ideological character' discourse did constitute an ideological or moral US identity – but this was contrasted against the 'vocal minority' construct produced through the discourse. The 'psychological character' discourse directly addressed an audience supposedly prone to isolationism, with reference to the terms 'isolationist' and 'isolationism'. In this discourse, the isolationism of the US Self/public was accepted and presented as a fact to be reckoned with via the reduced responsibilities in the Nixon Doctrine. While isolationism was presented as a threat, the US public being inclined to it was not. In the 'ideological character' discourse, the targeted audience was assumed to be inherently isolationist, rather than prone to vacillation between isolationist and internationalist. Rather than criticize this audience or construct its views as threatening, the administration's discourse constructed a threatening Other which could then be used to define Wallace voters as firmly within a US Self.

Though it was presented as a segment of the American public, the ‘vocal minority’ was portrayed as un-American, while the ‘silent majority’ constructed by the ‘psychological character’ discourse was presented as *the* American public. Regardless of its tendency towards isolationism, the ‘silent majority’ was nevertheless portrayed as ‘patriotic’ and capable of being roused to international leadership, while its isolationism was presented as a naïve, but well-intentioned method of protecting the US from involvement in war, rather than an act of cowardice.

In the ‘ideological character’ discourse, an ideological, moral US identity was constructed as under threat from a ‘vocal minority’ who wanted to withdraw from Vietnam in a way that would harm US honor. The discourse covered in this chapter is also conceptualized as a security discourse. However, in this discourse the threat was isolationism, and beyond the identity of the US being threatened, the existence of the US was also constructed as being under threat. Though a *desire* for withdrawal or isolationism was presented by the administration as a natural characteristic of the US public, the threat was the *realization* of isolationism: if the public became isolationist and/or the policy of the US became isolationist. Furthermore, the policies of some foreign policy elites were portrayed by the administration as isolationist. While in the discourse these policies were not presented as being threatening in and of themselves – because only the administration conducted foreign policy – if they became policy in the future or encouraged the war-wearied public’s inclination towards isolationism, then the existence of the US and the world would be threatened.

This chapter theorizes that the administration’s discourse constituted a ‘silent majority’ as it presented the Nixon Doctrine as pragmatically reacting to the potential isolationism in the ‘silent majority’. This allowed for the doctrine to be presented as not isolationist, while simultaneously constituting other foreign policy elites as threateningly isolationist in their failure to correctly understand the US public and the nature of a ‘changed’ world. Furthermore, the Nixon Doctrine was presented as a rejection of previous globalist anticommunist policies, both because the world had ‘changed’ and as a means of accommodating a war-weary US public.

The bigger picture

As with the other segments of isolationism discourse interrogated in this thesis, this chapter theorizes the Nixon administration's isolationism discourse as a security discourse. This chapter posits that the Nixon administration's isolationism security discourse (re)created a context of a knowable, rational world in which an American public (the 'silent majority') was reproduced using historical scientific polls as being innately predisposed to oscillating between isolationism and internationalism. This constructed *a priori* context is theorized as having then served as a foundation to construct what were essentially two 'isolationisms'. The 'silent majority's' desire for isolationism was constructed as an understandable, rational reaction to years of supposed over-extension and international involvement – particularly the war in Vietnam – by dint of the US public's innate disposition to oscillation. Another isolationism was ascribed to the advocacy by some foreign policy elites⁶² for immediate or negotiated withdrawal from Vietnam (rather than the 'honorable peace'/Vietnamization plan of gradual withdrawal advocated by the Nixon administration). As will be addressed in the final section of this chapter, what the administration called isolationism was predominately attempts by Congress to reassert control over the war, as well as military deployments and expenditures, and to demonstrate the costs of the war.

The administration's foreign policy approach (the Nixon Doctrine) was situated as a rational solution which understood and would respond to the context in which it operated. The understandable desire for isolationism by the 'silent majority' could be addressed, the administration proposed, by reducing aspects of direct US involvement overseas (while still maintaining American international leadership). According to the administration, this desire for isolationism could be dangerous – even existentially threatening – if it were allowed to develop from a weary inclination into a fully realized policy. The administration's discourse averred that the promotion of immediate or negotiated withdrawal from Vietnam by some foreign policy elites – policies designated by the administration as isolationist –

⁶² These 'foreign policy elites' were predominately Congresspeople, especially Senators.

would indulge the 'silent majority's' desire to withdraw from the world (itself a reaction to Vietnam), with disastrous effects for the US.

The Nixon administration characterized some foreign policy elites as isolationists if they advocated immediate or negotiated withdrawal from Vietnam, though their broader policies did not advocate completely withdrawing from the world – if anything they proposed reduced US responsibility similar to the Nixon Doctrine, though not always via the same specific policy approaches. Many of these elites rejected continued involvement because they no longer believed (if they ever believed at all) that the Vietnam War would successfully 'contain' communism, and therefore was no longer in the US interest. However, along with constructing Cold War globalism as anachronistic and the cause of over-extension/Vietnam, the administration's accusations of isolationism against these elites sought to portray them as not correctly apprehending the new 'world' or the US public (which the Nixon Doctrine could successfully interpret). Furthermore, the discourse also lumped these elites together into broad groups (e.g. 'new isolationists', 'former internationalists', etc.), rather than referring to specific individuals and their particular policies. The administration's discourse described these elites as 'internationalists' or 'former internationalists'. As the term 'internationalist' is as vague and analytically unhelpful as the term 'isolationist', whether these elites were or were not 'internationalists' is not relevant in this analysis. The final sections of this chapter will focus more on these foreign policy elites as individuals, their policy proposals, and the administration's reaction to them.

Though there were limits to globalism in the pre-Johnson Cold War era, the Nixon Doctrine proposed even further limits. The administration presented a policy that a few decades earlier would likely have been labeled isolationism by most foreign policy elites – including those now being accused of isolationism by the Nixon administration. Essentially, the administration was accusing certain elites – those calling for US withdrawal from Vietnam and limits on US international engagement – of wanting to withdraw from the world (i.e. isolationism according to the administration). At the same time, the administration proposed a foreign policy approach (the Nixon Doctrine) that called for limits to US international engagement,

including ceding responsibility for fighting in Vietnam to the South Vietnamese, and claimed this approach was not an isolationist impulse to withdraw from the world (cf. with the administration's 'appeasement discourse' covered later in the chapter).

In constructing a 'silent majority' prone to isolationism but also with a disposition towards world leadership, the administration's 'psychological character' isolationism discourse allowed for the Nixon Doctrine and Vietnamization to be presented as non-isolationist and realistic policies, and for foreign policy elites proposing differing plans for withdrawal from Vietnam to be portrayed as out of touch isolationists appealing to the isolationist impulses of a war-weary public. The administration's discourse then presented itself as appealing to the noblest instincts of the US and opposing an isolationist elite who did not believe in the US public or a US identity's best qualities and could not navigate a supposedly changed world.

The chapter's analysis begins with an examination of a 'moral strength' construct in the administration's discourse that also serves as an introductory overview of the rest of the chapter. The next section explores the historical reproduction of US 'psychological character', particularly the idea that the US public inherently vacillated between internationalism and isolationism. The analysis then turns to the concept of 'lasting peace' and its co-constitution with US 'psychological character', then introduces the administration's 'appeasement discourse'. Following this, the chapter takes a closer look at the administration's appeasement discourse and its relationship with withdrawal from Vietnam. Next, the chapter returns to the concept of 'moral strength', as well as 'credibility', within the context of administration's 'appeasement' and 'isolationism' discourses. Finally, the chapter examines the administration's portrayal of so-called 'internationalists' as isolationists.

Moral strength in the 'silent majority': An introductory overview

The administration's discourse often referred to concepts such as 'moral strength' or 'moral stamina'. Though at first these tropes seem as if they should fit in with the

administration's broader moralistic rhetoric (i.e. the 'ideological character' and 'ethical responsibility' discourses), they appear to have functioned in a different manner. This discourse revolved around the American public having, or needing to have, the moral stamina or strength to meet the challenges of (world) leadership. Rather than constructing an immoral 'Other' which the US needed to triumph against (as in the 'vocal minority'/'ideological character' discourse), the 'danger' presented in this discourse was the absence of US world leadership. The 'moral' aspect appears to have been concerned with the duty/responsibility of leadership – a not unfamiliar exceptionalist trope in US foreign policy discourse (often contrasted against the 'moral' responsibility to lead by example, by first perfecting the US at home before being involved with the world) (see e.g., Hilfrich, 2012: 83).

A key difference between the Nixon administration's isolationism discourse and previous invocations of isolationism, was that the administration was advocating reduced international involvement by giving allies more responsibility while accusing policymakers of isolationism who were not advocating withdrawal from the world, many of which had helped build the postwar international order (as is covered in the final section of this chapter). The moral stamina/strength concept was constructed as underpinning an ability in the American people (or their spirit, psyche, etc.) to embrace international leadership as a necessary burden for the sake of US (and world) security. The administration claimed this spirit had been "strained" (hence the desire for isolationism) but was still intact.

However, according to the administration, the policymakers advocating immediate or negotiated withdrawal from Vietnam (i.e. what the administration called isolationism), were further straining this aspect of the US public's 'character', threatening to incite a reversal away from international engagement towards isolationism. Moreover, these policymakers threatened US 'credibility' internationally.⁶³ In this sense, there was a construction of US world leadership as a natural, innate inclination of the American public – that is, its 'moral strength' – and

⁶³ And with it the credibility of the US nuclear deterrent, so the administration claimed – see the discussion on 'psychological domino theory' in the 'Spatio-Temporal Othering' chapter

a necessity for US survival, along with the ‘threat’ to this leadership from foreign policy elites (though none advocated such a position).

This moral strength was, in one sense, presented as a historical example to other states. According to Nixon, America had been “the hope of the world” since the “time of its birth”, and “stood for spiritual and moral values that far transcended the strength and the wealth of the nations of the Old World” (Nixon, Feb. 2, 1971). However, beyond just being an example, there was “a great deal of moral strength and fiber still left in this country” (ibid.). This moral strength was presented as a characteristic of the US public. Historically, this strength had been a part of “continuing [American] revolution”, a “spiritual and moral strength that has made us what we are” (Nixon, Oct. 23, 1972). However, this “spirit of moral courage – the ‘Spirit of ‘76’ which powered the American Revolution was “something that is happening today” (Nixon, July 3, 1971). Nixon stated that it was “heartening” to know that “there are a people – a people who are strong, a people who have backbone, a people who will stand up for America, a people who believe in the religious and moral values that made this country great” (Nixon, Nov. 3, 1972).⁶⁴

Though there is some conceptual overlap with the concept of a US ideological or national character, the ‘psychological character’ discourse covered in this chapter is concerned with the character or disposition of an American public. In other words, while the ‘moral strength’ construct was rooted in and reproduced the concept of a US ideological character – particularly notions of a US character that was morally and spiritually strong in various historical contexts such as the American revolution – the analysis in this chapter is concerned with how these ‘historical’ qualities were constructed as being innate in American public. Using the above words of Nixon, the ideological identity was characterized by historical constructs in the discourse such as the “spiritual and moral strength that has made us what we are”, while the moral strength in the ‘psychological character’ discourse was the “spirit of moral

⁶⁴ NB. ‘Stand Up for America’ was George Wallace’s 1964 and 1968 campaign slogan, a reworked version of his gubernatorial campaign slogan ‘Stand Up for Alabama’ (see: Carter, 2000: 204; for the racist campaign brochure of same name, see: ibid., pp. 297-8).

courage” that was “happening today” – the strength that the administration’s discourse was constructing as innate within the individuals he was addressing.

The existence of a ‘moral strength’ concerning international leadership in the ‘silent majority’ was constructed by the administration’s discourse as inherent, the obverse to the public’s other innate trait, a propensity to drift towards isolationism. While Vietnamization and the Nixon Doctrine were presented as necessary reactions to the “turmoil and uncertainty of war” which “strained America’s spirit”, policymakers advocating immediate or negotiated withdrawal from Vietnam were “apostles of defeatism and self-doubt” who would “chip away at the moral strength of America” (Nixon, Aug. 17, 1971). The administration situated itself on the side of international leadership and moral strength against the ‘defeatist’ and ‘isolationist’ policymakers (though none of them were advocating withdrawal from international leadership).

This discourse represented more than just warnings about heeding the ‘lessons’ of history. The administration was not simply urging the public to avoid repeating the mistakes of ‘interwar isolationism’. Rather, this discourse constructed the public’s propensity for isolationism and internationalism as being inherent in the individuals that comprised the public. In this sense, inborn traits shared by all Americans were constructed as causal elements. The tendency for the US public to veer from international engagement to isolationism was not just visible in the historical record, these qualities were what had *made* the US the “hope of the world” and *pushed* it into isolationism. Therefore, the ‘silent majority’ was constructed in the discourse as having to fortify itself against withdrawal, and to embrace what Nixon would call the “challenge of peace” (Nixon, Aug. 17, 1971). These constructed ‘traits’ served to legitimize the Nixon Doctrine.

In a rather populist twist of rhetoric, the administration warned the public that it must not “turn inward and fall prey to a new isolationism, great as the temptations may be to do that. Nor can the American people pass the responsibility of leadership solely to government” (Nixon, Aug. 17, 1971). Instead, the people must fulfil their responsibility to themselves because that “is the secret of America’s strength” (ibid.). This strength of character and confidence was dependent “upon

the individual character of 200 million Americans” (ibid.). The “challenge of peace” would “require all the character we have”, but Nixon said “[y]ou and I know that the American people have what it takes” (ibid.). However, this would have to be done despite the “many voices running down America” and those “selling America short” (ibid.). Nixon and individual Americans would have to work against these defeatists and self-doubters and “join together to awaken the moral power that is the heritage of a hard-working people and, by our example, let America be the light of the world” (ibid.). In this manner, the administration was presented as uniquely suited to lead the US public as it possessed the appropriate understanding of the American people and their character.

The administration’s ‘psychological character’ discourse used the concept of ‘moral strength’ as a rhetorical fulcrum in its petitions against isolationism and for Vietnamization and the Nixon Doctrine. Along with the US public’s supposedly innate disposition to lurch between internationalism and isolationism, the administration constructed this ‘moral strength’ within the public. The administration’s discourse presented this strength as a characteristic that, when appealed to, could tip the public back towards internationalism (i.e. supporting the Nixon Doctrine and Vietnamization). A ‘moral strength’ characteristic was often co-constituted with the ‘known’ tendency of the US public to waver on foreign policy approaches. Furthermore, as covered in the ‘lasting peace’ and internationalists-turned-isolationists sections below, the administration also ‘linked’ this ‘moral strength’ to US world leadership – the strength at home to do what was morally right was constructed as underpinning US leadership and protection of the world. In this manner, the conflict in Vietnam was rhetorically shifted to a conflict within a US public.

Knowing the public: Construction of a vacillatory US ‘psychological character’

A central aspect of the administration’s ‘psychological character’ discourse was reproducing as given an understanding of the US public as being inherently prone to swinging between internationalism and isolationism. Regardless of whether this

was accurate, or the administration believed it, the administration's discourse reproduced the concept as natural. Furthermore, irrespective of whether this understanding informed the Nixon administration or previous administrations in their decision-making processes, the idea that a knowable 'psychological character' of the US public predisposed them to such oscillation has been a consistent trope in US foreign policy discourse. Indeed, the perpetuation of this trope through the administration's discourse would appear to be a reperformance of the 'epistemic realism' and 'US exceptionalism' discourses. Specifically, this could be conceptualized as the intersection of these discourses: the reproduction of a US public fluctuating between the two poles of US exceptionalism, but presented as an objective fact that is historical, measurable, and can be accommodated via responsible, pragmatic foreign policy approaches.

The administration's discourse clearly described a public tempted to swing towards isolationism in the wake of the sacrifices of Vietnam, with Nixon saying in 1969:

Now we should never underestimate the appeal of the isolationist school of thought. Their slogans are simplistic and powerful: "Charity begins at home. Let's first solve our problems at home and then we can deal with the problems of the world." This simple formula touches a responsive chord with many an overburdened taxpayer. It would be easy, easy for a President of the United States to buy some popularity by going along with the new isolationists. (Nixon, June 4, 1969)

And again, in 1971:

Our experience in the 1960's has underlined the fact that we should not do more abroad than domestic opinion can sustain. But we cannot let the pendulum swing in the other direction, sweeping us toward an isolationism which could be as disastrous as excessive zeal. (Nixon, Feb. 25, 1971)

Understanding the US public as being liable to swing from internationalism to isolationism predated the US wars in Vietnam and Korea. As scientific public opinion polling gained prominence during WWII and immediately afterward, the application of this polling was influenced by policymakers' concerns that attitudes similar to the public's supposed interwar disenchantment with international affairs would follow the 'internationalism' of WWII (Holsti, 1992: 441). These fears were likely compounded by the work of Thomas Bailey and, particularly, Gabriel Almond – who furthered a thesis that public opinion was volatile and largely ignorant of foreign

affairs (ibid., pp. 441-3). In this manner, the ‘understanding’ of the US public came to rely heavily on an empirical approach of systemic polling data and a normative concern that the public may become isolationist and lead the US to repeat the ‘failures’ of the ‘isolationist’ interwar period (ibid. p. 441).⁶⁵

A ‘scientific’ knowledge of the US public developed as data on public opinions and voting behavior expanded and was then analyzed using increasingly sophisticated methodologies with which analysts could aggregate and examine trends (Holsti, 1992: 443). Most of this knowledge was collected and analyzed based upon the underlying premise that public foreign policy beliefs were structured by a single internationalist/isolationist continuum, similar to a liberal/conservative classification system (ibid.). This construction of the US public was pervasive enough by 1950 that the Truman administration’s internal discourse was, as Casey (2005) demonstrates, shot-through with concern that public campaigns to promote aspects of NSC-68, and later in the year, to discursively tie the USSR to the conflict in Korea, could tip the US into a ‘war psychosis’ with consequent calls for preventative war against the Soviets before it lapsed back into withdrawal (pp. 661-2, *et passim*).

Nixon’s campaign analysis and data relied on similar understandings about the public’s views of foreign policy, particularly related to perceptions of McGovern’s policies as isolationist (see e.g., the political postmortem of the election in Khachigian, Nov. 7, 1972). The campaign also relied on an understanding of isolationism as having ethnic and regional roots, similar to the work of Samuel Lubell. The ‘fact’ of a certain ethnic group being isolationist was then used in detailed population analyses. For example, a memo written ahead of the 1972 Wisconsin primary tied isolationism to German settlers, and anti-communism to Irish and Polish Catholics, with population estimates (e.g. “23% of Wisconsin’s population is of foreign stock”) used to formulate a strategy (Magruder, Feb. 11, 1972).

⁶⁵ One of these interwar ‘failures’ was often held to be ‘appeasement’ as is covered in the ‘Lasting Peace’ and ‘Appeasement Discourse’ sections below.

The notion that isolationism was always a possibility – and usually not far off the horizon – undergirded newspaper reports on foreign policy surveys as well. For example, a 1960 article in the *Boston Globe* about a “Joint Commission on Mental Illness and Health” survey quoted the report as showing “fewer than one in 10 expressed concerns for community, national, or world problems” (Burns, June 1, 1960). The report speculated that this lack of concern may be “a symptom of political immaturity combined with persistent undercurrent [sic] of isolationism, resulting in a renunciation of social responsibility” (ibid.).

Furthermore, the vagueness of isolationism as a term was also very apparent in newspaper reporting of foreign policy surveys – particularly after US involvement in Vietnam began. For example, a *New York Times* report from 1967 quoted a Harris poll as finding “a kind of pre-Pearl Harbor isolationism that militates against all American commitments abroad” (*New York Times*, Sep. 4, 1967). Due to “bewilderment about American aims, impatience with the war’s pace, and ‘increasingly, an unmistakable if still inchoate tide of opposition’ to American involvement” in Vietnam, the poll covering the previous two months had found “a decline from 72 percent to 61 percent in American support for the war” (ibid.). In this context, the public not supporting the war in Vietnam was equivalent to isolationism of the interwar variety.

In 1969 a *New York Times* article covering a Gallup poll reported a rise in isolationism (*New York Times*, Feb. 23, 1969). Although 72% of those surveyed answered the US should “work closely with other nations”, 62% believed the US should not send troops if “a situation like Vietnam were to develop in another part of the world” (ibid.). A 1970 Harris poll article quoted the pollster as saying the “overtones of a new isolationism can be seen” because 32% of respondents said they felt “we have learned from Vietnam [...] To mind our own business, stop policing the world” (*New York Times*, Feb. 6, 1970).

Regardless of whether the polls were correct, or indeed if the reporting of the polls was accurate, the point of the above examples is to demonstrate that this concept – that the US public was apt to lapse from internationalism into isolationism – was prevalent in the media beyond the public discourse of politicians. The Nixon

administration's discourse reproduced this trope, the 'psychological character' of the US, as it utilized it to present Vietnamization and the Nixon Doctrine as the appropriate courses of action. That this perception of US 'character' was often reproduced as a product of 'scientific' knowledge likely helped it remained generally unquestioned.⁶⁶

'Lasting peace': Withdrawal and appeasement

Along with encouraging the 'silent majority' to support Vietnamization and the Nixon Doctrine, the administration also asked for its help in perpetuating a 'lasting peace'. Essentially, this was an election discourse – Nixon made a swing through college campuses in late 1970 in aid of the midterm elections and deployed this discourse in the run up to the 1972 presidential election. The basic logic of the discourse was: concluding the Vietnam War through Vietnamization would end the cycle of wars which had occurred for generations and give rise to a 'lasting peace' by preventing future wars; the president needed support, either in Congress or as president to pursue this peace.⁶⁷ Though this discourse occasionally invoked isolationism directly, it invariably deployed the tropes of appeasement or 'Munich', either by referencing them by name or employing the supposed logic of their 'lessons' – discursive tropes used in presidential rhetoric since the end of WWII.

By the late 1940s the dominant Cold War narrative employed by policymakers held that, not only was there an internationalism/isolationism dimension by which to classify foreign policies, but also that this US isolationism had led to the US rejection of the League of Nations and made the country complicit in Chamberlain's 'appeasement' of Hitler in the Munich Agreement during the interwar period (Dawley, 2003: 347; Johnstone, 2011: 13-4). By 1948, calling someone or something an appeaser or appeasement carried almost as much pejorative force as the terms

⁶⁶ Of course, plenty of individuals did question the usefulness of the term isolationism, e.g. Wheeler, 'The Majority of Americans Are Isolationists', Nov. 26, 1971; Roskin, 1972; and George Lundberg's 'Semantics in International Relations' from 1948 (Lundberg, 1949).

⁶⁷ The term 'lasting peace' was not specific to just this discourse, however. Nixon used the term incessantly throughout his presidency, like a rhetorical tic, even mentioning it in his resignation speech.

isolationist or isolationism, such were the negative connotations surrounding 'appeasement' (Lundberg, 1949: 234-5). However, the rhetorical force of 'appeasement' in US discourse did not spring solely from Munich in 1938 or WWII.

In early 1950 – and particularly as the Korean War started later that year – the ubiquitous appeasement tropes had begun to coalesce into a discourse similar to that which the Nixon administration would later deploy. In 1950, as in the Nixon administration's discourse, there were two basic threads to appeasement discourse: one aspect linked with US 'credibility' and the other with the 'psychological character' of the US public. During the Korean War the Truman administration feared that not crossing the 38th parallel would be seen as 'appeasement', a bid to not provoke a Soviet or Chinese response, which would in turn damage US credibility (Gaddis, 2005: 109). When Chinese intervention did occur, abandoning South Korea was framed in a similar way: as 'appeasement' which would in turn damage US 'credibility' (ibid.). Just before the Korean War, as the Truman administration attempted to sell the country on elements of NSC-68, it based its tactics on polling of the US public. This public was seen in this context as prone to wild oscillations between 'appeasement' in the form of some sort of nuclear disarmament agreement with the USSR and preventative war against the USSR (Casey, 2005: 659, 663).

Before moving on with the analysis of 'credibility' and 'psychological character' in the Nixon administration's appeasement discourse, it is worth taking a closer look at what political functions this discourse may have achieved.

Appeasement discourse: Getting in and getting out of Vietnam

While the Nixon administration used isolationism discourse to vilify policies of immediate or negotiated withdrawal while it promoted its own foreign policy of reduced international responsibility, it also employed an interrelated appeasement discourse to justify the pursuit of an 'honorable peace' in Vietnam (i.e. its withdrawal plan). The tropes of 'Munich' and 'appeasement' had also been present in the public discourse of policymakers as US involvement in Vietnam began to

escalate in 1965.⁶⁸ The Johnson administration had early on used the concept of ‘appeasement’ to present its policies in Vietnam as the middle of the road, a “patient” employment of “reasoned agreement” between “larger scale war” and “appeasement” (Johnson, March 24, 1964). This continued into 1965 as Johnson spoke of “peace” while not “gambl[ing] on either aggression or appeasement” (Johnson, June 7, 1965). Vice President Humphrey also described the US policy in Vietnam as not seeking “territory” or “dominion”, but also cautioning that “[b]ecause one seeks peace there is no reason to assume he seeks appeasement” (Humphrey quoted in ‘Humphrey Answers Pickets’ (UPI), July 12, 1965).

Meanwhile Senators like Thomas Dodd (D. - CT) continued to defend Johnson’s policy by denouncing withdrawal as appeasement (see e.g., Sterne, June 13, 1965). Dodd had earlier in the year given a speech in the Senate deriding the “new isolationism”, which he described as the belief that the US globalist anti-communism had caused the US to become “overextended” (a view that has also been called ‘limitationism’, see, e.g., Gati, 1968: 134-5, *et passim*) (Dodd, 1967 [Feb. 23, 1965]: 32). Dodd had declared that all of the “corollaries of the new isolationism” added up to a policy of “‘appeasement’, subtle appeasement, unintentional appeasement, to be sure, but appeasement nonetheless” (*ibid.*, pp. 32-3). One of these “corollaries” was withdrawal from Vietnam, which would be a “humiliation” and “may indeed be the second shot heard round the world” after which many other allied states may negotiate with the “enemy” (i.e. communist states) (*ibid.*, p. 34). Furthermore, Roskin (1972) quotes Dodd as saying in the same speech “The situation in Vietnam today bears many resemblances to the situation just before Munich” (p. 120).

By 1970, the Nixon administration was offering a foreign policy approach wherein the US was “entering a period of negotiation with the Soviet Union” (which still required a “strong” US) and a Vietnam policy which Nixon claimed would “end” the war – while using ‘appeasement’ discourse (Nixon, Oct. 29, 1970). As in the Sept.

⁶⁸ For the possible effects the analogies of ‘Munich’ and ‘appeasement’ may have had on the Johnson administration’s decision-making process regarding escalation in Vietnam see: Khong, 1992: 174-205.

16, 1970 speech covered in the next section, Nixon also invoked a recent history of wars, WWI through Vietnam, before addressing the type of 'peace' he sought. Using the same appeasement discourse, Nixon spoke of ending the war (and "win[ning] a peace") in a way that would "discourage those that might start another war, and that will bring peace in the Pacific and increase the chances that we can have peace in the world for a full generation" (ibid.). By "discourag[ing] those who will start another war" the administration, Nixon said, was ensuring a "generation of peace for Americans" (ibid.).

The Nixon administration used an appeasement discourse (in conjunction with an interrelated isolationism discourse) – which only a few years earlier had been used to justify or advocate intervention in Vietnam – as a means to promote a delayed withdrawal. In 1964-5, 'appeasement' was a pejorative directed at non-interventionism in Vietnam. The 'logic' of this argument was similar to the domino theory (if not its intellectual foundation): if the spread of communism was not halted, other states in Asia (and beyond) would fall, necessitating the US fighting more wars in less favorable conditions (Khong, 1992: 184). By 1969-70, 'appeasement' was characterized as withdrawing from Vietnam immediately, as opposed to when Vietnamization was complete. Staying in Vietnam until an 'honorable peace' could be attained would entail a relatively minor fight and would ensure 'lasting peace' for generations across the world as (communist) enemies of the US would be discouraged from starting more wars. Thus, according to the administration's discourse, the comparatively minimal hardships of ending the war in Vietnam through Vietnamization – i.e. turning the fighting of the war over to the South Vietnamese – would prevent fighting future wars. This also allowed the administration to present this plan to young people as one which would save them from having to fight in these future wars.

The administration's discourse appealed to a 'silent majority' for support in achieving a 'lasting peace' – rather than the 'easy' peace of appeasement. In this appeasement element of the discourse, what was asked of this 'silent majority' was 'moral strength' (or courage, conviction, etc.). Indeed, this is a key feature of appeasement discourse in general: making a stand and showing strength early will

prevent future aggression and hardship.⁶⁹ These appeals both reproduced and were founded on an understanding that the US public (or at least a majority of it) was prone to a desire for withdrawal from the world, but could be coaxed into interventionism by virtue of an innate ‘character’ predisposed towards leadership and moral rectitude.

Perceptions of strength: Credibility and character

In the Nixon administration’s discourse, the ‘credibility’ and ‘psychological character’ aspects of appeasement were linked. Indeed, for Schell (1976), a ‘linkage’ between domestic and international *perceptions* was an inherent aspect of the administration’s interpretation of the ‘credibility’ doctrine (p. 133) (covered in the ‘Ethical Responsibility’ and ‘Spatio-Temporal Othering’ chapters). In its ‘vocal minority’ discourse, the administration minimized protestors and demonstrators by constructing them as an immature minority. In this manner, the ‘vocal minority’ helped discursively reproduce a US ideological character, but also served as an example of what was *not* a US psychological character. The ‘silent majority’ was capable of international leadership, and thus peace, by virtue of its innate psychological character. Furthermore, the supposedly innate propensity of the ‘silent majority’ to assume the necessary burden of world leadership would ensure the US chose – and was perceived by the world as choosing – the courageous, though difficult, path of Vietnamization rather than the ‘easy’ way out of a quick or negotiated withdrawal.

This linkage can be seen in the administration’s appeals to the ‘silent majority’ for unity and strength at home in aid of projecting strength internationally:

⁶⁹ Steele (2013), using Kierkegaard to theorize the limits of the Self in neoconservatism, notes that in neoconservative thought the definition of the US Self (viewed as a story, a “historical project presented through time”) is constantly dependent on struggle with an Other (p. 168). These moments of ‘struggle’ are episodes in the past held to be moments of weakness where the US failed to forcefully assert its power, moments which produce “dread” – anxiety or insecurity – including ‘Munich’ and the ‘Fall of Saigon’ (ibid., pp. 168-9). Neoconservatives also accused Nixon and Kissinger of appeasement and even isolationism for pursuing a foreign policy based on multipolarity. It is interesting that from the outset the Nixon administration used appeasement discourse to denote the *strength* of its approach, including Vietnamization.

And as we consider the problem of peace abroad, let us turn to a closely related problem, that of peace at home. The United States cannot lead the forces of peace abroad unless we can demonstrate that we can restore peace and keep peace right here at home in the United States of America. (Nixon, Oct. 30, 1970)

Conversely, indications of 'weakness' or disunity on the domestic front could likewise project a lack of strength internationally (i.e. 'appeasement'). Invoking the violent, rock-throwing 'vocal minority', Nixon stated that "[v]iolence in America today is not caused by the war", the demonstrating 'vocal minority' were "the same thugs and hoodlums that have always plagued the good people" (Nixon, Oct. 31, 1970). These people who "terrorize decent citizens" had "gained such prominence in our national life", Nixon averred, because of "a single word: appeasement" (ibid.). Nixon called on the "great silent majority of Americans of all ages, of every political persuasion, to stand up and be counted against appeasement of the rock throwers and the obscenity shouters in America" (ibid.). This "appeasement", Nixon stated, "has gone too far and it's time to draw the line" (ibid.). Nixon went on, "Since 1776 this great Nation of ours has never knuckled under to the tactics of terror, abroad or at home, and we are not about to start in the year 1970" (ibid.). Again, Nixon called on the 'silent majority' to help by electing a Congress that would "put across the programs that will make America strong enough to bring a full generation of peace abroad and strong enough to turn back the threat to peace and order at home" (ibid.).⁷⁰

A linkage between 'credibility' and both aspects of a US character constructed by the administration, 'vocal minority' and 'silent majority', is also evident in an address Nixon gave at a university – Nixon directed most of the speech towards a young, student audience – in the early fall of 1970:

A nation that condones blackmail and terror at home can hardly stand as the example in putting an end to international piracies or tensions that could explode into war abroad. (Nixon, Sept. 16, 1970)

⁷⁰ Though not explicit in the administration's discourse, as Schell (1976) points out, the rhetoric about 'appeasement' also used the 'logic' or 'lesson' of appeasement itself: that it was preferable for the administration to demonstrate strength in the relatively minor matter of protestors rather than at the level of war with another state (pp. 133-4).

Nixon claimed that, while the “blackmail” and “terror” was the work of a ‘vocal minority’, whose “existence is not new”, what *was* new was the “extent of the passive acquiescence, or even fawning approval” of this minority in “some fashionable circles” (Nixon, Sept. 16, 1970). These ‘fashionable circles’ acquiescing to and approving of the terror of a ‘vocal minority’, appears to be a broad jibe at foreign policy elites. The discourse not only minimized the views of demonstrators, but also portrayed elites, whose views broadly overlapped with those who wanted negotiated or immediate withdrawal from Vietnam, as condoning domestic blackmail. This aspect of the discourse also seems to have homogenized foreign policy elites and their views – which will be covered in more detail in this chapter’s final section.

Nixon went on to state that what was more corrosive to a society than “violence itself” was “the acceptance of violence, the condoning of terror, the excusing of inhuman acts in a misguided effort to accommodate the community’s standards to those of the violent few” (Nixon, Sept. 16, 1970). With a brisk rhetorical turn, Nixon shifted this discussion of society and violence to American universities as a microcosm of this “misguided effort” (ibid.). As in other speeches, Nixon claimed that if “the war were ended today” the “moral and spiritual crisis in the universities would still exist” – in the form of the “destructive activists of our universities and colleges” which were a “small minority” (ibid., cf. neoconservative thought). Indeed, these “disrupters” reflected “unfairly on those millions of students [...] who do respect the rules, and who go on to make constructive contributions to peaceful change and progress in this country” (ibid.).

Continuing to speak about the youth and elites, Nixon stated that, just as it was “wrong” for the young “to fall into a slavish conformity with those who falsely claim to be the leaders of the new generation”, it would also “be a tragedy for the young generation simply to pursue the policies of the past” (Nixon, Sept. 16, 1970). Nixon then drew on an issue he described as being at the confluence of the “uniformly” chanted “slogans of protest” and the “policies of the past”: ending the war in Vietnam (ibid.). Nixon argued that all Americans wanted to end the war, and that

“[e]nding the war is not the issue” (ibid.). Here, as in other speeches, Nixon invoked the ‘lasting peace’/appeasement trope. Presenting a history of wars, Nixon stated:

We have been in four wars in this century. We ended World War I. We ended World War II. We ended Korea. The great question is how we end a war and what kind of peace we achieve. (Nixon, Sept. 16, 1970)

The choice Nixon presented was between ending the war “in a way that will contribute to a just and a lasting peace in the Pacific, in Vietnam, and, we trust, also in the world” and ending the war immediately, which “would encourage those who would engage in aggression and would thereby lead to a bigger and more terrible war later, would be peace at too great a price” (Nixon, Sept. 16, 1970). Americans, particularly the ‘silent majority’, were presented as wanting peace, but also susceptible to wanting immediate withdrawal – and turning inwards – according to the administration’s discourse. The administration constructed this ‘silent majority’ as ‘true’ Americans, who only needed to draw on the ‘moral strength’ covered in first section. Nixon ended the Sept. 16, 1970 speech with an appeal for this strength:

I can truly say to you here today you are the heart of America – and the heart of America is strong. The heart of America is good. The heart of America is sound. It will give us – you will give us – the sound and responsible leadership that the great promise of America calls for – and in doing so, you will give my generation what it most fervently hopes for: the knowledge that your generation will see that promise of the American dream fulfilled. (ibid.)

In late 1972 the administration took this same discourse further, invoking a ‘realist’ world (i.e. a world of states pursuing their interests). While the US continued to “make progress for peace”, the administration averred “we must keep America strong” (Nixon, Oct. 22, 1972). The US would need this strength because there was no challenge “greater than that of keeping the peace in a dangerous world in which nations have conflicting interests” (ibid.). According to the administration, this strength was necessary both to maintain “America’s place” in the world, which no other states could assume, and because it was necessary for peace (ibid.). Using isolationism discourse Nixon declared that:

[t]here is no such thing as a retreat to peace. There is no such thing as peace without order. And if America were suddenly to slash away her defensive strength and abdicate her responsibilities as the major power of the free world, we would be retreating. (ibid.)

Rather than explicitly invoking a communist threat to the US, the administration constructed a threat to world peace that would exist in the absence of US world leadership, and which needed to be underwritten by the US public's 'moral strength'. Moreover, the discourse presented a 'history' of wars, all of which the US had "ended". The administration advocated that achieving peace in Vietnam via Vietnamization – i.e. ending that war – would create a 'lasting peace' in the world, as long as the order and strength of US world leadership remained. Ending the war in Vietnam was not presented as a next step in an ongoing ideological battle against communism, but as the end of a generation of war since WWI. In this manner, the administration's discourse constructed a multipolar world stabilized by the presence of a powerful US, whose power (and willingness to deploy it) would be reconfirmed after the US ended its involvement in Vietnam according to the Nixon timetable. The US public only needed to muster their innate strength of moral character long enough to end the war in Vietnam instead of understandably opting for an 'easier' peace 'now'. Thus, the discourse portrayed the supposedly inherent fickleness of the US public sympathetically, as a 'fact' to be dealt with.

'Internationalists' into 'isolationists': Portraying withdrawal as threatening

None of the foreign policy elites the administration labeled as 'internationalists who had become isolationists' supported complete withdrawal from the world. Most only advocated withdrawal from Vietnam after a settlement was negotiated between the US and North Vietnam (and/or the NLF⁷¹). This section highlights the views of some of the most prominent Senators who advocated a withdrawal from Vietnam that the administration labeled as isolationist. Specifically, the section

⁷¹ The National Liberation Front, or 'Viet-Cong', were an indigenous, communist insurgency group in South Vietnam.

demonstrates how the administration's discourse constructed non-Vietnamization withdrawal as a threat.

During the Johnson administration, Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (D. - MT) had initially not advocated military withdrawal until a diplomatic solution had been found that would assure South Vietnamese independence, and never publicly broke with the president, unlike Senators Fulbright, Morse, and McCarthy – though Fulbright initially only called for a halt in bombing to allow negotiations to progress (Ritchie, 2003: 192; Woods, 1998: 88-9). However, as the war expanded during the Johnson administration, Mansfield had privately urged the president for a cease-fire, negotiations, and the unilateral withdrawal of US forces – as other Senators, such as Frank Church (D. - ID) and Joseph Clark (D. - PA) would do publicly shortly thereafter (Ritchie, 2003: 194).

Mansfield, in hopeful expectance of settlement, gave the Nixon administration time to withdraw from Vietnam in 1969 – indeed it was Mansfield that coined the term the 'Nixon Doctrine' after Nixon's statements in Guam – whilst privately telling Nixon that if the administration announced a ceasefire and troop withdrawal, Mansfield would publicly announce that Nixon had made the "best possible end of a bad war" (Ritchie, 2003: 197). Chair of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations William Fulbright (D. - AR) also initially gave the administration the benefit of the doubt regarding its pledge to leave Vietnam and took the administration at its word when Nixon and Kissinger told him they would not escalate the war (Woods, 1998: 184-5). However, in February 1969 when Fulbright established an ad hoc Subcommittee headed by Senator Symington with a mission to determine where the US could potentially be committed to providing US military aid (and to compel the executive branch to seek congressional approval for such commitments), Nixon directed the administration to equate the national commitments resolution passed by the subcommittee with the isolationist Bricker amendment from a decade earlier (ibid., pp. 187-9). This criticism showed up in newspaper articles, for example: "Critics say the proposed [national commitments] resolution would be almost as dangerous a limitation on presidential authority as was the proposed Bricker

amendment – that it represents senatorial pique and carries a strong whiff of isolationism” (Bartlett, May 20, 1969, quoted in C.R. p. 15126).

In late May of 1969, Fulbright denounced ‘militarism’ and the military-industrial complex, which helped set the stage for Nixon’s response in his June 4, 1969 ‘Address at the Air Force Academy’ in which he warned of isolationism and unilateral disarmament (Woods, 1998: 192-4; Nixon, June 4, 1969). Fulbright responded in late June by announcing a series of Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings on Vietnam (ibid., p. 203). At the beginning of October 1969 Fulbright announced his support for Moratorium Day, saying it was “in the best American tradition of peaceful protest for the redress of grievances” (ibid., p. 205).⁷² The administration’s response to Moratorium Day, via VP Agnew, was discussed in the ‘Ideological Character’ chapter.

On April 30, 1970, Senator George McGovern (D. - SD) introduced the McGovern-Hatfield amendment to the Military Procurement Authorization bill. The amendment, had it passed, would have prohibited the use of funds for American military operations in Southeast Asia after December 31, 1970, and would have set a timetable for withdrawal of combat troops by June 30, 1971 (unless an official war was declared by Congress) (Knock, 2003: 112). In the wake of the administration extending military “actions” into Cambodia on April 30, 1970 (the same day the amendment was proposed) and the subsequent killings of four students at Kent State University during protests over the “action”, the amendment picked up momentum (ibid., pp. 114-5; Nixon, April 30, 1970). In June of that year the Senate repealed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution (the legal justification for the war adopted in August of 1964) and passed the Cooper-Church amendment, ending the incursion into Cambodia (ibid., p. 115). On September 1, 1970, the McGovern-Hatfield amendment failed to pass, but the bill garnered 39 ‘yeas’ (32 Democrats, 7 Republicans) against 55 ‘nays’ (21 Democrats, 34 Republicans) (ibid., p. 116). As Knock (2003) notes, the amendment “was the first serious attempt by either house

⁷² As mentioned in the ‘Ideological Character’ chapter, Moratorium Day was not simply the expression of a ‘vocal minority’ of kids and radicals, as in the administration’s construction. Fulbright was Southern, deeply conservative, opposed to the ‘counterculture’ of the late 60s, and had a long history of supporting segregationist legislation (Woods, 1998: 194; 2003: 155).

of Congress to reclaim its exclusive grants to raise and support armies and to declare war” (p. 112).

In response to the amendment, the Nixon administration again let loose Vice President Agnew. On August 17, 1970, Agnew gave a speech to the Veterans of Foreign Wars Association, which addressed the amendment directly. The next day the New York Times carried the story on the front page, above the fold, along with a four-column excerpt of the speech. In his remarks, Agnew described the bill as a “blueprint for the first defeat in the history of the [US]”; said the bill’s sponsors were “horribly wrong”; and wondered if McGovern and Hatfield “really give a damn” (*New York Times*, Aug. 18, 1970). He also spoke of “the isolationists in the Senate”, using the term three times, asking: if they had “pondered the full consequences of America’s defeat”; if “the isolationists [are] content to let [...] Asia go by default to the Communists because they lacked the perseverance to see this through”; if “the isolationists considered the impact of the abandonment of this one ally upon America’s other allies around the world”; and if the nation could then be trusted again if it were to “slink home, defeated” from Vietnam (*ibid.*).

When the Senate rejected the McGovern-Hatfield amendment, Mansfield put forward his own bill which called for the total withdrawal of troops from Vietnam (after American prisoners of war had been freed), which passed the Senate 57-42 (Ritchie, 2003: 199). Though the House rejected the bill, a compromise version was passed which called for an end to US military operations “at the earliest practicable date” – the first time a 20th century Congress had demanded an end to a war the US was currently fighting (*ibid.*). On May 11, 1971, Mansfield reintroduced one of his earlier proposed amendments, calling for the withdrawal of 50% of US forces in Europe to further pressure the administration (Olson, 1995: 223). The legislation was defeated 61-36 in the Senate eight days later (*ibid.*, p. 224).

A pragmatic response

Similar to how the administration framed the gradual withdrawal of Vietnamization (called ‘peace’ by the administration) as the opposite of the appeasement of

immediate withdrawal, the administration also used more explicit isolationism discourse to accuse foreign policy elites advocating immediate or negotiated withdrawal of being isolationists. Again, as the administration used an 'appeasement' discourse predicated on 'making a stand' to advocate their withdrawal plan, it also accused elites (many of whom had helped construct the postwar order, and all of whom continued to support it) of isolationism for wanting immediate or negotiated withdrawal from Vietnam. Furthermore, these invocations of appeasement and isolationism were made in aid of a broader foreign policy approach of reduced international responsibility (the Nixon Doctrine).

The administration's discourse about elites being isolationists was closely interwoven with the 'silent majority' construct and its supposed predisposition towards oscillation between interventionism/internationalism and isolationism. The so-called 'internationalist' elites accused of isolationism were not portrayed as direct threats to the US. Instead, they were often presented as subject to the same foreign policy vacillation as the 'silent majority'. The 'danger' constructed by this discourse was that if the US was allowed to become isolationist – that is, if the 'silent majority' embraced the isolationist proposals of these elites – then the US and the world would be under threat. The administration described proposals from these policymakers for immediate or negotiated withdrawal from Vietnam as isolationism while also generally referring to these elites as isolationist – even if the individual did not necessarily advocate other forms of withdrawal from the world.

Acknowledging isolationism in the public provided a means of constructing the Nixon Doctrine as a pragmatic response. Regardless of how accurately these elites may have represented the views of the US public, the discourse constructed them as lacking the knowledge to implement the correct policies. Again, the 'fact' of the public's drift towards isolationism was constructed by the discourse as an objective basis for the Nixon Doctrine. Nixon stated he was

certain a Gallup poll would show that the great majority of the people would want to pull out of Vietnam. But a Gallup poll would also show that a great majority of the people would want to pull three or more divisions out of Europe. And it would also show that a great majority of the people would cut our defense budget. (Nixon quoted in Sulzberger, March 10, 1971)

However, argued Nixon, polls were not the “answer” – instead one “must look at the facts”, before mentioning Soviet nuclear strength (Nixon quoted in Sulzberger, March 10, 1971). In this sense, the administration presented itself as having a better understanding of what the US needed to do and how the world worked than the US public, based on ‘objective’ factors.

The administration mentioned the popularity of isolationism and immediate withdrawal from Vietnam many times (e.g. Nixon’s June 4, 1969 ‘Address at the Air Force’). Nixon stated he could have “foolishly” ended the war in Vietnam “on his very first day in office” (Nixon quoted in Sulzberger, ‘March 10, 1971). However, he wanted the “American people to be able to be led by me, or by my successor, along a course that allows us to do what is needed to help keep the peace in the world” (ibid.). Unless the administration could make “people understand” that the US must “tend to our obligations”, remember its “alliances” and “interests”, and let other states know the US has “both the capability and the will to defend these allies and protect these interests”, the US would “simply retreat into isolationism” (ibid.). Moreover, if the US were to quit “playing a responsible role in the world [...] on that day this will become a very unsafe world to live in” (ibid.).

Through constructing an inherently fickle US psychological character, the administration was able to portray the Nixon Doctrine as a rational, pragmatic response to a vacillatory US public and construct elites as both unable to appropriately react to the danger of isolationism in the public and as victims of the same drift towards isolationism. The administration’s discourse did not Other foreign policy elites as un-American or actively threatening. Instead, these elites were characterized as failing to understand the necessity for world leadership and/or not understanding how the world or history ‘worked’. When asked about isolationism in early 1971, Kissinger replied:

There is some danger that disappointed idealism may turn into withdrawal and some of the most disillusioned people at the moment are precisely those groups who deserve the greatest credit for having shaped the previous period of foreign policy. (Kissinger quoted in Feb. 26, 1971, *FRUS*, V.1, D. 86 [transcript of a CBS Morning News interview])

Nixon, while discussing how the “great internationalists of the post-World War II period have become neo-isolationists” and why “many former internationalists developed neo-isolationist tendencies”, said he believed the answer in part was “simply that Americans, like all idealists, are very impatient people. They feel that if a good thing is going to happen it should happen instantly” (Nixon quoted in Sulzberger, March 10, 1971). As mentioned in the previous section, the administration’s discourse avoided referring to specific foreign policy elites or the particulars of their policy proposals. Instead, they were lumped together in broad groups such as ‘neo-isolationists’, with their policies likewise homogenized into categories like ‘neo-isolationist tendencies’.

When talking about these elites Nixon described the need to overcome “isolationism”. However, rather than constructing their views using polls, real or imagined, Nixon used broad generalizations to construct two types of isolationist policymakers – the “superdove” and the “superhawk” mentioned in the ‘Spatio-Temporal Other’ chapter – whose policy views created a “vicious cross fire” (ibid.). The ‘superhawk’ became “fed up with the war” and wanted to “pull out and build up our strength at home” (ibid.). Their “logic favored isolationism”, but they would “support the President even if that same superhawk isn’t sure he wants to see us do what we are doing” (ibid.).⁷³

The ‘superdoves’, on the other hand, “opposed our commitment in Vietnam and *all* world responsibilities – Korea, the Philippines, the Middle East, Europe. This was the kind of isolationism of those who felt the United States shouldn’t have played any role at all in Southeast Asia from the very start” (Nixon quoted in Sulzberger, ‘, March 10, 1971, emphasis original). Furthermore, for these ‘superdoves’ “Vietnam was a distant, small, foreign country in just the terms that Chamberlain mentioned concerning Czechoslovakia at the time of Munich” (ibid.). As indicated by the Munich reference, these ‘superdoves’ were portrayed as not heeding the lessons of history. By contrast, Nixon stated that he “knew too much about history, about Asia, about the basic feeling in the United States”, so much so that he knew if the

⁷³ As covered in the ‘Spatio-Temporal Othering’ chapter, the ‘superhawk’ discourse was used in the context of nuclear policies.

US failed to achieve its “limited goal” of letting a small state exist as a democracy without having “a Communist government imposed on it”, then the US would “not help the cause of peace” – which had been the purpose of all US involvement in wars from WWI onwards, according to Nixon (ibid.). However, ‘peace’ for Nixon was a “relative peace” which did not “mean everyone will be disarmed, safe and loving everyone else. [...] But it is realistic” (Nixon quoted in Sulzberger, ‘Excerpts from Interview’, March 10, 1971).

The threat constructed by the administration’s discourse was the US becoming ‘isolationist’, rather than the ‘isolationist’ elites themselves. This discourse depended on a construction of the US public’s ‘psychological character’ being inherently disposed to oscillation between internationalism and isolationism. The ‘danger’ – that the US would become ‘isolationist’ – was constructed as stemming from improper or inadequate leadership. The US public would only slide into isolationism if an administration allowed it by promulgating ‘isolationist’ policies such as withdrawing from Vietnam immediately or through a negotiated settlement. The Nixon administration claimed to understand the world and the US public in such a way that they could safely lead the US. The US public would be accommodated via reduced responsibilities and eventual withdrawal from Vietnam⁷⁴, but the administration would not embrace the isolationism of foreign policy elites as this would lead to the dangerous scenario of an ‘isolationist’ US. Finally, the concept of ‘linkage’ is evident in this discourse. US world leadership (a necessity for world peace/safety) was predicated on appropriate domestic leadership by the president.

⁷⁴ E.g., “Our experience in the 1960's has underlined the fact that we should not do more abroad than domestic opinion can sustain. But we cannot let the pendulum swing in the other direction, sweeping us toward an isolationism which could be as disastrous as excessive zeal. Thus, while lowering our overseas presence and direct military involvement, our new policy calls for a new form of leadership, not abdication of leadership. This policy must not only reflect a changed public will. It must shape a new consensus for a balanced and positive American role. [...] The Nixon Doctrine will enable us to remain committed in ways that we can sustain. The solidity of domestic support in turn will reverberate overseas with continued confidence in American performance” (Nixon, Feb. 25, 1971).

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated how the Nixon administration's isolationism discourse constructed a 'psychological character' of the US public. Reproducing the 'scientifically' based knowledge that the US public was inherently prone to foreign policy vacillation also constructed the administration's Nixon Doctrine and Vietnamization policies as being rational reactions to natural, knowable factors. Furthermore, by presenting 'moral strength' as an accepted aspect of the US character, the administration's discourse constructed the 'silent majority' as being capable of pursuing, and naturally inclined to choosing, international leadership. Invoking this 'moral strength' in a 'historical' context by using the rhetoric and 'logic' of appeasement, the administration's discourse compared finishing Vietnamization with taking a moral stand in Munich, and thus equated immediate or negotiated withdrawal from Vietnam with appeasement and isolationism. Furthermore, this discourse allowed the administration to portray foreign policy elites advocating negotiated or immediate withdrawal as being isolationists – both by construing their decisions as being based on the desire to withdraw from the world completely and through warnings that isolationist policies such as immediate withdrawal would tip the US public, 'naturally' inclined to vacillation, towards isolationism.

More broadly, the 'psychological character' discourse allowed the administration to differentiate the Nixon Doctrine from other foreign policy approaches, while simultaneously maligning them. The supposedly rational approach of the Nixon Doctrine to respond to potential isolationism in the 'silent majority' was co-constituted with a 'world' in which other states were rational, with their own interests and responsibilities. Not only did the supposed realities of this 'world' enable the Nixon Doctrine to be presented as prudent and rational, but it also distinguished the Nixon Doctrine from previous Cold War foreign policy approaches. The 'globalism' of the early Cold War had relied on portraying the US and the free world as engaged in an ideological battle with a generalized 'communism'. Rather than individual states with interests, the US was constructed as being at war with an

ideology that could, and would, spread throughout the world if it were not stopped wherever it presented itself.

By constructing 'globalism' in this way, the administration was able to portray it as guilty of causing the over-extension (including Vietnam) which was making the 'silent majority' increasingly wary of international involvement. According to this logic, the policy of containing 'communism' wherever it arose had led to the US becoming over-extended, fighting other states' battles, and ultimately causing the trauma of Vietnam. Contrasted against such a policy, the Nixon Doctrine could then be presented as both a reasonable reaction to a 'changed' world and a rational approach which interpreted this world in an analytical, scientific manner. Of course, this 'globalism' was always in practice – if not always in theory or rhetoric – a policy of limits. The escalations of committing substantial numbers of troops and weapons to a shooting war in Vietnam under the Johnson administration had been a break with this limited Cold War 'globalism'.

In this manner, the 'psychological character' discourse appears to have constructed a separation between the Nixon Doctrine and previous Cold War foreign policy approaches, while simultaneously giving some protection to the administration from accusations of isolationism. In the mid-1960s the approaches of the Nixon Doctrine and Vietnamization likely would have been called isolationism, possibly by the same elites the Nixon administration was now accusing of isolationism.

However, the Nixon administration presented its foreign policy approach as being a bulwark *against* isolationism – in some respects a sop to a public inherently prone to isolationism and wearied by Vietnam, but also with the superior 'knowledge' that this potential isolationism had to be checked by preventing any isolationist policies from being enacted. In a similar vein, the administration utilized the appeasement discourse often used to bolster interventionist arguments (as had been done in the early years of US involvement in Vietnam) to defend its plan to turn the Vietnam War over to the South Vietnamese. The reproduction of the 'natural' fact that the US public was psychologically inclined to shift between internationalism and isolationism was at the center of all these interrelated discourses.

Chapter eight: Conclusion

This thesis asked what isolationism *did* during the Nixon administration's prosecution of the Vietnam War. Of course, such a question necessarily presupposes that isolationism could 'do' anything. The terms 'isolationism' and 'isolationist' were intertwined with much of the Nixon administration's political discourse. Indeed, the administration appeared to call almost everyone an isolationist at some point, including people even the administration labeled "internationalists of the post-World War II period". This begs the question, what does this term mean, why would the administration use it, and did it retain its pejorative power? Certainly, isolationist had long been derogatory by the late 1960s, but how was it possible for the Nixon administration to label seemingly disparate foreign policy approaches isolationism? Definitions of isolationism had been vague for decades by the 1960s as well, so why would a presidential administration use such a term in foreign policy discourses?

Beyond a few broad historical referents, a rather consistent feature of isolationism discourse was its general logic. Isolationism was presented as something bad from the American past, an approach or an attitude that would harm the US if it occurred again in the present – in a new age where things had changed. Moreover, isolationism was often portrayed as either very likely to happen soon or as already happening. In short, isolationism was framed as a security discourse – it almost always followed a particular grammar and was presented as a threat. For this reason, securitization theory seemed a good fit for understanding and exploring such a discourse. And as security discourses in securitization theory are conceptualized as performative – as creating (in)security and reaffirming identity – this thesis hypothesized that an isolationism security discourse could create things as well.

However, isolationism was very much situated in a particular context. Of course, there is the empirical context – it was deployed in texts and speeches during the

Nixon administration. But there appeared to be broader contexts in which this discourse operated, predicates for the threat of isolationism to make sense. First, why would it be a threat? The isolationism itself was not the issue, per se, but what would follow from it. This threat to the US from other states, who would necessarily destroy allied states without US involvement and who would then eventually encircle and destroy the US itself. The knowledge that this would happen was generally undisputed and presented or reproduced through each invocation of isolationism as accepted fact. Second, why was isolationism almost always spreading or just about to spread through the US public? Why the inevitability of isolationism in the US? With each use of isolationism another knowledge was likewise presented or reproduced as unremarkable and accepted. It was taken simply as fact that the US was not just exceptional, but that it wavered between methods for spreading its moral example. This was presented as a history and an immutable aspect of a US identity: the US had withdrawn from the world in the past so it could shine as an example to the world, and the US had gone into the world to inculcate and defend this example, and this pattern could and would oscillate.

For these reasons, this thesis theorized the administration's isolationism discourse as drawing on and reproducing these two interrelated knowledges – conceptualized, following Hansen (2006), as the structuring discourses. These two discourses, 'epistemic realism' and 'US exceptionalism', were held to have performed the important function of grounding isolationism discourse, of maintaining continuity with a known narrative. The discourses were formulated as part of this thesis's methodology, which, again drawing on Hansen (2006), postulated the administration's isolationism discourse as functioning through the four 'basic discourses' of 'Ethical Responsibility', 'Spatio-Temporal Othering', 'Ideological Character', and 'Psychological Character'. These discourses, and the interactions between them and the structuring discourse, were further situated in a Foucauldian genealogy. This framework allowed the thesis to conceptualize the constitution and objectivization of isolationism, as well as the reperformance of the 'rules' which sustain them, through these discourses. The use of this post-structuralist foundation allowed for an epistemological and methodological

understanding that non-linguistic and extra-discursive phenomena can only be comprehended through discursive practices. That is, objects cannot constitute themselves as such outside of discourse (Campbell, 2001 443-444; Hansen, 2011: 360).

In terms of securitization theory, this thesis posited an audience that was both constituted as an audience through securitizing moves and which bore an empirical relationship to the individuals it was said to represent. This approach allowed for the audience to be conceptualized as being both constructed through security discourse and exercising some agency through surveys, polls, and elections. However, the audience was not theorized as extra-discursive – any ‘input’ from individuals was theorized as being constituted as speaking for a constructed subjective audience

The thesis broadly agreed with Balzacq (2005) and Stritzel’s (2007) critique that there are two mechanisms at work in securitization theory: self-referential performativity and social effects involving ‘pre-existing’ actors, audiences, and contexts. However, in this thesis these mechanisms were conceptualized as necessarily in conflict. Though a securitization can constitute ‘new’ meanings, through this process it may also re-perform, reconstruct, and reinforce existing ‘context’. A securitization was theorized as intertwined with the larger, structuring discourses in which it operates. By situating securitizations within larger systems or assemblages of utterances, practices, and historical contingencies (i.e. structuring discourses), this thesis argued there is less theoretical reliance on speech acts (cf. McDonald, 2008: 568-569).

Drawing on Butler (2014) and Weber (1998), this project argued that in the case of isolationism in particular, securitizations should be theorized as iterative rather than single speech acts. In other words, securitizations should be theorized as performative, understood as “the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (Butler, 2014: 2; Weber, 1998: 79-81). As the analysis of isolationism discourse in this thesis demonstrated, the relationship between US identity and security was a complex blend of history, myth, perceptions of public opinion, domestic politics, and foreign policymaking. While

isolationism as a discourse was rather flexible, the foundational myths and history of a US character were more rigid – and were constituted as immutable. This thesis argued that much of the power of isolationism discourse arose from its seemingly eternal presence in the narration of an American identity. The reinforcement of US isolationism as ‘real’ – as a historical or innate characteristic – through security discourses enabled the construction of isolationism as a threat or potential threat which could then be used to define the limits of domestic or foreign policy.

Within these narratives of US identity, foreign policy and (in)security were theorized in this thesis as being constituted relationally, with the practices, knowledge, and authority associated with such relationships objectified by neighboring historical and institutional discourses (cf. Veyne, 1997: 181). Securitizations helped place the threatened identity at the center of this narrative – “the spot from which the world is looked at” – while also constructing a periphery that was constituted as the position where the threats were located (Huysmans, 1995: 55). Thus, the center was constructed as “an unquestionable given”: a ‘natural’, pre-discursive identity (ibid.). Using securitization theory, this thesis explicitly applied temporality to Huysmans’ framework. Through constructing a temporal relationship between two events (or identities) within a narrative – i.e. constituting historicity – the events or identities were given meaning and became understandable in the context of the narrative (Somers, 1994: 617; Campbell, 1998b: 34).

Four discourses

The concept of a narrative of identity, how that identity should be understood and expressed were central to the Nixon administration’s isolationism discourse. Throughout the subsets of the discourse conceptualized in this project were the discursive construction and reproduction of a US moral character, the inherent disposition of the US public, knowledges of how the world allegedly functioned, and an inherent, immutable moral mission of the US. This thesis argued that the administration’s isolationism discourses represented attempts to use isolationism as a pejorative discourse, while also redefining what was and was not an isolationist foreign policy. As the US public and some foreign policy elites demanded

withdrawal from Vietnam and deliberated the reduction of US involvement in the world, the Nixon administration offered a foreign policy approach constructed as a reaction to these sentiments. At the same time, the administration's discourse designated competing policies (particularly regarding withdrawal from Vietnam) as isolationism, while assuring the public that its policies would be moving away from globalism towards reduced involvement.

This thesis conceptualized four subsets of the Nixon administration's isolationism security discourse as having performed several interrelated functions.

In the first analytical chapter, this thesis conceptualized an 'Ethical Responsibility' isolationism discourse, arguing that in a manner similar to Morgenthau, the Nixon administration advocated that the US must pursue its interests in aid of a "transcendental purpose" in order to provide meaning to the operation of its foreign policy (cf. Williams, 2005a: 187). This effectively allowed a national interest to become a strategy for harnessing unstable questions about responsibility to more durable aspects of responsibility, including tropes and identity constructs connected with the two structuring discourses (cf. *ibid.*, p. 188). In particular, this chapter argued that the administration's discourse drew on a 'transcendental purpose' in the form of exceptionalist tropes and 'lessons learned' from the interwar period and WWII, and concepts of responsibility based on these tropes and lessons – including the importance of international engagement. Furthermore, the chapter argued that the administration's discourse used these elements of US identity, along with concepts alleged to be objective – including the nature of the US public, the limits imposed by this nature, and the constraints of a 'changed' world, along with the supposedly universal rules under which the international realm operated, to construct moral and exceptionalist responsibilities to a US Self and the world.

According to the administration, isolationism in this discourse was still constituted as dangerous if it were to become the active policy of the US – something immediate withdrawal from Vietnam could exacerbate as the US would lose confidence in itself and withdrawal from the world. The administration's foreign policy approach was constructed by this discourse as a pragmatic expression of a US

moral example which would require the moral courage of the public to support it, as it still required US international involvement, but which also presented a reduction of US responsibility as both appropriate and acceptable. The threat in this discourse was in not expressing a US moral example at all by *embracing* – rather than simply desiring – isolationism. In other words, if the US public had moral courage and supported a US moral example by supporting Vietnamization and the Nixon Doctrine, then the administration could accommodate the war-wearied public through reduced responsibilities in a ‘changed’ world, while also promoting a US international role that would continue to protect the US.

The chapter analyzing a ‘Spatio-Temporal Othering’ discourse argued, essentially, that the administration’s discourse constituted different – though imbricated – worlds. The discourse was conceptualized as having constituted one world in which a nuclear shield was necessary to defend the borders of the free world against Soviet aggression. In another, multipolar, world, states pursued their own interests, and conflicts were merely sites of conflicting interests. This isolationism discourse constructed the presence of a nuclear shield as both a necessary defense for the US and the free world, and as a means of allowing the US to reduce its international responsibilities. On one hand, the discourse predicated reduced responsibility as an appropriate response to a newly multipolar world (and as a pragmatic reaction to potential isolationism in the US public). However, on the other hand, its nuclear shield discourse constructed a threat from the USSR that appears more appropriate to a bipolar world. This flexibility, the chapter argued, allowed the discourse to present US international engagement as important in two different ways.

First, the discourse constructed a nuclear deterrent as necessary for US safety and as a means of international leadership and protection of the free world. Unilateral disarmament was then presented as isolationism. Second, maintaining US international engagement and leadership was constructed as being both part of the US moral character and necessary for US security. According to this logic, an approach of only defending the US with nuclear weapons and reducing US involvement internationally was constructed as isolationism. Through linking US international engagement to a US moral character and credibility, the Nixon

discourse constructed international involvement as a crucial factor underpinning an effective US foreign policy. The administration's discourse used isolationism to reinforce the necessity for this international involvement.

This chapter also argued that the concept of 'credibility' was particularly important in this discourse. According to this discourse, immediate withdrawal from Vietnam would endanger South Vietnam and cause allied states to doubt the ability or willingness of the US to protect them from communist aggression. Only adhering to Vietnamization, asserted the administration, could ensure that US credibility was preserved. The US would withdraw its troops from Vietnam but would do so in a way that would leave South Vietnam capable of defending itself. This would assure allied states and the US public that the US honored its word and was capable of international leadership. Furthermore, the adversaries of the US would be shown that the US was willing to do whatever was necessary to fulfil its commitments – including, according to this logic, using nuclear weapons.

The central locus of this discourse was the necessity of upholding a US moral character and self-confidence as this was constructed as underpinning US international involvement – including engagement with states based on their interests and demonstrating a resolve to use nuclear weapons defensively against an alleged worldwide Soviet threat – which the administration presented as critical. While a general desire for isolationism by a public tired of war and globalist anticommunism was presented as understandable, the discourse constructed a US public which, if it lost faith in itself and its moral character, would become isolationist and thus existentially threaten the US.

The 'Ideological Character' chapter conceptualized an isolationism discourse that actively avoided invoking the terms 'isolationism' and 'isolationist'. This chapter argued that this discourse constructed the Nixon Doctrine and Vietnamization as appropriately 'American' and in keeping with a moral US character – a moral or ideological character that was co-constituted through the discourse. The chapter also argued, as a means of defining this ideological character, that the discourse constituted a 'vocal minority' that was un-American, using an anticommunist discourse that broadly overlapped with George Wallace's discourse. Essentially, this

discourse attempted to present immediate withdrawal from Vietnam as un-American because such a policy would not only threaten the security of the US, but it would also deviate from a US moral character – which itself could be dangerous to the US.

This chapter argued that this discourse did not use the terms isolationism/t for three general reasons. First, one of the target audiences for this discourse appears to have been a segment of the public perceived by the administration as isolationists – broadly, Wallace voters in the South. Second, and interrelated with the ‘psychological character’ discourse, the administration constructed a desire for isolationism as understandable and an American ‘trait’ to be pragmatically dealt with. Third, as the ‘silent majority’ constructed in this psychological character discourse included Wallace voters and the ‘silent majority’ was presented as *the* American people, a drift towards isolationism in the public was constructed as inherently American – essentially as a function of the US exceptionalism discourse. As the ‘vocal minority’ was constructed as un-American, it was not portrayed as specifically isolationist because this was a supposedly American characteristic.

As this chapter argued that the allegedly inherently isolationist Wallace voters were constructed as belonging to a ‘silent majority’, some of the administration’s anti-demonstrator and anti-civil rights discourse likely appealed to non-Wallace voters. This ideological character subset of the discourse appears to have attempted to justify the administration’s foreign policy approach by invoking a moral US character. This discourse emphasized the importance of fulfilling commitments and maintaining US honor, not just because it was the appropriately ‘American’ course of action, but also as a means of providing a defense against communism and general anti-American sentiments. The Nixon administration’s discourse leveraged this aspect of the discourse to appeal for support in gradually withdrawing from Vietnam by making it a matter of honor and security – specifically protection from the threat of a generalized communism, represented externally by an ideological communist Other and internally by a ‘vocal minority’ Other.

The final analytical chapter, ‘Psychological Character’, conceptualized a discourse that reproduced a ‘scientifically’ based knowledge that the US public was inherently

prone to foreign policy vacillation also constructed the administration's Nixon Doctrine and Vietnamization policies as being rational reactions to natural, knowable factors. The chapter also argued that this discourse constructed 'moral strength' as an accepted aspect of the US character. The administration's discourse constructed the US public as being both historically and currently capable of supporting a policy of international engagement and leadership. This discourse invoked this 'moral strength' in a 'historical' context by using the rhetoric and 'logic' of appeasement. Specifically, the administration's discourse compared finishing Vietnamization with taking a moral stand in Munich, and thus equated immediate or negotiated withdrawal from Vietnam with appeasement and isolationism. This, in turn, allowed the administration's discourse to portray foreign policy elites advocating negotiated or immediate withdrawal as being isolationists – both by construing their decisions as being based on wanting to withdraw from the world completely, and through warnings that 'isolationist' policies such as immediate withdrawal would tip a US public 'naturally' inclined to vacillation towards isolationism.

This chapter posited that this discourse allowed the administration to differentiate the Nixon Doctrine from other foreign policy approaches, while simultaneously maligning them. Interrelated with the spatio-temporal othering discourse, the supposedly rational approach of the Nixon Doctrine to respond to potential isolationism in the 'silent majority' was co-constituted with a 'world' in which other states were rational, with their own interests and responsibilities. Not only did the 'realities' of this supposedly changed world enable the Nixon Doctrine to be presented as prudent and rational, but it also distinguished the Nixon Doctrine from previous Cold War foreign policy approaches. Previously, this 'globalism' had constituted the US as at war with an ideology that would continue to expand across the world if it were not confronted at every turn.

Through constructing globalism in this way, the administration was able to portray this previous policy as guilty of causing the over-extension which was making the 'silent majority' increasingly wary of international involvement. Contrasted against this construct of globalism, the Nixon Doctrine could be presented as both a

reasonable reaction to a 'changed' world and a rational approach which interpreted this world in an analytical, scientific manner. Through this function, this chapter argued, the discourse appears to have constructed a separation between the Nixon Doctrine and previous Cold War foreign policy approaches, while simultaneously giving some protection to the administration from accusations of isolationism. Even as late as the mid-1960s the approaches of the Nixon Doctrine might have been called isolationism, possibly by the same elites the Nixon administration was now accusing of isolationism. However, this discourse constructed the Nixon Doctrine as a defense against isolationism and presented it as a concession to a public that, wearied by Vietnam, might slide back towards isolationism. This discourse also deployed an appeasement discourse, often used to bolster interventionist arguments (as had been done in the early years of US involvement in Vietnam), to defend its plan to gradually withdraw from Vietnam.

Durability

A key aspect of the Nixon administration's discourse – explored in detail in the 'psychological character' discourse – was the reproduction of the 'fact' of the US public as being inherently prone to swinging between internationalism and isolationism. Whether or not this is accurate, or if the administration believed it, the discourse reproduced this concept as 'natural' – seemingly a function of the 'US exceptionalism' structuring discourse. Furthermore, as the administration's discourse constructed this 'trait' as known and real through constituting its foreign policy as a pragmatic reaction to it, it underpinned its policy with the authority of both rationality and knowledge of how the world functioned. Indeed, the perpetuation of this trope through the administration's discourse appeared to be a reperformance of the 'epistemic realism' and 'US exceptionalism' discourses. Specifically, this could be conceptualized as the intersection of these discourses: the reproduction of a US public fluctuating between the two poles of US exceptionalism, but presented as an objective fact that is historical, measurable, and can be accommodated via responsible, pragmatic foreign policy approaches.

Again, it is not clear – and possibly not even knowable – if the administration believed this supposed trait of the US public was real and that the potential for isolationism presented a threat. This is not to imply that the administration necessarily constructed (in)security cynically or in bad faith. In many respects, it seems as though the administration may not have had much choice in referring to this oscillation between foreign policy approaches and the inherent danger of isolationism. The administration did not deploy its discourse in a vacuum. Not only did the discourse function in relation to events at the time and within a generally accepted historical record, but it also functioned in relation to myriad other discourses and subjectivities. As explored in this thesis, to propose something as a threat necessitated engagement with generally accepted tropes and notions of history, identity, knowledge, and contextual events.

While the notions that the US public was prone to waver between isolationism and internationalism, and that isolationism was negative are open to contestation, these were durable discourses. Though, as this thesis argued, the Nixon administration deployed isolationism discourse to define the contours and limits of its foreign policy approaches, this discourse still necessarily attached themselves to broader discourses. This thesis does not argue the way these discourses were used was deterministic – there was and certainly remains room for contestation. If anything, the Vietnam era was the site of much contestation of what the US role in the world should be and how this related to a US moral identity. However, most of the Nixon administration's discourse generally worked within these established discourses. Regardless of whether the administration saw isolationism as a discourse to be manipulated or if it simply saw itself as dealing with the objective realities of the world, it nevertheless utilized a discourse which constructed and reperformed histories, identities, and subjectivities through the constitution of isolationism – and its allegedly concomitant effects – as threats to the existence of the US.

Epilogue: An enduring discourse

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, invocations of isolationism in US public discourse have persisted beyond the Vietnam era and continue today. There was a

resurgence of the usage of isolationism discourse in the campaign for the 2016 presidential election and throughout the Trump administration. In the months before and during the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, invocations of isolationism in US political discourse once again increased. One site of contestation and locus of isolationism discourse was the Senate passing a \$40 billion Ukraine aid bill in May of 2022 – debates reminiscent of those about foreign military assistance in the Vietnam era. At time of writing, this situation is still fluid and ongoing – as, it appears, is the discourse. This final section will briefly survey some aspects of this contemporary isolationism discourse and broadly reflect on why the study of Nixon-era discourse remains relevant.

As with the discourse covered in this thesis, contemporary isolationism discourse reproduces isolationism as inherent in US history, character, and foreign policy, as well as something that cyclically reappears between bouts of internationalism. For example, as one newspaper article put it, “Americans’ reluctance to get involved in foreign entanglements goes back to the founding of the country”, with “outright isolationism” being “most pronounced in the American First movement of the 1930s” and has since “flared after periods of deep involvement in wars overseas” (Feldmann & Bryant, Feb. 24, 2022). In the aftermath of the Republican-led Senate managing to pass the Ukraine aid bill, one columnist outlined US history as having periods when “isolationism was resurgent”, including

after 1898, [which] were relatively brief and generally occurred after long wars: the 1920s-1930s (after World War I), the 1970s (after the Vietnam War), the 1990s (after the Cold War), and the 2010s (after the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan). But invariably a fresh crisis comes along to snap America out of its reverie: Pearl Harbor, the Iranian hostage crisis, 9/11, the rise of the Islamic State, and now the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Each time that happens, most Americans realize that the costs of abdicating international leadership are greater than the cost of exercising it. (Boot, May 24, 2022)

It appears contemporary isolationism discourse still constructs oscillation between isolationism and international engagement as innate in a US character or identity, similar to the psychological character concept explored in this thesis. Moreover, isolationism remains such a vague term that it can be, as in the quote above, applied to periods of substantial US international engagement (e.g. “the 1990s”).

Furthermore, as this quote indicates, the invasion of Ukraine is presented as both a wake-up call to nascent isolationists – along the lines of Pearl Harbor – and a reinforcement of the necessity of US international engagement.

As with the Vietnam-era isolationism discourse, the ethical responsibility and spatio-temporal othering aspects of the contemporary discourse are interrelated. Specifically, the question of the best way for the US to fulfil a moral responsibility to itself lingers – with, broadly, two answers proffered. Along the lines of the enduring US exceptionalism discourse explored in this thesis, the solutions generally mooted are that either the US should protect itself by being involved in the world, if not leading it, *or* that the US should focus on its own domestic problems. Which course of action is posited as appropriate is in turn based on the speaker’s conception of how the world operates, what and where international dangers are, how these threats relate to the US, and, often, the most prudent avenues for the allocation of money and resources.

Conflicting approaches to this responsibility can be seen in the fractured foreign policy approaches within the Republican party – as one newspaper article states, it represents “a skirmish that pits Trump-style, ‘America First’ isolationists against more traditional hawkish Republicans” (Hounshell & Askarinam, Feb. 23, 2022). In this reading, the intra-party contestation centers on “establishment Republicans [who] venerate the party’s Cold War stance of ‘peace through strength,’ a position best articulated by Ronald Reagan” versus Trump-aligned politicians such as Ohio Republican Senate candidate JD Vance, who believe “that the fate of Ukraine is none of America’s concern. [... And] that corrupt elites have conspired to embroil Americans in pointless wars” (ibid.).⁷⁵ In Vance’s comments are the populist echoes of George Wallace, who often attributed American ills to “a select elite cult” in academia and the media, as well as in the two major political parties because, he was fond of saying, there was not “a dime’s worth of difference between them” (Wallace quoted in Lardner, Sep. 15, 1968).

⁷⁵ Vance’s twitter feed is also littered with accusations of “elite” failures on foreign policy issues, among others.

In the discourse of the ‘establishment’ Republicans, there is reproduction of the importance of ‘traditional’ post-WWII US leadership as well as a dismissal of the rhetoric of Trump-aligned politicians (cf. criticism of Wallace and his supporters as “galoots on the loose” (Lardner, Nov. 3, 1968)). Of course, much of this disagreement likely dates back to debates over the role of the US internationally, particularly regarding NATO and the Middle East, during the Trump administration. As Republican Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell – a senior Kentucky politician who appears very much in line with the ‘establishment’ wing of the Republican party – stated, just after passing the Ukraine military assistance bill and in response to a question about ongoing isolationism in the Republican party:

I don't feel it's dangerous. You know, I've been here a long time, and I've watched a lot of campaign rhetoric that seems to disappear once you're sworn in, and you actually are responsible for governing and confronted with the facts and reality. So I have a tendency not to get overexcited about what A or B may be saying in some primary somewhere in America. I think this is one of those issues where, right and wrong – it's pretty clear. [...]

For a lot of younger people in America, this is the first time they've ever seen a clear battle between right and wrong. To a lot of people, Afghanistan was murky. Iraq was murky. It just didn't seem like a clear choice. I thought both those wars were necessary, by the way, but it was confusing to people. I don't think anybody's confused about this. [...]

I don't think anybody's confused about who the bad guys are and who the good guys are, and whether or not America really ought to play that kind of role it has traditionally since World War II: being the leader of the free world in opposition to this kind of authoritarianism. (McConnell quoted in Edmondson, May 21, 2022)

As for the “campaign rhetoric” McConnell is speaking of, much of the foreign policy discourse coming from Trump-aligned politicians is as inconsistent as the Trump administration’s foreign policy approaches. Some of this discourse, for example from Reps. Marjorie Taylor Green, Paul Gosar, and Matt Gaetz, is largely incoherent as foreign policy – lurching between conflicting positions seemingly to suit specific political attacks – and appears to be almost exclusively domestic political discourse similar to Trump’s flexible discourse (see examples of this discourse in, e.g., *The Business Insider*, Feb. 25, 2022).

While the contemporary discourse does not appear to directly reflect the ideological character discourse explored in this thesis, there do seem to be some overlapping functions. In the contemporary discourse there are various strands of divisive isolationism rhetoric which attempt to discipline the interpretation and reproduction of US identity and history. Much of this aspect of the discourse characterizes the positions of Trump-aligned politicians as ‘isolationism’, but also presents this modern isolationism – and the apparent affinity of Trump and Trump-aligned politicians seem to have for Russian President Vladimir Putin and right-wing authoritarianism (e.g. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s rule in Hungary) – as similar to the so-called interwar isolationists’ attraction to fascism.

In one sense, aspects of the discourse focused on the reproduction of a US Self – particularly from centrist or establishment politicians, right and left – seek to reinforce the notion that the US is on the side of good, as evidenced by history (particularly WWII), a role that must continue (see McConnell’s above comments). As Democratic Rep. Tom Malinowski said of Ukraine in late February of 2022, “Yes, it’s a small country far away. So was Poland and Czechoslovakia before World War II and you know what came of dismissing the importance of those countries. We’re not doing this for Ukraine we’re doing this to defend a principle, a set of rules, that has protected us for decades” (Malinowski, Feb. 23, 2022). Such a discourse is clearly intertwined with implicit invocations of ‘appeasement’ as well.

The other aspect of this discourse – the comparisons between Trump-aligned individuals and fascism/isolationism – does not seem to be as prevalent in the discourse of establishment politicians (though in the above quote, McConnell contrasts “the free world in opposition to this kind of authoritarianism” (McConnell quoted in Edmondson, May 21, 2022)). However, media interpretations from mainstream, reputable outlets such as the *Washington Post*, have explicitly made the fascism/authoritarian connection: “this faction of the GOP [the Trump-aligned wing] has modeled itself on the isolationists of the 1930s, who didn't bother to hide their admiration for that era's fascist aggressor” (Rubin, March 3, 2022). For Rubin, one of “the many positive consequences of the Ukraine crisis is the death of wrongheaded and ultimately dangerous Republican nostalgia for isolationism. Now

perhaps Republicans will also discard their infatuation with authoritarianism” (ibid.; cf. the ‘wake-up calls’ referenced above). Another journalist stated “Many of the original ‘America Firsters’ in 1940 and 1941 were actually pro-Nazi. Likewise, many of today’s MAGA militants [i.e. Trump-aligned individuals] are actually pro-Putin. They favor a hard line against leftist dictatorships [...] while advocating de facto appeasement of Russia’s right-wing dictatorship” (Boot, May 24, 2022). Because of this, according to Boot, “it’s hard to take much satisfaction from the rejection of isolationism among most Americans and even most Republicans. If Trump takes power again, Putin’s fellow travelers will again be in control of U.S. foreign policy – and Ukraine, NATO and the rest of the ‘Free World’ will be out of luck” (ibid.).

Another columnist also makes the fascism/authoritarian connection: “Right-wing authoritarian movements occasionally claim to be opposed to particular wars at particular times. Charles Lindbergh and the fascist America First movement set themselves against US involvement in the First [sic] World War” (Berlatsky, Feb. 24, 2022). However, Berlatsky also moves beyond simply using the isolationist pejorative. In this reading “Trump, [pundit Tucker] Carlson and their partisans aren’t really anti-war. They aren’t even really isolationist. They want a world in which authoritarians can employ military force without international pushback or condemnation” (ibid.). Essentially, in this aspect of the discourse Trump-aligned individuals are constructed as outside of a traditional US identity. They are presented in this discourse as not actually isolationists – which, though often constituted as potentially dangerous, has historically been constructed as an inherently American trait in the exemplar exceptionalist sense – and thus are not able to lay claim to a moral justification of simply wanting to protect the US example from foreign entanglements.

The logic at the root of this criticism is that the ‘true’ American Self is decidedly anti-Nazi/fascist. This attack attempts to detach positive, or at least understandable, connotations of isolationism from constructions of US identity. Specifically, this type of isolationism – one said to be rooted in pro-authoritarianism – is dissociated from the ‘shining example’ type of isolationism that has historically been presented as inherently American, but naïve, outdated, and potentially

dangerous. In other words, this strand of the discourse seems to offer support for Putin and/or lack of support for Ukraine as not only isolationism, but a non-American strand of isolationism or simply pro-authoritarianism masquerading as isolationism. The contemporary isolationism discourse seems to be performing a novel disciplining function in which it is characterizing this 'isolationism' as a means of supporting authoritarianism as much as, if not more than, a call to devote increased attention to domestic issues.

As shown in his earlier quote, McConnell's discourse has downplayed invocations of isolationism as merely campaign rhetoric that is divorced from "facts and reality" (McConnell quoted in Edmondson, May 21, 2022). In this appraisal, the Republican party has "sort of an isolationist wing, and I think some of the Trump supporters are sort of linked up with the isolationists – a lot of talk out in the primaries about this sort of thing" (ibid.). In one sense, McConnell seems to dismiss 'isolationism' as primary-related politicking – i.e. rightward movement by primary candidates to capture votes – rather than a serious policy. However, beyond his comments about an "isolationist wing", McConnell also acknowledged invocations of isolationism were more than simply grandstanding for far-right voters, saying before the Ukraine aid bill passed that there has "always been isolationist voices in the Republican Party [...] It won't create a problem, we'll get the job done" (McConnell quoted in *The Independent*, May 16, 2022).

McConnell seems to both dismiss isolationism talk in the Republican party as primary politics and affirm that there are proponents of isolationism in the party, however inconsequential. It is possible that McConnell is differentiating Trump-aligned politicians, with their generally inconsistent and domestic-focused discourse, from individuals such as Sen. Rand Paul, who while often aligned with Trump, has a history of anti-interventionism.⁷⁶ Paul delayed the Ukraine aid bill by a week after providing the only objection in the Senate (Litvan & Wasson, May 12, 2022). Though his objection in the Senate was over the bill's language, elsewhere Paul made it clear his main concern was the cost of the bill (*The Independent*, May

⁷⁶ It should be noted that McConnell and Rand are both senators from Kentucky who do not always agree with each other and have clashed in the past. See, e.g., Everett, July 18, 2022.

16, 2022). This objection was of a piece with Paul's history of non- or anti-interventionism – going back to at least 2014 when *Foreign Policy* called him a “neo-isolationist” because his “one consistent principle of foreign policy is suspicion of ‘interventionism’” (Miller, October 29, 2014). In Paul's estimation, his approach of “conservative realism” is a “moderate”, middle of the road position (Paul quoted in Domenech, Oct. 23, 2014). Paul was able to construct his approach as a middle ground by positioning it between “two views, basically, espoused in [US] foreign policy. One is that we're nowhere any time. That would be isolationism, but there's another extreme that we're everywhere all the time. That would be interventionism” (ibid.). Whether this markedly reductive view was a rhetorical tool posited to help make a point, or if Paul believes this framework to be accurate, remains unclear.⁷⁷

However, even Sen. Paul voted in favor of allowing Finland and Sweden into NATO during an early August 2022 vote – having voted against the past two membership accession votes for Montenegro and North Macedonia (Desiderio, Aug. 3, 2022b). The only vote against Finland and Sweden's membership, which garnered 95 votes in favor, was from Missouri Republican Sen. Josh Hawley (ibid.). Most Senate Republicans (especially potential presidential rivals) spoke out against his vote, as did McConnell – and *Politico* described the approach as “isolationist” as per McConnell's definition (ibid.; Desiderio, Aug. 3, 2022a). Hawley's position was that the US should focus primarily on ‘threats’ from China and that expanding European security commitments would diminish this China-centric focus (Desiderio, Aug. 3, 2022a). At first blush, this stance appears similar to that of 1950s ‘neo-isolationist’ boogiemanager Sen. Robert Taft (who has also resurfaced as an alleged paragon of isolationism in the discourse, see e.g. Hounshell & Askarinam, Feb. 23, 2022). Taft also favored a more aggressive posture towards China – including expanding the Korea war against China, blockading Chinese coasts, and bombing Manchuria – while calling for a reduced US military presence in Europe (Dueck, 2008: 112). Of course, Taft – who opposed a policy of US containment of communism, or at least

⁷⁷ In some respects, Paul's framework resembles a clumsy version of the Nixon administration's attempts to position the Nixon Doctrine as a middle ground approach.

opposed President Truman (and later President Eisenhower) who advocated containment – also favored “rolling back” the Soviet sphere of influence (i.e. Soviet satellite republics) through intervening militarily in Eastern European uprisings and outright attack against the USSR if necessary (ibid., p. 85). And Taft eventually supported Truman’s proposal to send four additional divisions to Europe (ibid., p. 112). While Taft’s proposals were more detailed and extreme than Hawley’s, calling either proposal ‘isolationism’ provides little use analytically, and functions instead as a simplistic pejorative.

There appears, broadly, in McConnell and other ‘establishment’ discourse an attempt to dismiss Trump-aligned politicians by denigrating them as unable to apprehend both how the world works and the importance of an internationally engaged/world-leading US – a classic element of isolationism discourse. Though at the beginning of the conflict, the US public generally “sided” with Ukraine (57%) and saw the situation in Ukraine as a “critical” threat to the US (56% for Republicans, 61% for Democrats) (Blake, Feb. 28, 2022), clearly there remain voters who feel otherwise. Broadly speaking, perceptions of this segment of the electorate could be compared to perceptions of Wallace voters during the Vietnam era: in some ways aligned with attitudes of a wider majority, but with a minority view on certain aspects which some politicians attempted to appeal to. However, the two discourses do not appear to function in the exact same manner, particularly as electoral strategies.

McConnell does not dismiss the potential appeal of isolationism – his acknowledgement that there has been isolationist campaign rhetoric implies that invocations of isolationism are thought by candidates to have some currency with subsections of the Republican base. Furthermore, such a strategy could also be construed as candidates employing a pro-Putin or pro-authoritarian discourse to appeal to some voters, in so much as these comments and invocations of isolationism might overlap, particularly in light of Trump’s historical and recent pro-Putin comments. McConnell’s dismissal might imply that he does not believe that this subsection of the base is substantial enough to warrant addressing. However, this dismissal could also be conceptualized as McConnell being unwilling to tar a

subsection of the Republican base with an isolationism/pro-authoritarianism pejorative. Indeed, McConnell said in May of 2022 that any divisions on foreign policy in the Republican Party did not represent “a major schism. It’s a small isolationist group, somewhat encouraged by the former president. But it’s not widely held among Republicans in Congress, and I don’t think among the public in general” (McConnell quoted in Desiderio, May 20, 2022). While McConnell, like Nixon, is acknowledging the existence of isolationism, he is not constructing it as widespread throughout the general public and is not attempting to appeal to potential ‘isolationist’ voters (as Nixon did with Wallace voters).

Elements of the Trump-aligned base seem to be perceived by a broader establishment element of the Republican party as likely sharing attitudes about US morality and honor with a wider Republican electorate, including moral probity concerning post-WWII leadership. Moreover, there seems to be an even wider perception in the discourse that an equation between supporting Putin and interwar pro-fascism remains an effective pejorative. Furthermore, there might be a calculation that if US support for Ukraine can be presented as a function of a US moral identity and a matter of US honor, perhaps members of the public initially wary of such support may nonetheless favor the maintenance of such an identity through continued or increasing support for Ukraine (cf. Wallace voters and support for ‘winning’ Vietnam or leaving with US honor ‘intact’). Though, this of course may not be the case amongst certain sections of the Trump-aligned electoral base.

During the Vietnam era, accusations of isolationism were generally directed at elites (e.g. members of Congress) rather than at the public. Most non-elite, anti-war individuals either did not care about or embraced the label of isolationist and some outright supported North Vietnam and/or the National Liberation Front for South Vietnam (the Viet Cong). Moreover, the Nixon administration was attempting to attract Wallace voters it perceived as isolationist and trying to present isolationism – but not a generalized war-weariness – as dangerous. The contemporary discourse is more confused. First, no presidential administration is invoking isolationism discourse – as mentioned in the introductory chapter, President Trump denied being isolationist on several occasions and to date President Biden has only publicly

used the term once, as per the American Presidency Project. Secondly, and obviously, the contexts – Vietnam and Ukraine – are substantially different, particularly in terms of US direct military involvement.

A key difference between the Vietnam era and the present context is the contrast between opposing foreign policies. During Vietnam, the Nixon administration attempted to differentiate its foreign policy approach from other quite similar competing approaches – with the main difference being the timetable for withdrawal from Vietnam – by using isolationism discourse. In the Ukraine context, so far there is a broad centrist (Republican and Democratic) consensus on both the need to support Ukraine and the underlying reasons for such support. Currently, there is no coherent argument *against* supporting Ukraine, rather there are fragmented criticisms that generally advance limited domestic political arguments, from both politicians and pundits.

What this abridged analysis of the contemporary context reveals is similar to what Klein (2017) broadly predicted: that President Trump would use “criticism of foreign politics [as] just a tool to sharpen the candidate’s profile as a man of action” (p. 138). However, Klein’s, and indeed many analyses’, largely uncritical use of isolationism as an analytical concept clouds the picture. Is the resurgence of isolationism discourse simply correlative evidence of a US public predictably swinging towards isolationism and/or indicative of a reaction to the isolationism of Trump and Trump-aligned individuals? Since no one really agrees on what isolationism is and because Trump (aligned) policies have to date been so incoherent, utilizing isolationism as an analytical term or framework is rather unhelpful (cf. with the Hawley/Taft example addressed earlier).

Debates over the level of US international involvement are nothing new, nor are interrelated arguments of the nature of a US character (e.g. should the US be a world policeman, a savior, a defender of human rights, etc.). However, one of the general throughlines of these discourses since WWII has been that the US, at a

minimum, supports ‘democracy’⁷⁸, and will attempt to nurture it across the world, and at times will deliver it to other states by force. The discourse of President Trump and Trump-aligned politicians certainly seems to break with this narrative – but does this represent a competing foreign policy approach, or is it rather a domestic discourse using referents from a foreign policy and US identity vocabulary for electoral purposes?

In the current context, accusations of supporting *Russia* do not appear as significant as the assertion that Trump-aligned politicians and, to a degree the Trump base, support *authoritarianism*. Besides bluster and criticism of NATO and past administrations, there was never any evidence that during his administration Trump actively sought to significantly reduce US international involvement or questioned US exceptionalism via policymaking.⁷⁹ Indeed, there appeared to be no *coherent* foreign policy approach during the Trump administration, whether retrenchment or intervention, whatsoever. Even Trump’s approach to Ukraine was primarily concerned with domestic politics – in 2019 his administration withheld ~\$400 million worth of military aid as means of pressuring Ukrainian President Zelenskiy’s government to investigate a discredited conspiracy theory concerning Joe Biden’s son, which led to Trump’s first impeachment (Cohen, March 26, 2022). After the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Trump praised the invasion as “wonderful”, saying Putin was “pretty smart” and would “go in and be a peacekeeper” (Trump had also commended Putin after the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, saying the Crimean people “would rather be with Russia”) (Cillizza, Feb. 24, 2022; Cohen, March 26, 2022).

Beyond a few comments, as Trump waits in the wings to presumably announce his candidacy for the 2024 presidential race, he has largely refrained from making

⁷⁸ This discourse has, of course, been quite fluid and open to interpretation in US foreign policy. This was particularly the case during the Cold War when, if candidates or governments – including in democratic states – perceived by the US to be ‘communist’, friendly towards ‘communism’, and/or at odds with US policy were elected or enacted certain policies, the US would actively subvert the vote or government, and help someone else seize power. See, *inter alia*, US interference in Iran (1952), Guatemala (1954), South Vietnam (starting at least as early as 1956), and Chile (1973).

⁷⁹ Though this could simply be the result of incompetence on the part of the Trump administration, rather than a resistance to enacting policies or a lack of concern with executing concrete actions.

substantive comments on foreign policy. However, it seems unlikely that he will develop a coherent foreign policy, regardless of his support of Putin, in the run-up to the 2022 midterms or beyond, as his focus has always been primarily on domestic, particularly electoral, politics. Regardless of what Trump's intentions may or may not be, the use of isolationism discourse directed at him and those following him, or politicians following in his wake, seems to be an attempt to discipline Trump's interpretation or construction of US identity. In many ways, it appears that isolationism discourse has been the most readily available tool to interpret Trump and Trump-aligned politicians' approaches regarding Ukraine. Trump and Trump-aligned individuals may indeed simply have – or wish to appear to have – an attraction to right-wing authoritarianism, and in the absence of any evidence of a coherent understanding of foreign policy or consistent foreign policy approach amongst these individuals, this seems increasingly likely. Moreover, in the absence of a foreign policy, this apparent attraction has increasingly become the lens – along with isolationism – through which analysts and reporters attempt to interpret the Trump-aligned approach to Ukraine.

The current situation is quite unprecedented: a former, and possibly future president, implicitly – and often explicitly – supporting a (non-allied) authoritarian state invading a pro-EU and US-friendly democratic state. While US history is littered with members of Congress saying inflammatory, nonsensical, or outright false statements, there has generally been a broad elite consensus on a general international-facing US identity post-WWII, if only abstractly rather than practically. Debates over US identity or character have increasingly come to the fore, including contestation over the democratic nature of the US. This contestation is not over just the projection of this character internationally, but over the function of democracy and democratic institutions domestically – a seemingly seismic shift.

Perhaps elite invocations of isolationism have waned during the Biden administration because his foreign policy approach has not radically departed from the post-WWII tradition, and the Trump discourse has been dismissed as a temporary aberration. If Trump or a Trump-aligned politician becomes president, there is a good chance isolationism discourse will resurface, wielded by elites

against the new administration. It seems likely that a Trump (aligned) presidency will evince the same rhetorical hostility towards NATO and support for allies, rather than any concrete policies. Regardless, any isolationism discourse will likely, as it did during the Trump administration, focus on defining a US (foreign policy) identity and disciplining any opposing approaches, rhetorical or otherwise, as at odds with history, knowledge of how the world operates, and US character.

But what of the US public? There is little indication from polls or surveys that the US public favors *radical* retrenchment⁸⁰ – except for in the aftermath of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, which attracted much public hostility. However, this reaction was perhaps as much derived from the manner of withdrawal than from the fact of withdrawal, particularly as it seems to be a non-issue campaign-wise, so far. A broad desire for substantial withdrawal from the world, or at least the cessation of some international responsibilities – particularly, as articulated by Trump, as a reaction against neoconservative interventionist policies in the early 2000s – might exist in subsections of the Trump-aligned base. Whether these individuals will be labeled as ‘isolationists’ by politicians or the media – and whether these individuals will care or necessarily see retrenchment and/or pro-authoritarianism as necessarily derogatory or non-/anti-American, remains to be seen.

The focus of this thesis was what isolationism discourse did rather than looking for isolationism – that is, it did not try to decide if the Nixon administration invoked isolationism because there really were isolationists peddling isolationism to a public inclined towards isolationism. Instead of assuming isolationism was an object, this thesis asked: when isolationism was invoked, what was being done – were there identities or knowledges being disciplined, or reperformed? Theorizing isolationism as a performative discourse helped reveal the functions of invocations of isolationism.

⁸⁰ For example, a May 16-22, 2022 Pew survey found 51% of Americans said the US should “pay less attention to problems overseas and concentrate on problems at home” vs 48% who said “it’s best for the future of the country to be active in world affairs” – with no significant changes compared with three years before (Silver, June 10, 2022).

While conceptualizing isolationism as a discourse can be helpful for understanding the political and electoral strategies at work within such a discourse, the concept of isolationism remains an unhelpful, if not detrimental, analytical tool. In the contemporary context, clearly something unsettling is happening in the US. As this thesis demonstrated, Nixon-era invocations of isolationism were indicative of something more than simply the US becoming isolationist again. These invocations represented a series of complex discourses related to contestations over a US identity, divisive electoral politics, and a severely fragmented and disillusioned public. A similar approach might help reveal what isolationism represents – or what it is doing – in the current US context as well.

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