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Haldeman Diaries Are a Reality Check

Politics & People
By Albert R. Hunt

"Richard Nixon's foreign policy goals were long-range. And he pursued them without regard to domestic political consequences."


"Henry [Kissinger] argues against a commitment . . . to withdraw all combat troops because he feels that if we pull them out by the end of '71, trouble can start mounting in '72 that we won't be able to deal with and which we'll have to answer for at the elections. He prefers, instead, a commitment to have them all out by the end of '72 so that we won't have to deliver finally until after the elections."

—Bob Haldeman's White House diaries, Dec. 21, 1970

The recently released diaries of President Nixon's chief of staff, H.R. Haldeman—a 681-page edited book version—is an "adult," we will be even 12-stroke senshu Chi-ho reits. That sen-international ore has so far U.N. Convened.

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RT W. HATTON

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a leaping assonomy in his idee. "Another induces that the Arkansas's for the doing of on and the rm. the Arkansas ark's use of his personal enter-

of staff recorded the day's events. (Mr. Haldeman died last November shortly after the diaries, many of which were dictated, were fully transcribed.)

There's plenty of titillation for Watergate wallowers. The coverage of the White House misdeeds begins almost innocently but then is clear. There's shocking anti-semitic and antiblack bigotry attributed, without any ambiguity, to Richard Nixon. A mean-spirited paranoia permeates. President Nixon not only sought to viciously smear political opponents, but even deliberately planted falsehoods about a longtime friend, Federal Reserve Board Chairman Arthur Burns, an act that the president vehemently denied at the time. The president repeatedly talks of the press, bureaucrats, academics and Congress as "out to get us," or less dispassionately as the "bastards who are here to screw us."

This dispels any lingering doubt that it was Richard Nixon who set the tone and mood that led to the Watergate break-in, to the infamous plumbers unit, to illegal wiretaps and bugging, to trying to use the Internal Revenue Service for political purposes and to abusing the FBI and CIA.

But the diaries also provide fascinating glimpses of Mr. Nixon as a leader. The buildup to the opening to China, and Mr. Nixon's prescience, make that achievement seem even more impressive.

An incredibly insightful account of presidential decision-making is contained in the seven pages on the 1971 weekend when the president summoned all his top economic advisers for a secret marathon meeting at Camp David. The result was the decision to institute wage-and-price controls and go off the gold standard. Many Nixonites later regretted these moves, but the Haldeman book shows a president skillfully navigating the political, domestic and international ramifications, and the differences among powerful advisers like John Connally, Arthur Burns, Paul Volcker and George Shultz.

Mr. Ambrose, the Nixon historian, says that his research suggests that the diaries are amazingly reliable. Jo Haldeman, the author's widow, says her husband saw the diaries as "a valuable research source for historians" that would "help put the Nixon presidency in better perspective."

Both Ms. Haldeman and Prof. Ambrose agree that other than Richard Nixon the book's central figure is Henry Kissinger; it's not a flattering portrait. When Ms. Haldeman called Mr. Kissinger some weeks ago to tell him about the book, he expressed displeasure, suggesting it would be better if it never were published.

Mr. Kissinger, who says he hasn't read the book, nevertheless suggests that many conversations "may have been taken out of context." Moreover, he questions Mr. Haldeman's expertise: "Haldeman was not a foreign policy man."

Nice try, Henry, but no dice. Mr. Kissinger, a Haldeman admirer at the time, shows an incredibly petty and insecure man. Mr. Kissinger threatens to resign on at least seven occasions when he feels he's not getting his own way. The spiteful personal feud he conducts with Secretary of State William Rogers, whom he believes is "out to get" him, is so constant that President Nixon complained about what an "emotional drain" Mr. Kissinger is. Walter Isaacson, who recently wrote a superb, if critical, biography of Mr. Kissinger, says that after reading the Haldeman diaries he fears he "understated the paranoid atmos-

sphere" that affected the Nixon White House in general and Henry Kissinger in particular.

But Mr. Kissinger's greatest flaw was Vietnam. The president's foreign policy czar initially envisioned a get-tough policy for the first year that would drive Hanoi to the bargaining table. "He [Mr. Kissinger] wants to push for some escalation, enough to get us a reasonable bargain for a settlement within six months," Mr. Haldeman reports on July 7, 1969. This became a familial, and movable, refrain.

"If we just had one more dry season, the opponents would break their backs," Mr. Kissinger tells the president in San Clemente on Aug. 24, 1971, more than two years later. The ever-loyal chief of staff couldn't resist adding: "This, of course, is the same line he's used for the last two years, over and over. . . . it's amazing how it sounds like a broken record." From 1970 through 1972 almost 6,000 Americans lost their lives in Vietnam.

Today Mr. Kissinger still is one who perpetuates the myth that Vietnam was lost not because of a flawed policy, but due to a lack of political will at home. The facts are that for seven years America had more than 150,000 troops in Vietnam, reaching a peak of 536,100; that in current dollars we spent almost a quarter of a trillion dollars on operational costs; and that the U.S. dropped four times as many bombs as during the entire Second World War.

Henry Kissinger remains a central figure in American life today, the darling of much of the business community, the foreign policy establishment and the media. He's on the board of CBS, writes a column for the Los Angeles Times syndicate, and can command space or airtime for his views almost at his convenience. The next time Mr. Kissinger is pronouncing on some momentous event, take a look at the Haldeman diaries. They're a good reality check.
I Stand By My Eulogy to Nixon

In his May 26 Politics & People column, Albert Hunt juxtaposes a quote from my eulogy at President Nixon’s funeral—that Nixon pursued his foreign policy goals without regard to political consequences—with a quote ascribed to me by Bob Haldeman that unilateral withdrawal from Vietnam in 1971 would serve no political purpose and that we should continue winding down the war in 1972. And Mr. Hunt demonstrates his self-indulgent righteous-ness by twisting a Haldeman entry indicating impatience with my alleged predic-tions about the peace of Vietnamization into the proposition that six thousand Ameri-can lives were unnecessarily sacrificed by me (or by Nixon and me) after that entry. Though Mr. Hunt ridicules my com ment to pay attention to context, some concern with context is essential. For one thing, Mr. Hunt has not bothered to check the diaries that would have revealed that the alleged comment by me was not volunteered but was Haldeman’s interpretation of my reaction to what Nixon had told him a few days earlier. More importantly, American policy throughout the Vietnam War was driven by a strategy developed early in the Nixon administration. Even before the inaug-uration, Nixon ordered a full review of Vietnam policy. Extending over many months, it examined a number of options. Nixon chose Vietnamization and pursued it consistently. He explained it in many public speeches, as did I in press confer-ences. A voluminous record exists attesting to the substance of American policy. What then is the Haldeman quote sup posed to prove? A careful reading of the di-aries suggests that in December 1970, Nixon, disappointed in the outcome of the congressional election, told Haldeman that domestic politics would force him to liquidate the Vietnam War in 1971. The choice of addressee alone is the best proof that Nixon was blowing off steam rather than changing strategy; for Haldeman was concerned with public relations, not sub stance, and any change in strategy would have been discounted with me, the NSC ma- chinery, and others responsible for imple-menting such a policy. According to the di-aries, Haldeman apparently raised the is-sue with me, and I stated that we should continue the strategy of winding down the war implicit in the Vietnamization policy. The entries are limited to a two-week period in December 1970. In 600 pages, there are no further diary entries to that effect, and a voluminous written record, including the diaries, proves the opposite. I have no recollection of such a conversa-tion probably because it was submerged by the endless chatter about public rela-tions emanating from Haldeman’s office. Had I taken it seriously, I would have written a memorandum to Nixon and not dealt through Haldeman, whose interest in substance was minimal (as indeed the diaries show).

That a first-term president was con-cerned about re-election is surely not a revolutionary discovery. That I opposed unconditional withdrawal is not startling news either; I have explained the reason for it in innumerable public statements: in my memoirs; in my recently published book “Diplomacy;” and indeed in articles before I entered government. I believed that setting a fixed deadline would have wrecked our bargaining position and been impossible to justify to the families of ca-sualties incurred in the interval. Further-more, my negotiations with Le Duc Tho made it apparent that setting a deadline for withdrawal would not end the war despite the contrary claim of the peace movement. Until the end, Hanoi consis-tently insisted that America overthrew its allies and install a Communist-dominated government. That we were never willing to do. That, too, has been amply docu-mented. Mr. Hunt might have pointed out that the strategy of complete unilateral withdrawal in 1972 described in the quote was never carried out.

One would think that the sheer paucity of the diary entries on the subject, the fre-quency with which the foreign policy mo-tivation appears and the voluminous written record would prove the opposite of Mr. Hunt’s thesis—namely that Nixon’s Viet-nam policy was driven by the substance of his strategy and not by electoral politics. Attempting to demonstrate the truly reckless charge that American lives were risked frivolously, Mr. Hunt quotes a Haldeman entry in 1971 about the pro-tracted nature of the conflict and the er-renousness of predictions of success for the past two years. Alas, Hunt’s relentless quest to relive the Sixties warps his perspective. When Haldeman recorded his impatience in August 1971, he had apparently forgotten that two years ear-lier in October 1969 he had recorded my advocacy of quite a different strategy (pp. 95 and 97). In Diplomacy (p. 652) I published the text of my warning about the risks of Vietnamization. When Nixon decided otherwise, I did my utmost to carry out his decision, recognizing that the choice was a close call and that the strategy was reasonable. In fairness to Nixon, the strategy succeeded until en-guiled by Watergate, and it might have worked more rapidly if the American domestic turmoil not inhibited both a stronger military response and the estab-lishment of a bottom line for our diplomacy. Nor did Haldeman—aggres-sively nonsubstantive throughout—ever offer an alternative, either in his diaries or elsewhere. To use such “evidence” for the charge that the American govern-ment was responsible for the death of 6,000 servicemen is truly irresponsible.

Vietnam was a tragedy because the commitment over four presidencies of both parties grew out of America’s idealistic tradition and the extraction became a nightmare because that idealism turned on itself. But America will never learn the proper lessons from the anguish so long as those who smugly claim a monopoly of moral concern smear those who found themselves charged with discovering a way through this labyrinth. In the meantime, I stand by my eulogy for President Nixon.

New York
HENRY A. KISSINGER
June 1, 1994

To the Editor of the Wall Street Journal:

In his column of May 26, Albert Hunt juxtaposes a quote from my eulogy at President Nixon’s funeral — that Nixon pursued his foreign policy goals without regard to political consequences — with a quote ascribed to me by Haldeman that unilateral withdrawal from Vietnam in 1971 would serve no political purpose and that we should continue winding down the war in 1972. And Hunt demonstrates his self-indulgent righteousness by twisting a Haldeman entry indicating impatience with my alleged predictions about the pace of Vietnamization into the proposition that six thousand American lives were unnecessarily sacrificed by me (or by Nixon and me) after that entry.

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The entries are limited to a 2-week period in December 1970. In 600 pages, there are no further diary entries to that effect, and a voluminous written record, including the diaries, proves the opposite. I have no recollection of such a conversation probably because it was submerged by the endless chatter about public relations emanating from Haldeman’s office. Had I taken it seriously, I would have written a memorandum to Nixon and not dealt through Haldeman, whose interest in substance was minimal (as indeed the diaries show).

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Sincerely yours,

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The Editor
Wall Street Journal
200 Liberty Street
New York, NY 10281

Dictated from London
June 1, 1994

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Sincerely yours,
to p1 - Bartley

For one thing, Mr. Smith has not bothered to check the charities which would have revealed that the alleged criminal figures were not volunteers but were Holdeman "straight" protestors.
To Philip

For our earlier meeting let us decide to check the obvious error which would have revealed the alleged command by our man not volunteered. Have Waldemar's interpretation of aggression to alert Russian SGO told him a few days earlier.

Intelligence about Foreign Minister Khrushchev's backing for meeting policy in England and Vietnam was overslept.

Strategy developed by a group of twenty in the Ministry I administered.
Policy throughout the Vietnam war was based on a strategy developed by a previous [illegible] administration.
Public relations emanating from Haldeman’s office. But it didn’t occur to me that there might have been a memorandum to Nixon and that change of Haldeman whose interest in substance was minimal.

Note 1

(2) It is also Mr. Hunt might have possibly and that nothing like the strategy of unilateral withdrawal described in its guise was never carried out.
2p2 - Bailey

1. Have no recollection of and probably never heard of, a conversation because of the smallest matter.
2 P.M. Bartley

1. Have no recollection of such probably if was misunderstanding a conversation because after excellent efforts above Public relations announcement from Haldeman's Head takes it seriously Effect. That Richard said I would have written a communication to him and dealt through Haldeman whose interest in substance was reciprocal (to indebted to chassis class)

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All this occurred in a 2-week period in December 1970. There are no further diary entries to that effect (in 600 pages) and voluminous written and diary record that proves the opposite.

That a first-term President was concerned about re-election is surely not a revolutionary discovery. That I opposed unconditional withdrawal is not startling news either; I have explained the reason for it in innumerable public statements: in my memoir, in my recently published book, Diplomacy, and indeed in articles before I entered government. I believed that setting a fixed deadline would weaken our bargaining position and make it impossible to explain to the families of casualties incurred in the interval.

In my negotiations with Le Duc Tho it further became apparent that setting a deadline for withdrawal would not end the war—despite the contrary claim of the Peace Movement. Until the end, Hanoi consistently insisted that America overthrow its allies and install a Communist-dominated government. That we were never willing to do, or have been, has been amply documented throughout the frequency with which the foreign policy motivation and strategy would have been discussed with me and the NSC machinery.
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found themselves charged with discovering a way through this labyrinth.

In the meantime, I stand by my eulogy for President Nixon.

Sincerely yours,
To: Suzanne  

From: H  

Here is a letter to the Wall St. Journal  

Original to: Beattay, copy to: Kenner  

Please type copy; let Brenda edit; send copy Beattay by mid-afternoon Tuesday. Hand me a copy and don't wait for response.  

H
In this column of May 31st

Miss Albert Hunt justifies a quote from a speech of
at President Nixon's funeral, with effect that this
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political consequences, will expect success to me

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sue to no political purpose. And keeps his
comparable self-righteousness with
unbearable solitude and violence against
an administration of Haldeman party in America
language. It was the best part of this revision
to prove that two thousand Americans have been
unneedlessly sacrificed, for me (or by Haldeman
Through Hunt's administration.

the point that they are doing with a consisten

the point that they are doing with a consisten
reports. The microwaves that Haldeman, for the purpose of innovation, to the
reverses of the computer. Pending the action, all are not a problem
doing events. He will succeed in an effort to
with just a purpose.

relation of the administrators with involvement. That

As first time, President administration should do it
in every not a sexual hierarchy. That appears.
many comments to pay attention to context, some background is essential. When Nixon assumed the
Presidency he ordered a full review of Vietnam policy
(even before his inauguration) extending over many
months it examined draft options. The word
Vietnamization and presented it consistently, promoting
it in many public speeches, as did it in
conference. A voluminous record is available to
prove it existed on substance. The United
Prov. 3/4.
prove. Reading the decades it appears that Nixon
in December 1970 Nixon disappointed in its
outcomes of the congressional election told Halderman
that the Vietnam war had to be liquidated in a
This alone
stagram indicates that Nixon was changing of
strategy. Halderman
was concerned with public relations and substance.
In this column of Page 6, they Albert Hunt juxtaposes a quote from Teddy at President Nixon's funeral with effect on him, by ‘tigging his foreign policy goals without regard to political consequences, with a quote attributed to one of Haldeman, possibly indicating an opinion about the political dynamics of the time. Haldeman's comments ultimately bring into question the context in which Hunt is referring to Haldeman’s role, suggesting an analysis about the motives of those involved in the Watergate scandal. The comments about Haldeman are made in a way that questions his role in the events that unfolded. That is, Hunt appears to be hinting at a broader context in which Haldeman's actions were not solely the result of personal motives, but rather part of a larger political landscape.
Though氪标元hlices
my comment to pay attention to context, some
background is essential. When Nixon assumed the
Presidency he ordered a full review of Vietnam policy
(even before his inauguration) extending over many
months. Nixon close
readers: it examined both options, both militaristic
Vietnamization, and pursued inconsistent policies.

If it in many public speeches, as does it in talks
conferences. A voluminous record is available to
prove it existed on substance.

What then does the Haldeman quote
To begin with these me recollections of the speech
prove? Reading the others, it appears that Nixon

in December 1970 Nixon disappointed in the
outcomes of the congressional election told Haldeman
that the Vietnam war had to be liquidated in a few
years. That alone
scenario indicates that Nixon was leaving off
steam rather than changing strategy. Instead,
was concerned with public relations and substance.
and any change in strategy would have been damaging.

Field Marshal Haldeman, with me (according to Haldeman, indirectly to apparently raise the issue with me). If Haldeman is to be believed, his strategy that I now stated that we should continue manoeuvring in the middle of Vietnam and in the middle of its war was an example of Vietnamization policy.

That Haldeman went out with that strategy consistent with making it lasting over 1 year. To make 1 year.

Haldeman's reasoning was this, at the end of reason that we'd like to see less and less we shouldn't stay there.

All this occurred in a 2 week period in December 1970. That are no further details in 600 pages.

entirely to the effect of a voluminous written report that proves the opposite. That a firm plan

President p1.
starting with
unconditional withdrawal in mid-winter. Khan
explained the reason for it in innumerable public
statements: in my memoirs; in my weekly
published Diplomacy and indeed in virtually every
I entered government, I believed that setting a fixed
deadline would speed our bargaining process
for
the yıllık to explain to his families whose children
indirectly
would be cannibals in the critical round negotiations
with Russia. The initial seconds became apparent that Russia
for withdrawal, despite Julian along the
deadline would not end the war. The time would not
until 1973, uncertainty
of such a inauguration that America expected us
to
ally to install a communist dominated government
in the aftermath of the 1973 coup which
us from allegedly having

corporate bailout of 1973. By 1974, we
plagued with the idea of withdrawal in 1971 (though 2
and our ability to effect was reverence
least one person declared to be in "c". We were not further
ordinations overheard (or misheard) by Pakistan.
Haldeman recorded his impatience in August 1970. He had apparently forgotten that two years earlier in October 1969 he had written down my analysis of quite a different strategy (pp. 95-97). In Diplomacy (p. 682) I published the text of my warning about the risks of Vietnamization.
(3) Haldeman, along with the rest of the administration, was in the first flush of victory. The conflict with China to the north and the presence of a powerful and sympathetic friend to the south, combined with the Nixon Doctrine of public opinion, made it possible for the White House to assume a more passive role in Vietnam. The Secretary of Defense, McNamara, was the true architect of the Vietnam policy. He was the man who, in the words of President Nixon, was the 'man who knew Vietnam.'

Haldeman's statement (in 1971) was typical of the administration's rhetoric:

'Of the conflict, the Americans would have the power to decide the outcome. We would not be making the decisions; we would be reacting to them.'

Elsewhere, Haldeman explained: 'I sought to make a psychological point... that the Americans were on the defensive and that the enemy was on the offensive.'

This was not only a psychological point, but also a political one. The American public was wearied by the war, and the administration was under pressure to end it. Haldeman's strategy was to create a sense of inevitability about the outcome of the war, thereby reducing the chances of a costly and prolonged conflict.

In the end, the Vietnam War ended with a negotiated settlement, and the United States withdrew its troops. Haldeman's role in the administration's Vietnam policy cannot be underestimated.
When Hellemann met his army,

in the fall of August 1971, he was cautious about the military strategy to be employed. He had decided on a strategy of protracted gradual withdrawal, which would have involved the gradual withdrawal of American forces from Vietnam. However, the decision was not easy, and it was viewed as a difficult one. From October 1969, there was a sense that American forces might have succeeded more quickly had not the American character traits inhibited both a steady military response and the establishment of a strong military presence.

Hellemann was faced with a difficult decision. At that point, it was clear that the only alternative was to withdraw American forces from Vietnam. However, this was not an easy decision, and it was viewed as a difficult one. From October 1969, there was a sense that American forces might have succeeded more quickly had not the American character traits inhibited both a steady military response and the establishment of a strong military presence.

The American's commitment was also evident in the context of both

parties' goals and of America's idealistic tradition, and

became a

the situation described, with its significance again

because that idealism continued as well.

But America will never
learn the proper process so long as the debate is conducted by means of the members of the
bushes of the parties who stand
embraced by the House of the People.
It is for the parties to find their own path
in the meantime dictated by my policy.

for President Nixon.

S. F.

H. K.