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BREAKING NEWS: HUMAN RIGHTS IN IRAN DETERIORATE UNDER 'MODERATE' ROUHANI

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Op-Ed Contributor

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At G20, Will Obama Have Thoughts of The Day The Vietnam War Ended?

By [Steven Blumrosen](#)

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November 14 - 17, 2014, the G20 will be meeting in Brisbane, Queensland, Australia.

Barack Obama, President of the United States, will be there.

I wonder if Barack Obama, human, will be thinking about what happened to LBJ when he went to Queensland 48 years ago. The Vietnam War ended.

I don't mean the last person boarded "the last plane out" and left Vietnam to the Vietnamese and, eventually, the tourists.

I don't mean Henry Kissinger was finally able to negotiate the shape of the table around which peace could be negotiated in Paris.

I mean LBJ decided he had enough.

Vietnam War

In 1966, Vietnam was LBJ's war. Before the November elections in 1964, Congress had given him authorization to do what he wanted in Vietnam. The House and Senate jointly passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, an AUMF (also known as an "Authorization for Use of Military Force") that left the escalation of U.S. involvement in Vietnam to the discretion of the president.

This violated the requirement of Art. I, Sect. 8, Cl. 11 of the U.S. Constitution that "Congress shall have the power ... to declare war." Both houses of Congress must agree on war, or the U.S. does not go to war (other means are found to achieve the desired result).

Of course, the U.S. has gone to war without a formal declaration from Congress. The law, even constitutional law, is not self-enforcing. In 1964, no one went to court to enforce the Constitution. [1]

Before guns shot, bombs exploded, and napalm spread fire over the jungle, a judge might have figured it was unconstitutional to delegate to the Commander-in-Chief the gatekeeping questions of whether the country should go to war, and whether there would be limits on our involvement.

Going to court later would change a judge's preliminary thoughts. For a judge to stop an ongoing war would have taken great courage, more than was contemplated by the drafters of the Constitution.

Constitutional Convention

At the Constitutional Convention in the sweltering Philadelphia summer of 1787, the delegates almost immediately agreed on a bi-cameral legislature with the House elected by the voters and the Senate selected by the states. [2]

It was understood that the president would take great latitude in dealing with foreign affairs. A few matters, though, were so important that the president was given less discretion and had to seek the advice and consent of the Senate.

The decision to enter war was graver. On June 1, 1787, the constitutional convention voted that war would require the affirmative declaration of both houses. Since one house would represent the voters, this gave the people a veto over war.

In 1964, Congress gave the president discretion to go to war in Vietnam and deprived the people of their veto.

Australia

After his landslide victory in 1964, Johnson proceeded with both the Great Society and the War in Vietnam.

In 1966, LBJ went to Australia on a state visit. [3] Oct. 20 - 23 he was in Canberra, Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Townsville. The president and the first lady, Lady Bird Johnson, were photographed with cute muscular Koalas in Queensland (QLD). [4]

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This was the first state visit by a U.S. President to Queensland. Originally, it was to be a one hour stopover Sunday, Oct. 23. At some point, arrival in QLD was pushed forward to provide an overnight stay.

On Oct. 22, back in the United States, Black candidates were campaigning for the November elections pursuant to the Voting Rights Act of 1965. [5] In Vietnam, 19 U.S. military people died. [6]

Speaking in Townsville Oct. 23, the president reminisced about his previous time in Townsville.[7] He recounted how, 24 years earlier, June 8, 1942, he spent the night "in a double bed with a Colonel Francis Stevens." They left for the Kelso airfield about midnight. Col. Stevens did not return. [8] Apparently, the plane he was on was boxed in by other planes and crashed. Col. Stevens had taken LBJ's seat on that plane. [9]

Col. Stevens had a son who never met his father. A few weeks before LBJ's visit to Australia, the Prime Minister of Australia visited the president in Washington. LBJ made sure the Prime Minister and Col. Stevens' son, who was then teaching at West Point, met at a luncheon in the Prime Minister's honor.

For weeks leading up to the state visit to Australia, the president must have been thinking about his experiences in WWII. When he was stationed in Townsville he had already been elected to Congress and had been in the Naval Reserves. Just after Congress declared war, Congressman Johnson went on active duty inspecting manufacturing facilities with a focus on efficiency and labor issues. In May 1942, he was stationed in New Zealand and Australia, and is said to have participated in a number of missions in the South Pacific.

In an email interview today, Ray Holyoak confirmed that on June 17, 1942, Johnson had dinner with Robert 'Bob' Sherrod, a Time Magazine reporter. They talked about black soldiers fragging their white officers in Townsville. [10] The reporter hoped the congressman would take the story back to the States and avoid the censors. Sherrod wrote it up and Johnson brought it to the attention of FDR.

The story is centered on the confluence of race and war.

The military wanted an air base on the coast near Japan. About 600 Black troops from the 96th Battalion, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, were sent to build the Kelso airfields in Townsville. They were taunted and subjected to "serial abuse." Apparently, the white southern officers did not like their black soldiers fraternizing with white Aussie women. Harassment by the officers mounted until the Black soldiers saw no reasonable alternative to taking up machine guns and anti-aircraft weapons and firing about 700 rounds into the white officers' tents. One person was killed while many were severely injured. The Australian military set up roadblocks to direct traffic away from the area and to redirect or kill the Black soldiers.

Apparently, the report had an effect on the president. Eleanor Roosevelt made the trip to Townsville in 1943 and visited "the newly established North American Services Club in Flinders Street-a 'negro-only' establishment." [11]

Johnson returned to Washington when President Roosevelt recalled legislators to their legislative duties. The actual document Johnson received from Sherrod went into the National Archives and the Johnson Presidential Library provided a copy to Mr. Holyoak. [12]

Epiphany

I'm speculating here, but I believe that LBJ's time with his wife in the place where he had experienced war enabled him to reconnect with some powerful memories and re-envision his endeavors. This was the epiphany that ended the war for him. March 31, 1968, President Johnson went on television and in an impassioned plea for unity, and in an attempt to keep the office of the presidency above the fray of divisive politics, he proclaimed "I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your President." Then, he pledged to use his remaining time to work for peace. [13]



- [Washing with Ka](#)
- 4. [Why I a an Indis](#)
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LBJ and Ladybird Johnson at the Lone Pine Koala Sanctuary in Queensland, Australia.
Photo: Lone Pine Koala Sanctuary

1. "Restoring the Congressional Duty to Declare War," Blumrosen and Blumrosen, Rutgers Law Review, 2011, www.warpower.us, accessed 10/13/2014.
2. Since ratification of the 17th Amendment in 1913, both houses of Congress are elected by the voters.
3. U.S. Dept. of State, Office of the Historian, [Travels of President Lyndon B. Johnson](#), accessed 10/7/2014.
4. The [encounter with Koalas](#) occurred at the Lone Pine Koala Sanctuary in Brisbane. A picture of the visit accompanies this opinion piece [61]/63/, accessed 10/13/2014. For another picture, see [Queensland State Archives](#), accessed 10/7/2014.
5. See, for example, [The Southern Courier](#), Montgomery, Alabama, accessed 10/7/2014.
6. Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, [Wall of Faces](#), accessed 10/7/2014.
7. [The American Presidency Project](#), Lyndon B. Johnson, "Remarks at Townsville Upon Departing From Australia. October 23, 1966," accessed 10/7/2014. For a description of the First Family's trip, which they changed to overnight in Queensland, see [Life Magazine](#), 11/4/1966.
8. [Military Times, Hall of Valor](#): "Lieutenant Colonel (General Staff Corps) Francis Robert Stevens (ASN: 0-15779), United States Army, was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross (Posthumously) for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy, in action against enemy forces on 9 June 1942, over New Guinea. While on a flight over Lae, New Guinea, Lieutenant Colonel Stevens was shot down." accessed 10/7/2014
9. "Lyndon Baynes Johnson His Time In Townsville And The Bombing Raid On Lae 'Tow 9' - 9 June 1942," [Oz at war](#), accessed 10/13/2014.
10. [Australian Broadcasting Corporation](#) (ABC), "Secret documents lift lid on WWII mutiny by US troops in north Queensland," accessed 10/13/2014. Peter Dunn's [Australia at War](#), "Negro Servicemen riot at the Upper Ross, Townsville on 22 May 1942," accessed 10/13/2014. For a dramatic restatement, see [last year's short video](#) on ABC news, accessed 10/13/2014. (The term "fragging" did not come into common use until the Vietnam War, when the media needed a term to describe the frequent attacks by draftees against officers.)
11. Jamie Walker, [American Renaissance](#), "Cover-Up Of Townsville Mutiny: Black GIs Turned on Officers," accessed 10/13/2014.
12. Ray Holyoak is a heritage consultant working diligently on his [PhD dissertation](#) tentatively titled "Kelso Field Rising: African-American involvement in North Queensland 1942-1945," accessed 10/14/2014.
13. [LBJ Presidential Library](#), "President Lyndon B. Johnson's Address to the Nation Announcing Steps To Limit the War in Vietnam and Reporting His Decision Not To Seek Reelection March 31, 1968," accessed 10/14/2014.



Steven Blumrosen, author, foreign correspondent, journalist, OpEd contributor, care-taker, computer DIY and photography enthusiast, loves to travel. He is fascinated by history, law and politics, and is

concerned about the future, especially in politics. - See more at: <http://newsblaze.com/writer/blum.html> Read more stories by [Steven Blumrosen](#).

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Medical Research May Be Unnecessary, Unethical, Unscientific, and Wasteful

Sometimes there is a waste in health and medical research, says Dr Hans Lund, Chair of EBRNetwork Steering Group and a senior researcher at University of Southern Denmark.

[...More Australia](#)

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