

Handout B: Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon and the War Powers Resolution

Background: Following World War II, President Harry Truman announced that the United States would provide assistance to any nation in the world that was threatened by Communism. During what became known as the Cold War, the United States and its NATO allies were involved in a long period of political and military tension against the Soviet Union and its allies. This tension became outright military conflict in Korea (1950 – 53) and in Vietnam (1961 – 73). Because these conflicts during the presidencies of Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon seemed to be unwinnable and were fought without a declaration of war, a growing number of Americans became concerned that Congress was losing power in comparison with the commander in chief. Finally in 1973, Democrats in Congress

led the charge to pass the War Powers Resolution by a sizeable majority (in the process overriding Republican President Richard Nixon's veto). The law stipulated that the commander in chief could send U.S. armed forces into action only by authorization of Congress or if the United States were already under attack or serious threat. Within forty-eight hours of committing armed forces to military action, the president was required to notify Congress. Armed forces could not remain more than sixty days on foreign soil without congressional authorization of the use of military force or a declaration of war. Virtually every president since Nixon has expressed strategic and constitutional reservations about the War Powers Resolution.