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In *Revolution in the Air*, Max Elbaum argues that radicals were not impassioned people eventually turning irrational and destructive, but instead that their engagement against injustices foreign and abroad allowed them to gain new insights into inequality and militarism in US society. As antiwar sentiment intersected labor, civil rights, and other movements, revolt and protest erupted from deep frustrations, rather than historical accident. Beyond simply reform, many believed in deeply embedded faults that required fundamental restructuring – and thus, the “system” as a whole became the target of revolutionary movements in the 60s.

In “Beyond Vietnam”, Martin Luther King, Jr. Articulates several arguments against US involvement in the Vietnam War. The US, which itself was built upon revolution and liberty, was now operating a campaign of anti-revolution and oppression on the Vietnamese people; the war also impacted people at home – the poor’s aid cut and drafting disproportionate, the black soldier’s irony. King calls for a radical revolution of values to orient towards people and argues taking offensive action on behalf of justice is the greatest defense against communism.

The radical movement of the ‘60s greatly diminished, as can be drawn from the significantly “less radical” climate of today’s politics – as Elbaum himself notes. In Elbaum’s discussion of the two bombings in 1970 – approaching the height of a surge in violence – he claims that while others have argued that this violence was the downfall of this New Left, the subsector that adopted apocalyptic and distorted perspectives was a minority. Instead, he

suggests that external factors – citing the revival of conservatism not being “nearly as conducive to... [growth of the] revolutionary wing”¹ as thought – are responsible. While it seems – with the set of evidence presented – that this is likely a reasonable conclusion, I argue that the ties between US involvement in war and this radical movement are also significant in analyzing its decline. *Revolution in the Air* describes the core character of the radical movement as the intellectual connection between foreign policy and domestic inequality. Indeed, the war in Southeast Asia was a centerpiece from which a variety of radical movements drew. From the 1968 Vietnamese Tet offensive, which posed a serious threat to the narrative of destined US victory, to Nixon’s 1970 invasion of Cambodia, this height of American intervention abroad fueled “radicals”. In May of 1970, four students at Kent State University protesting Nixon’s Cambodian Campaign were shot and killed by the National Guard². US intervention in wars provided the impetus both for protest to erupt and for a heightened sense of the fragility of national security – hence, greater militancy by the government. Following these events, the academic community was consolidated not only against war, but also convinced them against business and the government itself³. Many radicals wielded both the disproportionate enlistment and death of American soldiers in Vietnam as demonstrating both racial and class injustice in the United States⁴. The intensity and bloodshed of the war provided a visceral catalyst for which intellectual connections could be made. Without that catalyst, though, the growth of the radical movement was slowed. Nixon’s drastically reduced death averages per week, despite his continuation of the war, “succeeded in keeping wavering sections of the population from joining

¹ Max Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals Turn to Lenin, Mao, and Che* (New York: Verso, 2002), 40.

² Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air*, 18.

³ Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air*, 19.

⁴ Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air*, 23.

the antiwar movement.”⁵ Similarly, militancy and activism among college students fell proportionately to the size of draft calls and number of US troops deployed in combat⁶. After the United States gradually ceased from its intense intervention in Southeast Asia, movements for economic restructuring, racial civil rights, women’s equality, and so forth did not halt – their connection with war was not an inextricable and dependent one. However, the radical wings of these movements, the ones that justified their own violence on state violence and called for fundamental change, in time lost their gleaming, active edge in large part because the catalyst of war – which had been so instrumental in bringing one to the conclusion that the United States needed fundamental and total restructuring – had ceased to be as effective as before.

⁵ Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air*, 27.

⁶ Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air*, 36.