Nixon’s Presidency

I. Foreign policy issues during Nixon’s presidency (excluding Vietnam)

A. Detente: shift in U.S. policy toward communism

1. Sec. of State Henry Kissinger traveled to China and USSR for secret sessions to plan summit meetings with the communists.
2. Nixon believed USSR and China clashing over their interpretations of Marxism could give U.S. opportunity to play off one against the other.
3. Nixon also hoped to gain their aid in pressuring North Vietnam into peace.
4. Nixon and Kissinger’s policies
   a. realpolitik: US should pursue policies and make alliances based on its national interests rather than on any particular view of the world.
   b. Balance of power: "It will be a safer world and a better world if we have a strong, healthy, United States, Europe, Soviet Union, China, Japan -- each balancing the other." -- Nixon in 1971
   -- Détente was the key to this balance.

B. China visit, 1972 — “Ping Pong or Panda Diplomacy”

1. February 1972, Nixon and Kissinger went to China to meet with Mao Zedong and his associates.
2. Recognition of China
   a. U.S. agreed to support China’s admission to the United Nations and to pursue economic and cultural exchanges.

C. Soviet Union and détente

1. Czechoslovakia invaded (1968) by Soviets seeking to squash student reform movement.
   a. Czechoslovakia became one of strictest govt’s in E. Europe for two decades.
   b. US, preoccupied with Vietnam, could do little to aid Czech reformers
2. Nixon’s Moscow visit -- May 1972, Nixon played his "China card" with the Kremlin.
   b. Chairman Leonid Brezhnev approached Nixon about nuclear reduction talks.
   c. Nixon’s visit ushered in an era of relaxed tensions called détente.
      i. Policy sought to establish rules to govern the rivalry between the U.S. and the Soviet Union and China.
      ii. Resulted in several significant agreements.
      iii. Agreements significant as they were made before US withdrew from Vietnam.
3. Arms control treaties
   a. SALT I (Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty) signed in May, 1972.
      -- U.S. and USSR agreed to stop making nuclear ballistic missiles.
   b. ABM Treaty (Anti-ballistic missiles)
      -- US and USSR agreed to reduce the number of antiballistic missiles to 200 for each power.
4. Grain deal of 1972: 3-year arrangement by which the U.S. agreed to sell at least $750 million worth of wheat, corn, and other cereals to the Soviet Union.
5. Helsinki Conference (July, 1975) -- 34 countries present
   a. Held during Gerald Ford’s presidency
   b. One group of agreements officially ended World War II by finally legitimizing the Soviet-dictated boundaries of Poland and other East European countries.
   c. In return, Soviets guaranteed more liberal exchanges of people and information between East and West and the protection of certain basic "human rights."
   d. U.S. angry that USSR continued to send huge quantities of arms and military technicians to pro-Communist forces around the world.
   e. Ford maintained policy of détente but U.S. and USSR relations were deteriorating.
5. Détente evaluated
   a. Successful overall as U.S. checkmated and co-opted the two great Communist powers into helping end the Vietnam War.
   b. Did not end the arms race
   c. Ended in 1979 with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan

D. Energy Crisis, 1973 (sometimes called "Oil Crisis")

1. Major cause for U.S. economic troubles in the 1970s
2. Yom Kippur War of 1973 resulted in bitterness among Arabs toward Western nations for their support of Israel.
3. Arab Oil Embargo
   a. Arab states established an oil boycott to push the Western nations into forcing Israel to withdraw from lands controlled since the "Six Day War" of 1967
   b. Kissinger negotiated withdrawal of Israel west of the Suez Canal and the Arabs lifted their boycott—Shuttle Diplomacy
4. OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, and Iran, raised the price of oil from about $3 to $11.65/ barrel in an attempt to force U.S. to recognize the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)
a. U.S. gas prices doubled and inflation shot above 10%.
b. Nixon refused to ration gasoline and an acute gasoline shortage ensued.

II. Nixon’s Domestic Policy
A. "New Federalism"
1. Revenue sharing -- Congress passed in 1972 a five year plan to distribute $30 billion of federal revenues to the states.
2. Nixon proposed bulk of welfare payments be shifted to the states and a "minimum income" be established for poor families, but did not push the program through Congress.

B. Civil Rights
1. Nixon sought to block renewal of the Voting Rights Act and delay implementation of court ordered school desegregation in Mississippi.
2. Supreme Court ordered busing of students in 1971 to achieve school desegregation.
   -- Nixon proposed an anti-busing bill but Congress blocked it.
3. Nixon furthered affirmative action by establishing goals and timetables for companies to hire women and minorities.
   a. “Philadelphia Plan”
   b. Critics charged Nixon was trying to weaken labor unions by using affirmative action for hiring practices.

C. Congressional Legislation
2. Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) -- 1970
   -- Agency would monitor worker safety conditions.
3. Federal Election Campaign Act: would reduce campaign contributions

D. Environmentalism
1. Earth Day, April 22, 1970 seen as symbolic beginning of the nation's environmental era.
2. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) created in 1970 (to stall the environmental movement)
   a. Its inception climaxed two decades of environmentalism
      -- Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring (1962) exposed poisonous effects of pesticides.
   b. Eventually the EPA stood on the front line of the battle for a clean environment: Clean Air Act (1970) and clean air and water acts a few years later.
   c. Progress made in subsequent decades on reducing automobile emissions and cleaning up polluted rivers and lakes.
   d. Nixon & Ford opposed to environmental legislation during their terms due to conservative perceptions of over-regulation of businesses & increased costs.
3. Toxic Waste
   a. Example: Love Canal, NY
      i. Soil and groundwater so polluted EPA declared town unfit for habitation.
      ii. Residents evacuated, homes boarded up, community sealed off by a tall chain-link fence.
   b. Superfund established in 1980 by President Carter (law aimed at cleaning toxic dumps)
      -- Impact: Release of selected toxic chemicals down 46%

4. Protest over nuclear power
   a. Three Mile Island -- March, 1979 in Harrisburg, PA
      i. Worst nuclear disaster in U.S. history; core released radioactive water and steam.
      ii. Officials feared massive radiation release but it never came.
      iii. Reactor shut down for 6 years.
      iv. 100,000 residents evacuated.
   b. Environmental groups stepped-up their protests but the powerful nuclear power lobby prevented any significant change.

5. Endangered Species Act, 1973
   a. Area of protected land and water increased 300%
   b. Recovered species include bald eagle, peregrine falcon, gray whale.
   c. Criticism: Wetlands regulations and Endangered Species Act imposed unconstitutional restrictions on landowners. Too much valuable land taken out of production and off the tax rolls.

E. Economic Problems and Policy
1. 1969, Nixon cut spending and raised taxes. Encouraged Federal Reserve Board to raise interest rates but the economy grew worse.
3. Inflation reached 12% by 1971
   -- Cost of living more than tripled from 1969 to 1981; longest and steepest inflationary cycle in U.S. history.
4. Price and wage controls
   a. 1970, Congress gave president the power to regulate prices and wages
   b. 1971, Nixon announced a 90-day price and wage freeze and took the U.S. off the gold standard.
   c. At end of 90 days, Nixon established mandatory guidelines for wage and price increases.
d. 1973, Nixon turned to voluntary wage and price controls except on health care, food, and construction.
e. When inflation increased rapidly, Nixon cut back on government expenditures, refusing to spend funds already appropriated by Congress (impounding).

5. Why did the U.S. economy stagnate?
   a. Federal deficits in the 1960s during "Great Society" and Vietnam War
   b. International competition especially from Germany and Japan
      i. U.S. losing its economic hegemony since the days following WWII.
      ii. U.S. complacent; saw little need initially to modernize plants and seek more efficient methods of production.
   c. Rising energy costs due to the oil crisis.
   d. Increase in numbers of women and teenagers in the work force took part-time jobs and were less likely to develop skills in the long-term.
   e. Shift of the economy from manufacturing to services where productivity gains were allegedly more difficult to achieve.
   f. Inflationary military and welfare spending during 1960s (in the absence of off-setting taxes) because they give people money without adding to the supply of goods those dollars can buy.

6. **Stagflation** by mid-1970s (plagued Ford and Carter presidencies)
   1. Slowing productivity and rising inflation -- rare.
   2. Industry slowed down in the 1970s while inflation hit 11% in 1974
   3. Unemployment hit over 9% in 1975

**III. Election of 1972**

A. Nominees

1. Democrats nominated **George McGovern**
   -- McGovern hampered by a party divided over the war and social policies as well as his own ultra-liberalism.

2. George Wallace ran again as the American Independent candidate
   -- Shot on May 15 and left paralyzed below the waist.

   a. Emphasized that he had wound the "Democratic War" in Vietnam down from 540,000 troops to 30,000.
   b. Candidacy received boost 12 days before election when Kissinger announced "peace is at hand" in Vietnam and an agreement would be reached within days.
      -- No agreement occurred; the war lasted almost another year.

B. Results

1. Landslide victory for Nixon: 520-17; popular majority of 47.1 million to 29.1 million.
2. Republicans suffered losses in both houses of Congress
   -- Reduced Nixon's mandate for his policies.

**IV. Watergate -- biggest presidential scandal in U.S. history (forced Nixon to resign)**

A. Nixon sought to secretly attack political opponents.

1. Nixon surrounded himself with people who almost always agreed with him, thus protecting himself from criticism and making him more isolated.
   b. John Erlichman, chief domestic policy advisor

2. 1971, Nixon's men gathered list of 200 individuals and 18 organizations that the administration regarded as enemies.
   a. Included Edward Kennedy, McGovern, entire black leadership in Congress, college presidents, actors such as Steve McQueen, Paul Newman, Jane Fonda, and 57 members of the media.
   b. Nixon asked FBI to spy on these individuals and try to discredit them.
   c. Ordered the IRS to harass them with tax audits.
   d. FBI blocked an illegal Nixon plan for secret police operation to combat antiwar movement. Would have included FBI, CIA, NSC & military intelligence.
      -- Nixon feared antiwar movement might undo him like it did Johnson.

B. **CREEP** -- Committee to Re-Elect the President

1. Nixon worried about the outcome of the 1972 elections.
   a. Nixon's attorney general set up CREEP and began a massive illegal fund-raising campaign.
      -- Money was set aside in a special fund to pay for "dirty tricks" operations against Nixon's Democratic opponents.

2. **White House "plumbers"** instructed to stop anti-Nixon leaks to the press.
   a. *New York Times* published "Pentagon Papers" stating Gulf of Tonkin Resolution had been based on a lie and discredited Johnson's motives for continuing the war.
      -- Nixon feared leaks of classified documents damaging to his administration.
   b. CREEP's special investigations unit, "the plumbers," targeted Daniel Ellsberg who had leaked the "Pentagon Papers."
      -- Broke into office of Ellsberg's psychiatrist but found nothing embarrassing.

3. **Watergate Break-In**, summer 1972
a. Burglars hired by CREEP caught breaking into Democratic Nat’l Headquarters at the Watergate Hotel in Washington, D.C.  
b. Nixon and his aids denied any involvement in the break-in and embarked on a massive cover-up while the public initially believed them.

C. Bob Woodward & Carl Bernstein, young Washington Post journalists, broke the story.
1. Investigations revealed that two of the Watergate burglars and a White House aide involved in the burglary were employees of CREEP.  
   -- Also discovered other illegal activities conducted by the president’s advisors.
2. "Silence money": Nixon secretly authorized payment of more than $460,000 in CREEP funds to keep the Watergate burglars quiet about White House involvement.

D. 1973, Watergate trial and Senate hearings revealed Nixon and other White House officials had covered up their involvement & pressured defendants "to plead guilty and remain silent."
-- Nixon announced resignations of his three closest aides who were involved in Watergate.

E. Watergate Tapes
1. Senate committee and prosecutor Archibald Cox called on Nixon to surrender tapes of conversations that might pertain to the Watergate break-in.
2. Nixon refused and claimed executive privilege and stating release of the tapes would endanger national security.
3. Saturday Night Massacre: Nixon fired two of his men for refusing to fire special prosecutor Archibald Cox before a third Nixon aide finally fired Cox.
   -- Public outraged

F. Spiro Agnew resigns (October, 1973)
1. Agnew pleaded no contest to charges of income tax evasion and accepting bribes while governor of Maryland and resigned the vice presidency.
2. Nixon nominated Gerald R. Ford, the popular conservative House Minority Leader

G. In a non-related matter. Nixon was forced to pay back taxes for tax evasion ($500,000)
   -- Also accused of using public funds for improvements to his private residencies in California and Florida

H. Nixon releases edited transcripts of some tapes but most incriminating portions are erased, especially critical 18 minute gap.
   1. When Nixon refused to release unedited tapes, special prosecutor took case to Supreme Court.
   2. U.S. v. Nixon: Court ruled unanimously that President Nixon had to release the tapes.

I. Impeachment proceedings
1. July 30, House committee voted to recommend impeachment of President Nixon on three counts:
   a. Obstructing justice by trying to cover up the role of the White House in the Watergate burglary.
   b. Violating the rights of U.S. citizens by using the FBI, CIA, and IRS to harass critics.
   c. Defying congressional authority by refusing to turn over the tapes.
2. August 5, Nixon handed over the tapes which revealed a White House cover up
   -- Impeachment charges seemed certain.

J. Nixon resigns as President (August 7, 1974)
   -- Following day, Gerald Ford sworn in as president.

K. Ford Pardons Nixon in September for any crimes he may have committed while president.
   1. Many Americans outraged that Nixon escaped justice.
      a. Questioned if a deal had been made between Nixon and Ford.
      b. In light of Vietnam, Americans grew even more skeptical of their gov’t.
   2. 31 Nixon administration officials were convicted and went to prison for Watergate-related offenses.
   3. The pardon probably cost Gerald Ford the presidential election of 1976.