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**Ken Hughes.** “Fatal Politics: Nixon’s Political Timetable for Withdrawing from Vietnam.” *Diplomatic History* 34:3 (June 2010), 497-506.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/reviews/PDF/AR265c-Response.pdf>

Reviewed by **Edwin E. Moise**, Clemson University

Author’s Response by **Kenneth J Hughes Jr.**, Presidential Recordings Program, Miller Center, University of Virginia

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I’m as pleased as anyone would expect that Edwin Moise found my “Fatal Politics” article “makes a credible case” and a “good argument” that Richard Nixon pursued a “decent interval” exit strategy designed to postpone, not prevent, a Communist military victory. Moise does not think an article provides me with enough space to prove the point so I guess I’d better write a book. Future reviewers will find that it, too, “resists the temptation to cite only those of Nixon’s recorded conversations that support [my] case.” I want people to understand how Nixon contradicted himself even when he was alone with his closest aides. That complexity is part of what makes him and his tapes so interesting.

Of course, the things one expects everyone to understand are often the things that wind up misunderstood. Moise objects to my references to Nixon’s decision “to bring the troops home between July 1972 and January 1973” (498) and to the risk that if he had “withdrawn the troops in 1971 or sooner, South Vietnam might have collapsed before the 1972 election” (503). Moise writes, “This is misleading: Nixon did withdraw most of the troops in 1971 or sooner.”

No one said he didn’t. I was referring to Nixon’s *final* troop withdrawal, and doing so in the same manner as H.R. Haldeman in the Dec. 21, 1970, diary entry that I quoted: “Henry argues against a commitment that early 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" (502).

If Moise feels that's a misleading way to refer to Nixon's final troop withdrawal, then he must object to this reference by a third writer: "When the draft [settlement] was presented to President Nguyen Van Thieu of the Republic of Vietnam, however, Thieu was horrified; the agreement, which called for a withdrawal of American but not of PAVN troops from South Vietnam, seemed to Thieu likely to lead to Communist victory in South Vietnam." Moise could point out to this writer that by October 1972 Nixon had withdrawn more than 90 percent of U.S. troops from Vietnam. Of course, he would be making the point to himself, since the sentence I just quoted appears on page 293 of *Moise's Historical Dictionary of the Vietnam War*. Since I referred to Nixon's final troop withdrawal the same way as Haldeman and Moise himself, I don't see how Moise can find the reference misleading. I think that all three of us are clear in context.

Moise further writes, "If the large-scale withdrawals of 1971 were not mentioned frequently in the Nixon tapes, the omission seems so strange as to call for comment." If you follow the link at the end of my article, you can listen to Nixon and Kissinger discuss them in the *Fatal Politics* videos.

Moise closes with a series of interesting questions, the point of which appears to be "the risk [Nixon] was taking in 1971, pulling most Americans out of combat in Vietnam more than a year before the 1972 election." Bear in mind that Nixon still had more than 150,000 U.S. troops in Vietnam at the start of his reelection year--more than we have had in Iraq for that past two years. The last U.S. ground combat forces didn't come home from Vietnam until late in the summer of 1972--well after General Creighton W. Abrams had blunted that year's conventional North Vietnamese ground offensive by deploying U.S. airpower against the amassed Communist ground troops. In short, Nixon kept enough U.S. military power engaged in Vietnam into his reelection year to avoid a pre-election Communist victory.

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