

In the opening essay, Henry Kissinger, Richard Nixon's national security adviser, sets forth the principal concerns and interests that shaped the Nixon administration's approach to Vietnam. He explains that the administration entered office determined to end U.S. involvement in Vietnam, but it needed to do so honorably—with America's prestige and credibility intact. In the next essay, Arnold Isaacs, a journalist who covered the Vietnam War from 1972 to 1975 and traveled extensively throughout Indochina, presents a strong indictment of the Nixon policy. The Nixon administration's preoccupation with America's credibility led to a grievous exaggeration of the regional and global stakes involved in Vietnam. Isaacs suggests that a policy designed to cut U.S. losses by as speedy as possible a withdrawal would better have served American interests. He especially faults Nixon for expanding the war into Cambodia.

Peace with Honor

HENRY KISSINGER

I reached high office unexpectedly at a particularly complex period of our national life. In the life of nations, as of human beings, a point is often reached when the seemingly limitless possibilities of youth suddenly narrow and one must come to grips with the fact that not every option is open any longer. This insight can inspire a new creative impetus, less innocent perhaps than the naive exuberance of earlier years, but more complex and ultimately more permanent. The process of coming to grips with one's limits is never easy. It can end in despair or in rebellion; it can produce a self-hatred that turns inevitable compromises into a sense of inadequacy.

America went through such a period of self-doubt and self-hatred in the late 1960s. The trigger for it was the war in Vietnam. Entered into gradually by two administrations, by 1969 it had resulted in over 31,000 American dead with no prospect of early resolution. It began with overwhelming public and Congressional approval, but this had evolved first into skepticism and then into increasingly hostile rebellion. For too many, a war to resist aggression had turned into a symbol of fundamental American evil. A decade that had begun with the bold declaration that America would