

office in 1977. But Congress refused to resume the bombing in the spring of 1973, and the president became embroiled in the Watergate scandal. Nixon resigned in August 1974, and the South Vietnamese government collapsed on April 30, 1975. The new president, Gerald Ford, had been unable to get Congress to send bombs, troops, or increased aid to South Vietnam.

The Vietnam War remains controversial both among historians and policy makers. President Nixon's interpretation gets support from Lewis Sorley, a third-generation graduate from West Point, a Ph.D. holder from Johns Hopkins, and a former CIA agent. *A Better War, the Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America's Last Years in Vietnam* (Harcourt Brace & Co., 1999), argues that Nixon's policy makers and, in particular General Creighton Abrams, "dropped General Westmoreland's war of attrition and search-and-destroy missions in favor of a holistic approach aimed at 'pacifying' the population of South Vietnam." (Jeff T. Hay, *The Greenhaven Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War*, Greenhaven Press, 2004.) Militarily, the war was won, says Sorley, but Congress and a politically weakened Nixon negotiated a one-sided peace to ensure defeat for South Vietnam. Another military historian and former Vietnam War military commander, James H. Willbanks, supports some of Sorley's interpretation. *Abandoning Vietnam: How America Left and South Vietnam Lost Its War* (University Press of Kansas, 2004) argues that the South Vietnamese, with the aid of United States advisers and air power, held off the North Vietnamese military advances in 1972. But the Paris Peace Accords, negotiated by a politically weakened Nixon along with corrupt South Vietnamese political leaders and incompetent senior military leadership caused the demise of South Vietnam.

Professor Berman's interpretation is also challenged by Jeffrey Kimball who has written a comprehensive and detailed interpretation of *Nixon's Vietnam War* (University Press of Kansas, 1998). In his article for *The SHAFR Newsletter* (September 2001) "The Case of the 'Decent Interval': Do We Now Have a Smoking Gun?", Kimball feels that Berman misinterpreted some of his evidence. The "decent interval" was adopted in the fall of 1970 after his initial plan for a quick victory and withdrawal had failed and not in 1973 at the Paris Peace Talks as Berman claims.

Perhaps we will have a better assessment of Nixon's policies when all of his tapes along with Kissinger's correspondence are placed in the National Archives or the Nixon Presidential library.

The Vietnam War remains politically controversial. In the 2004 election, President George Bush had to prove he served in the Alabama National Guard during the war, while Senator John Kerry had to defend his patriotism as a former leader of the Vietnam Veterans against the War. In the summer of 2009, President Obama was weighing his options in Afghanistan. Should he send troops there? Republicans were reading Lewis Sorley's book for lessons on how to win while Democrats, including Obama, were reading Gordon M. Goldstein's *Lessons in Disaster: McGeorge Bundy and the Path to War in Vietnam* (Henry Holt and Co., 2008). Bundy was head of the National Security Council under both Presidents Kennedy and Johnson who, like former Secretary of Defense Robert F. McNamara, had second thoughts about escalating the war in 1965. See "A Battle of Two Books Rages," *The Wall Street Journal* (October 7, 2009).