

RELEASE IN FULL

**From:** H <hrod17@clintonemail.com>  
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**Subject:** Fw: Richard Holbrooke's last campaign

Pls print.

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**Subject:** FW: Richard Holbrooke's last campaign

See highlight

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**Sent:** Thursday, May 19, 2011 8:50 AM  
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## POLITICO

### Richard Holbrooke's last campaign

**By:** Ben Smith

May 19, 2011 04:46 AM EDT

Nicholas Kristof's Sunday column in The New York Times was a classic of a certain genre: A prominent, respected administration figure stuns the White House and rattles the apparatus by going on record to criticize U.S. policy.

That Richard Holbrooke has been dead for nearly six months hardly diminished the impact. Indeed, the public airing of Holbrooke's posthumous concerns that Afghanistan had become a Vietnam-like quagmire put the administration in a particularly difficult position: It's hard to spin against the saintly departed, a twist that Holbrooke, his friends say, would have positively relished.

The column, full of Holbrooke's private remarks to his wife, Kati Marton, to Kristof, and selected tidbits from his private notes, marked a sort of milestone in what is shaping up to be Holbrooke's last campaign, one with typically high stakes. The goal, Marton and other friends say, is twofold: to advance Holbrooke's goal of a negotiated solution to the nearly decadelong war and to secure his legacy as a visionary who worked himself to death for a vital cause — and not as the isolated old lion some in the administration have portrayed.

"It's so characteristic of Holbrooke that he would be no longer among us but still very much in the argument," said Peter Osnos, his longtime editor, whose imprint, PublicAffairs, will publish a book of essays on Holbrooke later this year.

The posthumous Holbrooke is weighing in on an argument, Kristof wrote, that he'd lost while serving as the administration's special envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan: pushing back against a "surge" of troops into Afghanistan in 2009 and arguing for a speedy peace deal with the Taliban.

Holbrooke, Kristof wrote, "chafed at aspects of the White House approach [to Afghanistan]" and "winced at the over-reliance on military force, for it reminded him of Vietnam."

Marton is quoted as saying Holbrooke saw the conflict as "Obama's Vietnam," a combustible phrase for a Democratic president.

Marton is certainly aware of her charismatic husband's enduring political impact — and the power of his posthumous doubts. As a well-connected, well-regarded writer and public figure in her own right, she's well placed to promote his views and manage his legacy. She shared Holbrooke's private thoughts and notes with the Times, she said, for a reason.

"I think that there's a definite urgency and an opportunity right now," she said in a telephone interview Monday. "I guess I was channeling Richard; I know that he would see a great opportunity with the killing of bin Laden to put diplomacy in overdrive."

"I want to spur that and also to raise a voice of concern regarding the temptation to throw up our hands and tell the Pakistanis where to get off," she said. "I'm very familiar with his thinking, and I'm also familiar with what he was trying to do, ... and what he was trying to do was to prepare the ground for reconciliation."

The project of putting Holbrooke's memory to foreign policy use began as soon as he died, as his family told reporters in early reports that his last words, to a Pakistani doctor, were, "You've got to stop this war in Afghanistan."

But some officials now say casting him as an anti-war figure simplifies his role in internal conversations.

"I don't think he was opposed at all" to the surge, said P.J. Crowley, the former assistant secretary of state for public affairs. "He was passionate about the civilian element of the strategy, which frequently gets overlooked."

Holbrooke, he added, "would have loved" his posthumous re-emergence into the center of a crucial debate.

Holbrooke's views are also muddied by the difficult, frustrating space he held and defended within the Obama administration. A large and often polarizing figure who had been on the front lines of American foreign policy since Vietnam, he found himself constantly at odds with a White House national security staff that valued low-key, bureaucratic decision making, no drama and a public process structured to emphasize the president's singular role.

He was, Kristof wrote, "effectively gagged, unable to comment on what he saw as missteps of the Obama administration that he served."

When the administration debated a "surge" into Afghanistan, Holbrooke didn't emerge in

the prodigiously leaked accounts as the leading voice against the escalation. Vice President Joe Biden played that role, while Holbrooke faced the complex position of making his views known without alienating his boss and protector inside the administration, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who supported the surge.

Bob Woodward, however, reported last fall that Holbrooke's view on the surge had been simple: "It can't work."

But Holbrooke did not, until now, emerge as the face of an alternative approach to Afghanistan. While he was not by temperament a good soldier, it was a role he had little choice but to play in the administration.

"He was not doing anything — I underscore this — he did not do anything without administration approval," Marton told POLITICO. "He did not go rogue. But he didn't anticipate that talks with the Taliban would happen, and he was preparing the ground."

Holbrooke also hinted at least once in public at the Vietnam comparison that the Kristof column suggests was at the heart of his views on Afghanistan. At a conference of historians last year on the release of a new, declassified, official history of the Vietnam War, New America Foundation fellow Steve Clemons, who has tried to rally opposition to the American presence in Afghanistan, asked Holbrooke about parallels.

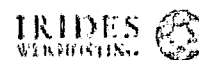
"Structurally, there are obvious similarities," Holbrooke said. "And leafing through these books here, they leap out at you. Many of the programs that are being followed, many of the basic doctrines are the same ones that we were trying to apply in Vietnam.

"And I believe in history. I think history is continuous. It doesn't begin or end on Pearl Harbor Day or the day Lyndon Johnson withdraws from the presidency or on 9/11. You have to learn from the past but not be imprisoned by it," he said.

The White House has been reluctant to engage in political "pushback" against the late diplomat, and officials declined to comment on his posthumous broadside. But Obama administration officials have long disputed comparisons to Vietnam, arguing that the current policy in Afghanistan is geared toward an exit. The Washington Post reported Monday that the United States this month "accelerated direct talks with the Taliban," holding meetings in Qatar aimed at the kind of reconciliation Holbrooke is said to have been lobbying for.

And Holbrooke, though dead, probably won't be silent. The PublicAffairs volume, due out on the anniversary of his death, is to be edited by current National Security Council staffers Samantha Power and Derek Chollet, Osnos said, with Marton's preface and contributions from journalists who covered episodes of his life, from Strobe Talbott to David Rohde. The historian Michael Takiff is at work on an oral history. And New Yorker writer George Packer is at work on a biography of the diplomat, having addressed the last phase of Holbrooke's career in a long article that introduced both the Vietnam comparison and Holbrooke's own large personality in ways that infuriated the White House.

Marton, though, won't wait for those to make the case for her late husband's policies and for Holbrooke himself. "I want Richard's legacy to be secure, and it would be extremely irresponsible on my part to let these events unfold without answering [those who ask], 'What would Richard advise?'" she said.



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