

A Failed American Experiment:



**Vietnam Wars
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A Failed American Experiment: The Haunting Legacy of the Vietnam War and Lessons Lost

**‘The convulsions that shredded the nation’s fabric
continues to resonate throughout the political and cultural landscape.’**



ABSTRACT

“Haunting...alters the experience of being in time, separating the past, the present, and the future...[g]hosts appear when the trouble they represent and symptomize is no longer being contained or repressed... The ghost...is not the invisible or some ineffable excess. The whole essence...of a ghost is that it has a real presence and demands its due, your attention.”¹ --- Avery F. Gordon

From 1776 to the Vietnam War, the United States had never lost a war. The loss was an embarrassment, or shame to the military industrial complex, and it exposed the country to its false delusion of endless omnipotence. From perpetual self-confidence, Americans descended into the



abyss of self-doubt and interrogation. Politicians continue to banter the view of American exceptionalism and though the United States continues as the most impressive world power ever, it lives in a post-Vietnam era; grappling with the awkward but undeniable fact that President Johnson’s “raggedy ass fourth-rate (Southeastern Asia) country”² had routed it from Saigon. Though the War had been over for 20 years, the haunting ghosts and legacy of the Vietnam war hadn’t

vanished. Former Defense Secretary Robert McNamara said in 1995, admitting to being haunted by the government’s mistakes and convoluted role in Vietnam, “People don’t want to admit they’ve made mistakes. We were wrong, terribly wrong. We owe it to future generations to explain why.”

The height of U.S. power came in 1945, and lasting about four years, with a descent beginning in 1949 with the loss of China. Vietnam was marinated into a killing zone, but it also served a defiant lesson. We must never permit political or historical revisionists to cover and conceal its lessons by wrapping them in the red, white and blue with stars and stripes romanticizing about past chivalrous wars inseminating the with blood by the gallons and deaths by the millions. If we fail understand and care, more will die in pointless, and ‘fundamentally wrong and immoral’ wars, like Vietnam, brooked by charismatic leaders who find it either too humiliating or shameful to quit. Certainly, this haunting is one way in which violent and implacable systems of power make themselves recognized and their impact felt, especially when they are supposedly over and done with. Understanding this haunting is vital for acknowledging the character of any society and for changing it.



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¹ Gordon, Avery, F., *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, Introduction, p. xvi

² Jones, Howard, *Crucible of Power: A History of American Foreign Relations from 1897*, p. 381

KEYWORDS:

The NORTH

- **Ho Chi Minh, the North Vietnamese Communist Revolutionary Leader and Chairman, 1890-1969**
- **Hanoi: North Vietnamese Government**
- **Viet Minh: The League for the Independence of Vietnam**
- **DRV: Democratic Republic of Vietnam by Ho Chi Minh**
- **NVA: North Vietnamese Army**
- **VC: Viet Cong Communist rebels in South Vietnam**
- **VPA: Vietnamese People's Army or Viet Minh**
- **NLF: National Liberation Front or National Front for the Liberation of the South**

The SOUTH

- **Ngô Đình Diệm: Prime Minister and President of South Vietnam 1955-1963, b. 1910 – 1963**
- **Saigon: South Vietnamese Government**
- **ARVN: Army of the Republic of Vietnam-South Vietnamese Army, 1955-1975.**

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THE VIETNAM WAR IN PROSE



The war in Vietnam is but a symptom of a far deeper malady within the American spirit.

--MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR

“They may bring in half a million...They may use thousands of aircraft...But never will they be able to break the iron will of the heroic Vietnamese people, their determination to fight against American aggression, for national salvation...Nothing is more precious than independence and freedom. Once victory is won, our people will rebuild their country and make it even more prosperous and beautiful.”

(Ho Chi Minh, July 17, 1966)

“The war against Vietnam is only the ghastliest manifestation of...imperial provincialism, which afflicts America's whole culture -- aware only of its own history, insensible to everything which isn't part of the local atmosphere.”

(Stephen Vizinczey, London Times, 1968)

“It has been said that the United States was deceived into entering and expanding the Vietnam War by its own overoptimistic propaganda. The record suggests, however, that the policy-makers stayed in Vietnam... because of overly pessimistic assessments of the consequences of losing.”

(Jonathan Schell, The Real War)

Map of NORTH AND SOUTH VIETNAM



THESIS: “The Vietnam War was Fundamentally Wrong and Immoral”

Any subject of history is taught from a unique perspective: the first person of the instructor. It is impossible to teach such a subject with objectiveness and impartiality. To try and teach with objectivity is to misconstrue what history is about. It is about viewpoints, interest, biases, prejudices, preconceptions, misconceptions etc. These characteristics must be taught so as to understand how history happens, but also why it happened the way it did. It is understanding the human aspect to history with all its defects, faults and blemishes. One aspect of the discussions concerning the Vietnam War is the conclusory nature of the arguments. Some presuppose the war is ‘just or unjust,’ with the premises of their argument unspoken, while others may believe the war to be ‘fundamentally wrong and immoral.’ Both may consider their argument obvious with the details of any agreement only a matter extended discussion, thus evidencing a move in the quality of principled discourse regarding the legitimate or illegitimate uses of force. At the beginning, I want to make clear, I am approaching this argument with a position of bias and will attempt to credit my thesis: ‘The Vietnam War was Fundamentally Wrong and Immoral’ with such evidence as I can.

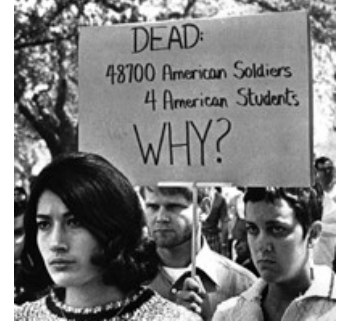
This move is perhaps explicable in terms of the moral consciousness of the irreconcilability of warfare with the purposes of human well-being and existence. However, it remains true to say that people, and nations, are more disposed to the magnitude of their conduct by reasoned discourse than by unarticulated intuition, irrespective of how persuasive or profound. Additionally, the reality of a particular moral philosophy as a discipline capable of postulating a guidance for human activities may well rest on upon its capacity to lift our moral sense into a higher sphere of human thought. This deliberation suggest that an ethical assessment of the Vietnam War would be a worthwhile venture. Yet, as I have mentioned, with the human element the effort will be dangerous. Objective judgments about human events are impossible; rare is the skill to think analytically about the tragic loss of life in warfare, which arouses strong feelings of compassion, empathy to renunciation. Despite these formidable impediments, my attempt to clarify the conflict in a language of a higher sphere of realities is worth the effort as a means for the advancement of human good.

I shall attempt to examine the Vietnam War in terms which appear to be most inclined to an extensive moral reflection, and as such it is essential for a moralist to see the complex nature of the War and its inconsistencies. Some will, I am sure, object with my findings, since particular aspects of the War will be highlighted for its moral examination. Additionally, the events, situations and politics I have chosen to consider may give rise to criticize the actions of one side of the War while

refusing to question the depredations of the other. What I can say is, I have no voice over what the other side does; there exist no staying power of control. To deride and criticize that side is to preach to the choir and is meaningless. I do have something to measure from my home and tax dollar, and how it is spent. I have some measure of responsibility to speak out when I see injustice perpetrated by my country. This I also believe is what patriotism is all about: dissent. To see wrong and change it, to stop bigotry, to recognize law both national and international, to not be an international rogue state, to value principles that all people are worthy of life and that the color of their skin, region of birth, ethnicity, religion are no grounds to kill or murder them, especially innocent children and adults.

Finally, what Howard Zinn said about patriotism and implied about dissent, “If patriotism were defined, not as blind obedience to government, nor as submissive worship to flags and anthems, but rather as love of one's country, one's fellow citizens (all over the world), as loyalty to the principles of justice and democracy, then *patriotism would require us to disobey our government, when it violated those principles.*” On another occasion he said, ‘Between the declaration of war and the first shot fired there are an infinite number of choices and steps to make rather than war.’ Memories will and do fade or diminish in time. Facts, however, do not. They must and will remain unchanged unless by more revealed and relative facts. We must never forget that Vietnam was an immoral war. This is the virtue I seek to examine, and not ‘my country regardless.’

The Vietnam War remains a memory in American society, military, and culture because the conflict proved to be a turning point in what the American government did and wound up getting away with. The War, a contentious and provocative theme, divided a nation along generational, class, and racial lines. The Vietnam War was typical of America 'imperial militarism;' however, it did not follow the trajectory of the major wars before it. It sapped the American psyche and gave effectively nothing in return except for a nation alienated, divided and a generation lost. Events of the Vietnam era caused many to rethink the nature of America's hegemony, its social and cultural norms, and foreign policy. Many conflicts opened during the Vietnam War continue unresolved, and the public carried on with impassioned debate about the significance, consequence and lessons learned and lost for several decades after the war ended in 1975. Though the conflicts occurred in a small country in Southeast Asia, the war's discord, resentment, mayhem, and opposition was intense here; it drained and exhausted America, it tore America to shreds, divided its young from their parents, and negated what America had claimed to stand for: freedom and democracy.



Americans still ask: was the American effort in Vietnam was mistaken, a blundering effort that started out well intended, an honorable cause, or a failed idealist struggle to protect South Vietnamese independence. The historic events of Vietnam serve as a document to reassess the nature of America, its social and cultural assumptions, dissenting views and foreign policy. I believe that it is 'unacceptable and morally wrong' for any powerful nation-state to attack, invade, occupy, and seek destruction of a weaker nation-state so as to impose on it an acceptable government. If we're serious we will anatomize the war's aftermath by analyzing the remembrance of the War, its terror and violence. As in in any society, we must recognize that war is a moral issue, and moral issues relate to the human condition and psyche and have grave consequences.

It is the ultimate responsibility for any citizen to challenge, contest and restrain the violence of his nation-state of birth. The sense of complete irresponsibility shown by those who stood mutely, in the early 1960s, while millions of refugees in Vietnam were forced from their homes by American bombardment was incredible. To say nothing about the inhuman moral standards or contempt for international law was a willful tragedy. To simply ignore this responsibility, or stand by 'My Country Right or Wrong,' is to stand accused of active complicity in war-time crimes, which is defined as 'a crime under international law' according to the Nuremberg principles. One anti-war activist recalled, 'Supporters of the war kept yelling, "My country right or wrong."' It was insane. We don't want to live in a country that we're going to support something irrespective of it's being right or wrong, so we had two groups of Americans, both thinking that they were patriotic, on completely polar ends of the war and fighting each there. Patriotism had become the unquestioning and absolute allegiance of one to his or her country, regardless of whether it was correct, "right or wrong." It's like saying 'My mother drunk or sober,' it's completely irrational and senseless and means absolutely nothing.

It seemed as senseless as Mark Twain’s absurd and paradoxical indictment of the church in “War Prayer,” published after his death in 1923. Twain said,

“Lord our Father, our young patriots, idols of our hearts...help us tear their soldiers to bloody shreds with our shells; help us to cover their smiling fields with the pale forms of their patriot dead; help us to drown the thunder of the guns with the shrieks of their wounded, writhing in pain; help us to lay waste their humble homes with a hurricane of fire; help us to wring the hearts of their unoffending widows with unavailing grief; help us to turn them out roofless with their little children to wander unfriended in the wastes of their desolated land in rags and hunger and thirst...broken in spirit, worn with travail, imploring thee for the refuge of the grave and denied it.”³

It was believed afterward that the unknown messenger was a lunatic, because there was no sense in what he said.

“The War Prayer,” is a mocking and derisive prosecution of wartime hysteria, blind patriotism and godly dedication as inspirations for war. It is about a little town that prays for the victory of their soldiers against their enemies. An unknown messenger from God comes to disclose to the town how self-centered, egotistical and cruel they are in their wishes. It is a story of deviance and social manipulation. The “Prayer” is the topic of bigotry and fanaticism as some assembled in church are so very intolerant of other’s beliefs and scorn anyone who may disagree with them. Twain uses irony and sarcasm in order to focus attention to the insincerity of the church, which preaches about mercy and love, with emphases on the cruel, gruesome reality of violence and misfortune of war.

There are many breast-beating hyper-patriots who wish America to rule the world. What I find frightening is the serene composure with which government officials race to the bottom in speaking of ‘making the sands glow,’ or ‘destroying the entire country.’ To speak of inflicting such insufferable violence and tragedy on another people seems to void us of our humanity. The American military sought not simply to contain Vietnam but sought to ‘dry it up.’⁴ Had any other government razed Vietnam the way we did we would be clamoring with moral indignation at such crimes.

Today, it is permitted to criticize U.S. foreign policy, although to a limited degree and primarily on tactical levels of engagement before receiving any real resistance. However, what is not tolerable is to exclude condemnation of the ‘Axis of Evil plus 2’ (North Korea, Iraq, Iran, Russia and China.) These are the ‘evil empires.’ The U.S., be it awkward, misguided, misinformed, or even deceived has nothing but good intentions, never ‘evil or immoral.’⁵ As Noam Chomsky

³ <https://warprayer.org/>

⁴ Young, Marilyn B., *The Vietnam Wars 1945-1990*, ed.1991, p. 86

⁵ *IBID*, p. 27

commented, “My own concern is primarily the terror and violence carried out *by my own state*, for two reasons. For one thing, because it happens to be the larger component of international violence. But also, for a much more important reason than that: namely, I can do something about it. So even if the US was responsible for 2% of the violence in the world instead of the majority of it, it would be that 2% I would be primarily responsible for. And that is a simple ethical judgment. That is, the ethical value of one’s actions depends on their anticipated and predictable consequences. It is very easy to denounce the atrocities of someone else. That has about as much ethical value as denouncing atrocities that took place in the 18th century.”

Justifiably, one could only imagine the public laughter, if Andrei Sakharov was arrested on January 22, 1980, following a public protesting of Afghanistan for not allowing the USSR to invade and take control of their country and resources in 1979. It would have been absurd to even listen to a Russia dissident speak such nonsense. His protests of the Russian invasion were far more venerable and instructive for speaking ‘truth about power’ and not ‘truth to power.’ The USSR, (today Russia) as the United States, know all about power and where it lies. Consequently, I am not interested in ‘singing to the choir’ about matters I have little to no control over or possess any authority over, albeit in Afghanistan, Iraq, North Korea, and Iran etc. It is what I can do here and now, in the United States as a citizen, about enlightening the ‘truth about power’ that is my concern and should be others.

Consequently, this war Americans are fighting, thousands of miles away from American shores, for what was a result of vague, idealist goals of the United States from the beginning and with victory not immediate, its purpose was lost to time with inevitable defeat. Ultimately, the goal digressed to “kill the gooks” as many VC as possible, regardless of civilian deaths sustained. It was then that the populace of America, not the leaders or pundits, recognized and acted upon this moral and ethical hypocrisy. The lack of factual government intel for getting involved in Vietnam, the existence of an undemocratic draft, antiwar emotions, and protests completely unified so as to split America, creating a chasm of lasting effects of the Vietnam War for decades.

Finally, three to five million people were killed in a War against a small country, thousands of miles from the coast, that had never attacked the U.S., had never attempted to attack it, had no wish to attack it, had no ability to attack it, and which had come to the U.S. after WWII asking President Truman for help in securing its own national and economic self-determination and liberty and was completely disregarded.

1. Introduction

The Vietnam War is perhaps the most traumatic event for American society since WWII. There was no official beginning, no celebrated ending with partying in the streets, and there were no heroes. Rather, there was guilt with no remorse, blame and culpability, lying, arrogance, mistake after mistake, revulsion and shock. “The wealthiest and most powerful nation in the history of the world made a maximum military effort, with everything short of atomic bombs to defeat a small nationalist movement in a tiny peasant country--and failed...[I]t was organized modern technology versus organized human beings and the human beings won.”⁶ Vietnam, the Cold War’s largest Southeastern War, soon became the most infamous ground zero conflict. With fear of a catastrophic nuclear war, the United States and the Soviet Union circumvented a direct military confrontation. U.S. intervention in Southeast Asia was a gradual process that included economic aid, diplomacy, politics, and military force. Regional coalitions and superpower pressures between the U.S., China, and the Soviet Union were set in an international theater for the macabre war. American policymakers, the elite corporate multinational business and banking systems, with their hands on the controls of ‘bought and paid in full’ political marionettes, set out to prove that the U.S. was fixated on stopping the spread of indigenous democracy and independent nationalism. They formed the ideological foundation of America’s core methodology in the destruction of Vietnam over the course of five presidencies. Vietnam was America’s litmus test to prove that it could meet the global challenge from the rise of independence with wars of annihilation and found it could not, less severe wounds to itself. The legacy of the Vietnam War has haunted the United States, its culture and foreign policy for some 60 years and try as they might, U.S. presidencies, politics and policy decision makers are engaged with the ‘immortal ghosts of Vietnam.’

2. The Vietnam War in 1000 Words

⁶ Zinn, Howard, *A People's History of the United States*, p. 469.

The Vietnam War began with communists fighting French colonial power in the 1940s and ended when Saigon fell in 1975. U.S. military intervention lasted from 1962 to 1973. The Communist military in the north was led by the nationalist Ho Chi Minh. The Geneva Accords of 1954 were negotiated and split the country at the 17th parallel by a demilitarized zone (3½ mile wide zone). The country was divided into communist north and pro-American south. Nation-wide elections to determine a permanent solution for all Vietnam were promised to take place in 1956 but never happened, and within 6 years the United States had invaded, occupied and was bombing the foreign nation of South Vietnam. The U.S. was obsessed by Cold War concerns; the spread of communism or more aptly economic and national independence, believing that if one Asian nation fell to the leftist ideology others would follow.

It is difficult to assert accurately casualty figures from the Vietnam War. Since 1975, there are a numerous estimates of its dead, casualties and refugees, but they frequently vary, or contradict each other. A BBC source estimated “two million Vietnamese civilians were killed, another 5.3 million injured and about 11 million, by US government figures, became refugees in their own country.”⁷ Perhaps, we will never know; after all, they aren’t us and we only count us.

By the late 1950s, a communist guerrilla force, the Vietcong, appeared in the south. It was supported and supplied from Hanoi and by southerners frustrated with the authoritarian, corrupt and repressive government of President, Ngo Diem. The U.S. had been providing aid, military equipment and training to south Vietnam since 1954. As the Vietcong grew this was increased, so to, did the U.S. helicopters and military advisers. But the summer of 1963, Diem's government was so humiliated that the U.S. did nothing to stop a coup by dissident generals. A series of unstable governments followed, demonstrating no more effective against the insurgency. The facilitator, however false it proved to be, for deeper U.S. involvement came in August 1964, with the Gulf of Tonkin incident.⁸ U.S. President Johnson used a second conflict to rationalize air strikes on naval bases in the north in 1965.

⁷ BBC, Was My Lai just one of many massacres in Vietnam War? August 28, 2013,

⁸ Ellsberg, Daniel (2002). *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*. New York: Viking, p. 10

Now the U.S. launched Operation Rolling Thunder, a sustained surgical bombing campaign in the north. In the summer of 1965 the U.S. announced a deployment of 100,000 soldiers along with mercenaries from Korea, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines and Thailand. The strategy was one of attrition, or aimed destroying the North's will to fight, rather than occupying territory. But despite withstanding substantial losses, the communists returned to re-occupy areas after U.S. forces had vacated. The Vietcong guerrillas traveled effectively in the harsh and unforgiving terrain. U.S. aircraft sprayed millions of gallons of the toxic Agent Orange over the jungle to destroy the thick foliage that Vietcong fighters used for cover and caused horrid deaths that have continued till today. Heavy bombing, including napalm was nonstop. But the communist forces fought back with anti-aircraft guns and fighter jets supplied by their Soviet and Chinese allies. By the end of 1967, U.S. troop losses and Vietnamese civilian casualty figures were generating massive domestic protests.

On January 31, 1968 the North Vietnamese Army and Vietcong launched a massive offensive during the Vietnamese New Year holiday of Tet. In synchronized assaults, the North Vietnamese Army attacked five major cities, 36 provincial capitals, 64 district capitals, including Saigon where they entered the U.S. embassy compound.⁹ Although surprised, the U.S. and the South Vietnamese Army resisted the offensive successfully, while the VC suffered heavy losses. The offensive woke up US public opinion against the War. Political support for President Johnson diminished significantly, leading to President Johnson's announcement that he would no longer seek the office of the President.

In 1968 newly-elected President Richard Nixon sought an exit plan that would leave the U.S. credibility undamaged. In June 1969 Nixon announced a policy of "Vietnamization," or the training and equipping the South Vietnamese military to take a larger share of responsibility. Over the next three years, more than half-a-million soldiers were withdrawn. U.S. public resentment continued and was sparked by two offensives against communist supply routes in Cambodia, in 1970 and 1972. The 1969 battle for "Hamburger Hill" fostered serious concerns about unnecessary U.S. lives killed in battle for a piece of land and later abandoned, only to be followed in the 1968 massacre at My Lai, where U.S. forces murdered point-blank more than more than '500 Vietnamese

⁹ Campbell, Karlyn Kohrs, *The Great Silent Majority: Nixon's 1969 Speech on Vietnamization*, p. 32

civilians were killed over the course of four hours, during which US troops even took time out to eat lunch.’¹⁰ Ho Chi Minh died in 1969. The communists launched another major offensive in 1972 but were turned back. Complicated talks were held in Paris and punctuated in 1972 by an eight-day U.S. bombing campaign attempting to level Hanoi, the negotiations ultimately formed a peace conference in January 1973. With the Paris Accords, the U.S. forces would leave, and South Vietnam would have the right to determine its own future.

The last American troops left in March 1973, but Southern and Northern forces charged each other of contravention to the terms of the Accord and fighting continued, though less intense. With the U.S. aid to South Vietnam reduced, the southern government became weaker. In early 1975, Hanoi began the first phase of an assault to take the whole country. The South Vietnamese army collapsed faster than anticipated, and in less than two months the North swept through the south taking land, while millions of refugees fled towards Saigon. On April 21, 1975, with the NVA closing in on Saigon, the South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu resigned and absconded to Taiwan. A week later the city was surrounded, and the plundering of Saigon began. By the end of April, the U.S. ordered the helicopter evacuation of 7,000 American workers and South Vietnamese from the city. The following day, North Vietnamese tanks drove unhampered into Saigon and the city was renamed Ho Chi Minh City.

3. U.S. Involvement in Vietnam - Why?

¹⁰ BBC, Was My Lai just one of many massacres in Vietnam War? August 28, 2013,

The Vietnam War was by far the most convulsive, distressing and painful of America's wars in Asia in the 50 years since Pearl Harbor. It set the U.S. economy on a hellish spiral; leaving America's foreign policy in a state of chaos and confusion, maligning the postwar policy of containment, and finally, demoralizing the consensus that originally supported it. It alienated the American people as no other event since the Civil War, while assaulting their collective soul. Whether the United States in fact won the Cold War is at best arguable. In any event it is important for Americans to understand why their nation intervened in Vietnam during such, and why it ultimately failed.

The Cold War and the ‘American War’ in Vietnam will probably not be unraveled for decades to come. Had it not been for the Cold War, the U.S., China, and the Soviet Union may have never interfered in what probably would have remained as a localized anti-colonial struggle in French Indochina.¹¹ The Cold War fashioned the way the Vietnam War was contested and meaningfully influenced its outcome. “Cold war principles, such as the concept of geo-political grand area of U.S. influence, ‘containment’ to withhold [*sic*] a constant threat of communist power, and the huge military-industrial complex needed to achieve this, developed naturally as the U.S.-Vietnam conflict progressed. This explains some of the baffling aspects of American presence in Vietnam. The Cold war met Vietnam with its searing hand as early as the time of the First Indochina War, when the French forces fought the Vietminh, from 1946-54, and in which the U.S. paid approximately 82 percent of French expenses.”¹² The war in Vietnam in turn changed the direction taken by the Cold War after Vietnam’s conclusion in 1975. The War in Vietnam emerged from the interface of several contending experiences of post-World War II: decolonization, nationalism and the Cold War itself. Perhaps, helpful in understanding U.S. intervention in Vietnam is see it as a gradual process of economic aid, political and military advisors, soldiers etc.



Though the crucial moments in this intervention occurred from different contexts there are three threads that unified them: **1. Nationalism, 2. The Cold War, and 3. Credibility.**

¹¹ Herring, George C. “The Cold War and Vietnam.” *OAH Magazine of History*, vol. 18, no. 5, 2004, pp. 18–21. *JSTOR*, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/25163717.

¹² M. S. Shivkumar. “Reconstructing Vietnam War History.” *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 31, no. 1, 1996, pp. 21–22. *JSTOR*, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/4403643.

1. Nationalism, or setting Vietnam in an anti-imperial and regional decolonial theater.
2. The Cold War the U.S., the Soviet Union, and China shaped events on a global theater.
3. Credibility moved U.S. policymakers to commit advisors, money, materiel, and troops to show American resolve.

In summary: The escalation of nationalism in the colonial theater and the failing European powers in post WWII coalesced to end a colonial system that had been a recognized phenomenon in world politics for decades. The Cold War involving the United States and the Soviet Union was changing into a philosophical power struggle with global proportions. The union of this philosophical struggle was set to explain the ‘internationalization’ of the ‘American War’ in Vietnam. The conflict encapsulated in microcosm all the political forces that formulated the century's global history: colonialism, independent nationalism, communism, economic transfer and democratic-capitalism; even though the State Department found no evidence of mass populace support for Communism within Vietnam.¹³ Communism was not the foremost ideology or wanted philosophy, but a desire for economic and national independence that drove the unrest. Most peasants knew little to nothing about communism, free market economy or democracy. Nonetheless, the Washington elite, with the U.S. decision making apparatus ensued because of their worst-case suppositions. Losing Indochina, could upset the strategic balance in the ‘free market economy’ in Southeast Asia, particularly if, other countries in the area were to follow as well. It would also damage the economic revitalization of Japan after WWII, who was reliant on maintaining commercial ventures with areas of Southeast Asia. The U.S. wanted all Southeast Asia under its control for economic hegemony.

Finally, if the United States permitted itself to be humiliated or disgraced by a little known Southeast Asian country, its military credibility would be seriously weakened, if not permanently damaged; the regional coalition that the United States led might melt away as countries lost faith in American protection and resolve. Throughout the world, American retreat was seen as a sign of military ineptitude, herculean clumsiness, or in want of a political resolution. Let there be no doubt: if nothing was learned, there will be more “Vietnams” in America's future,¹⁴ either as wars of American military credibility, or as wars where the enemy refuses to use strategies that allow the U.S. military to profit from its high-tech conventional warfare. [*Afghanistan and Iraq*]

¹³ Young, Marilyn B., *The Vietnam Wars 1945-1990*, ed.1991, p. 22

¹⁴ <http://www.nytimes.com/books/first/l/lind-vietnam.html>

4. History of Warfare in Vietnam

The First Indochina War (Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia formed Indochina) was between France and Vietnam. It began after the end of WWII in 1945 and lasted till France's defeat in 1954. Before Ho Chi Minh proclaimed the independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam from France in September 1945. John Pilger noted Ho Chi Minh's persistence on seeking aid from the United States through the Roosevelt administration. We must not forget that Vietnam, as a French colony, was an ally during WWII. Ho Chi Minh liked Americans. he told his friend Wilfred Burchett...that he enjoyed 'the openness of Americans...they didn't seem to be prisoners of the past, not like the French.' Continuing Pilger noted,

“Ho Chi Minh was the antithesis of other emerging communist leaders in one respect: he wanted his people to open themselves out to other societies, communist, capitalist and non-aligned...Indeed, so anxious was Ho for American support for his fledgling republic that he addressed twelve separate appeals to President Roosevelt....Major Patti later wrote that Ho pleaded not for military or economic aid...but for understanding, for moral support, for a voice in the forum of western democracies. But the United States *would not read his mail* because...the DRV [Democratic Republic of Vietnam] Government was not recognized by the United States and it would be improper for the President or anyone in authority to acknowledge such correspondence.”¹⁵

Later, Ho Chi Minh appealed again to President Truman, while insisting,

“That he was not a communist in the American sense. Although he had lived and worked in Moscow, Ho considered himself a free agent; but he warned that he would have to find allies if any were to be found; otherwise the Vietnamese would have to go it alone. And alone they went until 1950 when Ho Chi Minh believed he could no longer delay accepting the formal ties and material assistance under offer from the Soviet Union and especially from China. It was the success of the Chinese revolution in 1949 that was to give the Vietminh the means to defeat the French: military training, arms and sanctuary across an open frontier.”¹⁶

Ho wrote eight [8] letters to President Harry S. Truman reminding him of the self-determination promises of the Atlantic Charter, at the same time asking President Truman and the U.S. Congress for assistance by means of 'aid, capital, technology' and recognition. One such letter stated, “I wish to invite attention of your Excellency for strictly humanitarian reasons to following matter. Two million Vietnamese died of starvation during winter of 1944 and spring 1945 because

¹⁵ John Pilger, *Heroes*, (Jonathan Cape 1986, Vintage 2001), pp.180 - 181

¹⁶ *IBID*

of starvation policy of French...Unless great world powers and international relief organizations bring us immediate assistance we face imminent catastrophe...”¹⁷ As the U.S. continued to ally Northern Vietnam with Communist China and the USSR, Ho Chi Minh believed he had no choice but to turn to them. Upon being blatantly ignored by the United States, Ho had decided to pursue assistance from the USSR and China, to gain independence from the French colonial rule. The British forces briefly seized the South only to reestablish a French colonial rule till 1946. The French wanted return of their former Indochina colony prior to agreeing to participate in any NATO alliance the Warsaw Pact of the East. The communist/nationalist Viet Minh, whom the Allies had supported briefly during the war, remained fighting the French with financial and military equipment support from both China and the USSR, eventually obliging the French out of Indochina in 1954.

After Japan’s formal defeat on September 2, 1945, Vietnamese nationalists, or the Vietminh, who had fought against the Japanese occupation demanded full independence from France. France refused, and a 10-year war followed. In 1950 France acknowledged a pro French-Vietnamese government, the Vichy, led by Bao Dai in Southern Vietnam’s capital city Saigon and was recognized by the United States and England. Ho Chi Minh, leader of the Vietminh, claimed legitimate representative of Vietnamese nationalists and responded by announcing the independence of North Vietnam, as the Democratic Republic of Vietnam with Hanoi its capital. Ho Chi Minh continued the war against French colonial forces, exacting the final defeat on the French army on May 1954 at Dien Bien. At the 1954 peace talks in Geneva, Switzerland, it was decided that Vietnam would be divided along the 17th parallel for two years, or 1956, after which a nationwide democratic election would finalize who would rule the unification of Vietnam. That never happened.

The Second Indochina War, was known as such due to the contribution of all three countries previously constituting the French territory of Indochina. It also became known in Vietnam as the “Resistance War Against America,”¹⁸ or simply the American War, was a conflict that occurred from November 1955, to April 1975 when the North Vietnamese conquered Saigon

¹⁷ Zinn, Howard, *A People’s History of the United States*, pp. 470-471.

¹⁸ Kerr, Gordon, *A Short History of the Vietnam War: The Resistance War Against America* EPUB, 26/02/2015

in South Vietnam. The political ends and its war propaganda were unclear or at least ambiguous at the beginning: success and progress were inaccurate and blatantly false on many occasions, and with the enormous numbers of combatant casualties, the War provoked moral issues that made it more hated at home. The United States, originally financed France during the First Indochina War in opposition to the Communist party. Fighting eventually spilled over to Cambodia and Laos.

This appallingly gruesome war continues to haunt America, shaping its foreign policy, culture and national identity by initiating protracted and faltering wars in the Middle East with an imperial presidency executing foreign policy without the direct consensus of the citizenry. Accordingly, with the war ending, a concerted historic and media effort was made by the intelligentsia to portray the war as a ‘good venture, but gone bad, or a noble cause that went awry.’ Another effort was to make the resistance and dissent movements appear as if enemies of the state which led to polarizing arguments.

When World War II ended, the United States and its allies, most of whom were former imperial and colonial powers, now encountered a new problem, merging nationalism and independence movements evolving all over the East. The source of American concern and anxiety was imperial in nature. Noam Chomsky commented on this saying,

“...[It] was over strategic resources of Southeast Asia and their significance for the global system that the US was then constructing, incorporating western Europe and Japan. It was feared that successful independent development under a radical nationalist leadership might cause the rot to spread, gradually eroding US dominance in the region and ultimately causing Japan, the largest domino, to join in a closed system from which the US would be excluded... The idea that US global planners had national imperialist motives is intolerable to the doctrinal system, so this topic must be avoided in any history directed to a popular audience.”¹⁹

Declaration of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam

¹⁹ Noam Chomsky, *The Vietnam War in an Age of Orwell, Race and Class*, Spring 1984, p. 44.

Among 20th-century statesmen, Ho Chi Minh was noteworthy both for the tenacity with which he sought his goal of Vietnamese unification and independence and for his achievement in the amalgamation of Communism with independent nationalism. It was summer of 1945 that Ho Chi Minh set out to write the *“Declaration of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.”* The Declaration begins, “All men are created equal; they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights; among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.” After explaining that this meant that “all the peoples on the earth are equal from birth, all the peoples have a right to live, to be happy and free,” Ho went on to number the grievances of his Vietnamese people and to proclaim their independence from colonial France. About a year later, Ho spoke to nearly 20 million Vietnamese north of the 17th parallel. The small, frail Ho, with an elongated ascetic face, somewhat untidy goatee, dressed in his distinctive high-necked white pajama type of garment, with open-toed sandals and his unique “Uncle Ho look,” was that of a patriarch, or the George Washington of his nation. ²⁰ His magnetism or charisma was undisputable, as was the fondness that the average Vietnamese had for him. Speaking with defiance to the French colonialists Ho said, “You can kill 10 of my men for everyone I kill of yours, yet even at those odds, you will lose and I will win.” ²¹ The French, stoned by their superiority, ignored his warning and suffered grievously. Ho Chi Minh was consumed by a twin goal: not communism, but ‘revolution and national independence’ ²² for Vietnam.



New Definition for Communist

From 1949, the United States read the fight in Indochina with words of a ‘Cold War.’ Ho Chi Minh had been a Communist operative for many years, and Americans regarded his insurgent movement suspiciously. However, Abbot Low Moffat reported to Acting Secretary of State Dean Acheson that, “Ho might be an unrepentant Communist, but he was first and foremost, a nationalist seeking to establish an effective national state as a prerequisite to any attempt at developing a communist state—which objective must be as secondary;” such sentiment was echoed by virtually all U.S. officials stationed in Vietnam. ²³ As a result, in May of 1949, Secretary of State Acheson

²⁰ <http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/bday/0519.html>

²¹ Vu, tuong, Vietnam's Communist Revolution: The Power and Limits of Ideology

²² Young, Marilyn B., The Vietnam Wars 1945-1990, ed.1991, p. 30

²³ *IBID* p. 21

abandoned all hard evidence; he drafted a simple equation to define Communism. “Ho was an ‘outright Commie’ so long as he (1) fails to unequivocally repudiate Moscow and Commie doctrine and (2) remains personally singled out for praise by the international Commie press...” Mao Tse-tung's Communists seized power from Chaing Kai Shek in China in 1949 in “The Loss of China,” and offered support and military assistance to the Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh, thus worsening American anxieties. Consequently, in January 1950, the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union recognized the Viet Minh's (Democratic Republic of Vietnam), based in Hanoi, as the legitimate government of Vietnam, a far cry from what Truman had done earlier. From the Geneva Conference, Laos, Cambodia received their independence from French colonization, while Vietnam was temporarily divided between an anti-Communist South and a Communist North at what was a three-mile wide 17th parallel. Such recognition of the Viet Minh by China and the Soviet Union in early 1950 was enough for some American officials. Notable, was then Secretary of State Dean Acheson. who on February 1, 1950, “publicly declared that the Kremlin's recognition of the “Communist movement” in Indochina “should remove any illusions as to the ‘nationalist’ nature of Ho Chi Minh's “true colors as the mortal enemy of native independence in Indochina in Indochina...”²⁴

Patrick Hearden said, “failure to support French policy in Indochina,” moreover, “would have the effect of contributing toward the defeat of our aims in Europe.”²⁵ As a result, unwilling to accept the nationalistic roots of Ho Chi Minh’s revolution, Americans were propagandized and convinced that Ho and the Viet Minh were part of a ‘single monolithic Communist’ bloc controlled by the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR). America’s business elite and whimsical political apparatus went full bore falsely charging that the fall of Vietnam to Communism, (USSR or China) would portend the beginning of the end of our nation's interests in Southeast Asia and who knows what else will follow. Fear, now was the fire, and the political winds fueled this storm to unimaginable heights.

Armistice Signed 1954

²⁴ McMahan, Robert J., Dean Acheson and the Creation of an American World Order, p. 121

²⁵ Hearden, Patrick, J, The Tragedy of Vietnam, p. 56

Elections throughout the country were to be held in 1956 to establish a unified government as was agreed upon at the Geneva Convention in 1954, while unwittingly precipitating a 21-year American War in Indochina. Ho Chi Minh's popularity and approval rating was such that it was generally acknowledged, by his political foes, that Vietnam would have been unified under his leadership had the countrywide elections pledged at Geneva taken place. Inciteful is the following memo from U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1954, "I have never talked or corresponded with a person knowledgeable in Indochinese affairs who did not agree that had elections been held as of the time of the fighting, possibly eighty percent of the population would have voted for the Communist Ho Chi Minh as their leader..."²⁶ By this time in 1954, the United States had spent \$1 billion in support of the French military effort, assuming 80% of the cost of the war.²⁷ Ho Chi Minh was now prepared to lead his countrymen in the North against the onslaughts of American military might.



America reacted and installed Ngo Dinh Diem as President of Vietnam in 1955, as such he implacably eliminated all opposition in the South attacking not just the Communist National Liberation Front but any competitors for power: including Buddhists and fellow nationalists. As wide-spread opposition to his violent tactics increased, Diem sought to blame the communists; his power was scarcely based in Vietnam's Roman Catholic minority and he trusted a massive web of corruption to sustain loyalty to him. After thousands of DRV supporters had been murdered, the National Liberation Front appealed to Ho Chi Minh in the North for aid.

In 1956, South Vietnam, with American support, refused to hold the unification elections of the Geneva Convention.²⁸ Accordingly, in 1958, Communist-led guerrillas (known as the Viet Cong (National Liberation Front, or NLF) and The People's Army of Vietnam, also known as the

²⁶ Eisenhower, Dwight D., *Mandate for Change*. Garden City, New Jersey. Doubleday & Company, 1963, p. 372.

²⁷ Zinn, Howard, *A People's History of the United States*, p. 471.

²⁸ Chapter 19 of Gettleman, Franklin and Young, *Vietnam and America: A Documented History*, August 18, 1955 pp. 103–05.

North Vietnamese Army (NVA)) engaged in a more conventional ground warfare, and began battle against the South Vietnamese government. The North Vietnamese government and the Viet Cong were fighting to reunify Vietnam and end the three-mile wide 17th parallel quandary. The southern movement began as a response to Diem's anti-election campaign in 1957 and consisted mainly of the South Vietnamese. Diem eliminated elections for municipal councils in 1956.

“The insurrection is Southern rooted: in response to Southern demands...[and] widespread reaction against the harshness and heavy-handedness of Diem's government...Contrary to United States policy assumptions, all available evidence shows that the revival of the civil war in the South in 1958 was undertaken by Southerners at their own—not Hanoi's—initiative...Insurgency activity against the Saigon government began in the South under Southern leadership not as a consequence of any dictate from Hanoi, but contrary to Hanoi's injunctions.” [29,30]

“In 1956, Diem began to be actively resisted by the Viet-Cong, the name given to the Viet-Minh in the Southern Zone, and after 1958 Ho Chi Minh's government began to resist it by infiltrations of men...from the Northern Zone.” As well, historian Arthur Schlesinger [*The Bitter Heritage, 1967, p. 17*] noted that “it was not until September 1960 that the Communist Party of North Vietnam bestowed its formal blessing and called for the liberation of the south from American imperialism.”³¹

MANIFESTO OF THE EIGHTEEN

In 1960, strong vociferous words were being used against the Diem regime. The “MANIFESTO OF THE EIGHTEEN,” was written in April 1960. It contained strong criticisms of Diem's regime in South Vietnam, accusing it, of rigging elections, crushing freedom of speech and participating in corruption and nepotism. All eighteen signatories were old-time, anti-communist politicians.

²⁹ SarDesai, D.R., Vietnam: Past and Present, p. 80

³⁰ Origins of the Insurgency in South Vietnam, 1954–1960, The Pentagon Papers (Gravel Edition), Volume 1, Ch. 5, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), Section 3, pp. 314–46; International Relations Department, Mount Holyoke College.

³¹ Falk, Richard A., The Vietnam War and International Law, p. 279, 422

Addressing Diem,

“Mr. President:

“We the undersigned, representing a group of eminent citizens and personalities, intellectuals of all tendencies, and men of good will, recognize in the face of the gravity of the present political situation that we can no longer remain indifferent to the realities of life in our country...

“Therefore, we officially address to you today an appeal with the aim of exposing to you the whole truth in the hope that the government will accord it all the attention necessary so as to urgently modify its policies, so as to remedy the present situation and lead the people out of danger...

“Let us look toward the past, at the time when you were abroad. For eight or nine years, the Vietnamese people suffered many trials due to the war...

“You should, Mr. President, liberalize the regime, promote democracy, guarantee minimum civil rights, recognize the opposition so as to permit the citizens to express themselves without fear, thus removing grievances and resentments, opposition to which now constitutes for the people their sole reason for existence. When this occurs, the people of South Viet Nam, in comparing their position with that of the North, will appreciate the value of true liberty and of authentic democracy. It is only at that time that the people will make all the necessary efforts and sacrifices to defend that liberty and democracy...

“Until now, we have kept silent and preferred to let the Executive act as it wished. But now time is of the essence; we feel that it is our duty—and in the case of a nation in turmoil even the most humble [*sic*]people have their share of responsibility—to speak the truth, to awaken public opinion, to alert the people, and to unify the opposition so as to point the way. We beseech the government to urgently modify its policies so as to remedy the situation, to defend the republican regime, and to safeguard the existence of the nation. We hold firm hope that the Vietnamese people shall know a brilliant future in which it will enjoy peace and prosperity in freedom and progress.”

Failed Coup to Successful Assassinations

The November 1960 failed coup had Diem falsely make promises of reform only to allow his loyalists to crush the rebels. It marked the end of opposition by professional politicians against Diem. In fact, all the signees, intellectuals and their public critique of the South Vietnamese government, were arrested and jailed. It was obvious, 1960 was altogether too late for effective loyal opposition to form. The threat to the Diem regime, when it came, arose from more traditional sources of power: the religious sects and the military generals. The Pentagon Papers leak clearly

stated the U.S. surreptitiously maintained contact with President Diem's assassins after the failed coup and that the U.S. government gave the generals in Vietnam the authorization to start planning a coup for his 1963 murder.

In August 1963, concerned by the authoritarian South Vietnamese President Diem's failure to win over the public or prevent the insurgency, Kennedy sanctioned a plan to encourage a faction of dissident generals to overthrow Diem's regime. In November, rebel troops held key installations in Saigon and promised Diem and his merciless brother Nhu safe passage out of South Vietnam. As soon as the brothers surrendered, they were murdered by rebel leaders. South Vietnam plummeted into chaos.

George Kahin, an American historian, political scientist, participating in teach-ins 1965 and anti-war position and a leading critic of United States involvement in the Vietnam, co-wrote "*The United States in Vietnam*" with John Lewis in 1969. According to Kahin and Lewis, American foreign policy in Southeast Asia was based on a twisted view of Vietnam saying, "Vietnam is a single nation, not two...[and] South Vietnam constitutes an artificial creation whose existence depends on the sustained application of American power." ³²

Sabotage and Light Harassment

When John F. Kennedy took office in 1961, he continued the legacy of Truman and Eisenhower, approving a plan for military actions in Vietnam and Laos including engagement in "sabotage and light harassment" as revealed by the Pentagon Papers. ³³ The hawkish Kennedy, in search of a decisive victory, launch an all-out aerial bombing campaign on South Vietnam beginning in 1962. Little known to most American citizens is the fact that the U.S. *invaded* South Vietnam, and by 1962 was bombing South Vietnam relentlessly with American pilots, to support an authoritarian regime that had little to negligible popular legitimacy. "On October 11, 1961,

³² Pace, Eric (February 2, 2000), "George McT. Kahin, 82, Dies", The New York Times, retrieved June 24, 2009

³³ Zinn, Howard, *A People's History of the United States*, p. 472-474.

Kennedy ordered dispatch of a U.S. Air Force Farmgate squadron to South Vietnam, 12 planes especially equipped for counterinsurgency warfare, soon authorized “to fly coordinated missions with Vietnamese personnel in support of Vietnamese ground forces.” It was December 16, that Defense Secretary McNamara authorized their participation in combat operations. These were the first steps in engaging U.S. forces directly in bombing and other combat operations in South Vietnam from 1962, along with *sabotage* missions in the North. These 1962 actions laid the groundwork for the huge expansion of the war in later years.”³⁴ Official policy regarding these attacks is that no such attack happened.



This policy allows the war to be a “mistake” or an “unwise effort,” after all, the United States was defending South Vietnam from Communist aggression; those who opposed the war were blatant apologists for the USSR. The purpose is clear: to obfuscate the fact that the United States did use an aerial attack of ‘aggression against South Vietnam.’ The invasion of South Vietnam directed against the civilian rural society has been erased from official U.S. history. There is no such event as the ‘attack or aggression on South Vietnam.’ It’s a manufactured, historical construction, but official truth anyway.

The Independence of South Vietnam

The United States was struggling to prevent the independence of South Vietnam and to thwart a political resolution inside South Vietnam. It finally started bombing the North in 1965 with the intent of getting the North to use its sway to call off the insurrection in the South. However, there were no North Vietnamese troops in South Vietnam, none officially. The U.S. expected that when they began bombing the North from South Vietnamese bases that it would bring a North Vietnamese invasion into the South, then it would pretend it was aggression from the North against the South. It was clear, simple but absurd. The U.S. did not want an independent South Vietnam regardless of the North’s position. The U.S. feared it would be a reconciliation or appeasing

³⁴ *Foreign Relations of the United States, Vietnam, 1961-1963*, I, 343; III, 4n. Gibbons, US Government, 70-1, citing Air Force history.

takeover and produce a nationalist movement with a successful social and economic infrastructure that would be a model for the region; the same was being attempted in Laos and Cambodia. The independence and sovereignty of South Vietnam had to be wrecked as an example of what not to do.

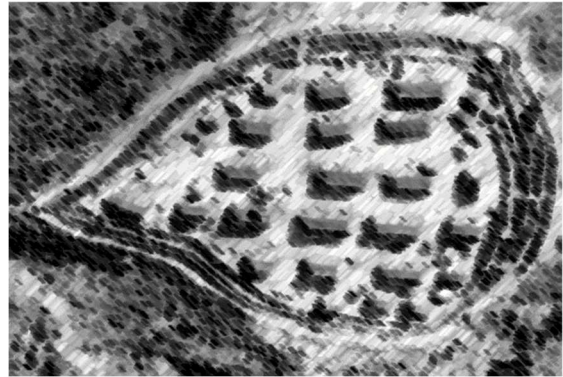
With the increase in U.S. military activity, Vietnam was soon to become a research laboratory or test center for counterinsurgency techniques. It was by the spring of 1961 a joint U.S.-Vietnamese testing center was established to evaluate the testing of herbicidal warfare: chemicals were designed to poison crops and strip the foliage where guerrillas were thought hiding. In January of 1962, “Operation Ranch Hand” was created and grew from its initial introduction in 1961-1963 through its massive expansion from 1964-1968. Over the next eight years, one hundred million pounds of herbicides were dropped over four million acres in South Vietnam.³⁵

Strategic Hamlets--Concentration Camps

In 1962, President Kennedy sent the U.S. Air Force to attack rural South Vietnam, where 75-80% of the population subsisted. This was part of a program proposed to drive several million people into concentration camps (called “strategic hamlets”) where they would be surrounded by barbed wire and armed guards. This would “protect” these people from the guerrillas whom, were conceded, they were largely supporting. These hamlets were an attempt by a frail government to control physically, and by force, people it did not recognize or understand due to incompatible class and religious differences. These people lived in small rural villages dispersed along canals and waterways, also known as the low-landers. Most were Confucian or Buddhists. Many of them resisted these hamlets, because as peasants it afforded a disruption in their lives just for survival, there was also a matter of distance to be traveled between forts or hamlets that made farming difficult, and finally many were not able to carry out their religious practices.

³⁵ Young, Marilyn B., *The Vietnam Wars 1945-1990*, ed.1991, p. 82

The U.S. launched a cruel and brutal pacification campaign with fenced in ‘hamlets’ a euphemism for ‘concentration camps;’ by 1964, the strategy had failed. The intent was to keep the rural South Vietnamese peasants from supporting the Viet Cong. This “*Agroville Program*,” created by President Diem’s South Vietnam regime, was meant to isolate and divorce rural South Vietnamese inhabitants from northern communists and pro-independent Vietnam insurgents in the south. The debate continued as to how much these southern revolutionaries were organized by the north’s Hanoi. Either way, the strategic ‘hamlet plan’ ended up being a disaster for the rural South Vietnamese, regardless communist, anti-communist, Buddhist, Catholic or anyone else. The Pentagon Papers noted that over 4,300,000 people had been expatriated in these hamlets, and that by any narrative they neither protected the Vietnamese nor where they sustainable: “The Strategic Hamlet Program...was, in short, an attempt to translate the newly articulated theory of counter-insurgency into operational reality. The objective was political, though the means to its realization were a mixture of military, social, psychological, economic and political measures.”³⁶ The New York Times, March 28, 1962 wrote, “One thousand two hundred families have been obliged to leave their villages to go and live in strategic hamlets. Their homes have been entirely destroyed. Some of them were able to save a bed or a table before their house was destroyed. Others could take nothing else with them except the clothes which they were wearing. The ‘*Agroville Program*’ was generally a failed disappointment. The peasants had many complaints about it ranging from “clumsy, dishonest administration to the physical hardship of being too far from their fields and the psychological wrench of being separated from ancestral homes and burial plots.” In reality, less than 10% of the ‘hamlet style camps or fortresses provided any security.



In the following years, the U.S. continued to resist every attempt at peaceful settlement, and in 1964, after the 1962 indiscriminate aerial invasion of South Vietnam, began to plan the ground invasion of South Vietnam. The land assault took place in early 1965, followed by the very

³⁶ The Pentagon Papers, Gravel Ed., Vol. 2 “The Strategic Hamlet Program, 1961-63,” pp. 128-159 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971).

discriminating bombing of North Vietnam and an intensification of the existing bombing of the south, at more than double the level of the more publicized bombing of the north. The U.S. also extended the war into neighboring Laos and Cambodia and why not, they are also poor brown people.

5. ‘America’s War’ in Vietnam--A False Narrative--Secrecy to Failure?

Looking backward, “America's involvement in Vietnam began in secrecy. It ended, thirty years later, in failure, witnessed by the entire world. It was begun in good faith, by decent people, out of fateful misunderstandings, American overconfidence, and Cold War miscalculation. And it was prolonged because it seemed easier to muddle through than admit that it had been caused by tragic decisions, made by five American presidents belonging to both political parties.” says Ken Burn’s documentary, “The Vietnam War.” These words are replete with vague, incomprehensible generalizations, simplistic and disparate answers, while offering concessions designed to keep all political persuasions attentive, while setting a preoccupation over whether to use words as: “failure” or “defeat,” “aggression” or “defense,” and finally not ever mention “fundamentally wrong and immoral, as the main stream media chose to avoid, despite the overwhelming consensus of the U.S. population.

Reclaiming the war as a noble cause allowed a lifeline to those more critical of it. Millions of innocent civilians died, but the U.S. had meant well before the quagmire and other realities took us awry. The Washington Post articulated this viewpoint as Saigon fell in 1975: “if much of the actual conduct of the Vietnam policy was wrong and misguided—even tragic—it cannot be denied that some part of the purpose of that policy was right and defensible...the people of South Vietnam would be able to decide their own form of government and social order... how good impulses can be translated into bad policy.”³⁷ So, even when the United States makes a mistake or misstep, its good, honorable and noble intentions must be celebrated; however, the historical record shows nothing to reveal these good, honorable and noble intentions, nor did its strategy and tactics any concern for the lives of Vietnamese civilians.

Well, is that summary factually accurate, or was it worse than just a catastrophic miscalculation? Was it fateful misunderstandings or a ‘fundamentally wrong and immoral war?’ Is this an archaic attempt to sew together a new state-of-the-art narrative out of a well-documented history or is it a decidedly cognizant attempt at creating an alternative narrative through questionable epistemological interrogating, equivocating historical issues that continue controversial decades later? Perhaps, it would better document a time in United States history

³⁷ Washington Post, April 30, 1975, Marilyn Young’s “Epilog” in in Marvin E. Gettleman, Jane Franklin, Marilyn B. Young, H. Bruce Franklin, *Vietnam and America: A Documented History* (NY: Grove Press, 1995. p. 516.

accorded with a deep racial and political polarization, governmental deceits, fabrications, falsehoods and misconduct, as well as conflicting ideas of what patriotism is about. The United States, we are told, was pulled into this calamity, like an awkward, yet supremely confident, and ultimately well-meaning benevolent giant stumbling into an unknown nest of wasps. Is that really what happened and true?

To say the war began in good faith, for freedom and democracy, by decent people is simply counter to the historical record. There were certainly many competing visions within the United States, and policy was never entirely coherent or monolithic; however, by the 1950s, the United States had settled on the outlines of a denationalization of Southeast Asia: ensuring a global capitalist production market. This meant keeping newly independent countries from falling outside the U.S. capitalist breadth. The United States publicly focused on Communism but was really fighting the war to prevent Indochina from carrying out effective social and economic development apart from colonialization; however, the United States needed a policy of “bleeding Vietnam”³⁸ to prevent such from happening.³⁹

“Morality and legality aside, by wrongly attributing the conflict in Vietnam to world communism, Americans drastically misjudged the conflict's origins and nature. By intervening in what was essentially a local struggle, they placed themselves at the mercy of local forces, a weak client and a determined adversary. What might have remained a local conflict with primarily local implications was elevated into a major international conflict with enormous human costs that are still being paid. Along with Afghanistan, Vietnam should stand as an enduring testament to the pitfalls of interventionism and the limits of power, something that may be more vital than ever to keep in mind.”⁴⁰ As with Vietnam, the competition between contending narratives, demonstrates no signs of finishing; perhaps the final word on the war will never be heard, but lay silent amid all the shouting stiffs.

While a few aspects of Burns’ “The Vietnam War” may challenge the American orthodoxy on the war Burn’s pro-American narrative ultimately underpins that story, missing out on serious

³⁸ The Legacy of the Vietnam War, Noam Chomsky interviewed by Paul Shannon *Indochina Newsletter*, Issue 18, November – December 1982, pp. 1-5 [October 1982]

³⁹ Martini, Edwin A., *Invisible Enemies: The American War on Vietnam, 1975-2000*, p. 79

⁴⁰ Herring, George C. “America and Vietnam: The Unending War.” *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 70, no. 5, 1991, pp. 104–119. *JSTOR*, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/20045006.

questions about U.S. imperialism in Vietnam. The closure Burns gives is an artificially superficial one that does not bring us nearer the question of why and is politically questionable. The U.S. needed France's cooperation in building an anti-communist Europe with the Marshall Plan. It needed keep Southeast Asia open for Japan's economic revitalization, thus not losing Japan after WWII. With the second red scare from Joseph McCarthy's conservative pressure on President Harry Truman had to take harder anti-communist position, and the shockwave of a communist victory in China with Mao in 1949, the U.S. decided to become deeply involved in the First Indochina War. By the 1950s, the US had reconciled on the outlines of a massive imperialist project: guaranteeing the international reproduction of the capitalist manner of production. This involved keeping European allies in step, making sure newly independent countries did not fall outside the capitalist domain to communism.

The Geneva Agreement in 1954 split Indochina into three countries: Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. It granted Laos and Cambodia independence. Vietnam, however, was divided along the 17th parallel into the North and South. Whether Vietnam would be unified was to be decided after elections in both the regions in 1956. It would never happen. As Eisenhower explained, '80 percent of the country would vote to reunify under Ho Chi Minh. This could not be allowed to happen.' The American war was wrong in two respects, it was a case of aggression, deliberate and calculated. In 1954, the National Security Council stated that the US reserved the right to use force "to defeat local Communist subversion or rebellion not constituting armed attack," i.e., in violation of "the supreme law of the land."⁴¹ The U.S. acted on this dogma of intense and incalculable atrocity. The U.S. goal was to destroy any revolutionary nationalist force which. The technique was to destroy the rural society. While the war of annihilation partly succeeded, the U.S. was never able to create a viable system out of the carnage.



To speak of the U.S. as "victim" is as unclear, as an impossible assertion. The greatest military power on earth, backed by global defense pacts, 2,000 military bases in over thirty

⁴¹ Tucker, Spencer C. *The Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War: A Political, Social, and Military ...*, p. 1450

countries, and an arsenal of over 30,000 nuclear warheads is equally impossible. ‘Good intentions’ turn out to be harder to bear the further we move into the 1960s. One need only go to August 4, 1964 and the Gulf of Tonkin false flag. That was no miscalculation.

6. The Phoenix Program, the Definitive Example of the Brutality

The Vietnam War was unparalleled in the military history of the United States for the amount of public exposure and condemnation it received, and in large part due to the Phoenix Program. The Phoenix program would become one of the most contentious and provocative feature of America's war in Vietnam. Supported by the C.I.A., the Phoenix program was a decisive element of the post Tet 1968 pacification plan using guerrilla or revolutionary forces to focus clandestine Communist operatives in villages throughout South Vietnam. It could easily be summed up as a blueprint for the American military today as well. This war on terror in Vietnam involved: assassinations campaigns, torture, death squads, and mass surveillance of the populace, while frequently targeting innocent civilians over militants.⁴² American advisors certainly tolerated the torture of prisoners more than one may have wanted; torture was extremely common among South Vietnamese troops and police, and any effort to stop the practice would have had a harmful effect on the advisor's relationship with them.⁴³ One criticism of the program was their paramilitary/mercenary soldiers, the bounties earned for neutralizing VCI members, and the use of torture and assassination which were demoralizing the U.S. strategic during the conflict. Another criticism was on moral grounds. Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman passionately opposed the Phoenix Program. The basis for their attacks lay on the notion that the U.S. was an 'invading and aggressive' nation in South Vietnam in violation of the Nuremberg principles from WWII as stated by Robert Jackson. They stated that official documents and figures were of dubious veracity because they contradicted all "nonofficial testimony on the subject."⁴⁴

In the darkest days of the War, the Phoenix program was definitive example of the brutality of the American Central Intelligence Agency's counter insurgency war. The Program attempted to provide cooperation between several Vietnamese and American agencies so that they could synchronize their warfare on the Vietnamese civilian. The fundamental aim of the Vietnam War was to control and overwhelm of the South Vietnamese population, not necessarily winning their

⁴² Douglas S. Blaufarb, *The Counterinsurgency Era: U.S. Doctrine and Performance, 1950 to the Present*, New York: The Free Press, 1977, p. 211.

⁴³ Lewy, Guenter, *America In Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 287-88

⁴⁴ Chomsky, Noam and Edward S. Herman, *Counter-Revolutionary Violence: Bloodbaths in Fact and Propaganda* (unknown publication location: Warner Modular Publication, 1973), pp. 22-24.

hearts and minds. The CIA had clandestinely initiating an extensive program of abduction, torture, murder and assassination. It was developed to undermine the infrastructure of the National Liberation Front (NLF) of South Vietnam, known as the Viet Cong Infrastructure (VCI). Victims of the Phoenix Program were Vietnamese civilians, male and female, suspected of concealing information about the enemy. For about seven years, 1965 to 1972, more than 80,000 civilians were ‘neutralized,’ suspected of NLF involvement, of whom over 26,000 were killed. Men and women were exposed to protracted prison sentences without trial. Horrifying torture, rape, and execution, was carefully use all under observant US government agencies.

By ‘infrastructure’ the U.S. military meant *not* roads, electricity, water supplies and bridges, but the civilian ‘shadow government:’ a clandestine administrative apparatus in South Vietnam. The North Vietnamese shadow government assaulted by the Phoenix program was three-part: The Central Office of South Vietnam, the National Liberation Front, and the People’s Revolutionary Party. They were set up across the country, and in many places, they were the ones in real control in the local villages and communities, and they used their power to fight for land reform on behalf of the peasants. Some of the functions were to: collect taxes, procure supplies, coerce the local populace to complete labor, administer justice, and draft youths into the military. On the other hand, America’s South Vietnamese allies were a corrupt class of elitists who supported the land owners and were loathed by the populace. For the Vietnamese peasants, the Vietnam war was an insurgency intended to bring about land reform and re-uniting the country. The Phoenix Program’s crushing the enemy’s ability to organize and operate was fundamental to its pacification. Far-reaching overt and covert actions by American and South Vietnamese forces had failed to thrust the allies towards victory. Despite efforts to disassemble Viet Cong Infrastructure, the systems created by Hanoi proved resilient. American and South Vietnamese forces, had miscalculated the plasticity of the Viet Cong Infrastructure.

In addition, the CIA attempted to impersonate the VCI. The Phoenix program had its roots in mimicking the methods of the Viet Cong. For the CIA and the Phoenix Program, Vietnam was turned into a massive laboratory to research counter insurgency tactics. In its initial stages, the CIA created ruthless death squads skilled in tactics of covert war. They would sneak into a village at night and brutally slaughter someone they assumed worked with the NLF and proceeded to blame the Viet Cong. They called this tactic ‘counter terror’ sardonically since it was terrorism 101 itself.

In fact, the CIA performed ‘false flag’ terror attacks such as bombing theaters and civilians support systems and attributed them to ‘Viet Cong Terrorists.’

7. The Tet Offensive and the “Wise Men” Say No.

The October 1967 polls revealed that public support for the war, and the Johnson administration, was wearing thin, and a chorus of escalating dissent was accompanying the bombing campaign against North Vietnam. The military commanders wanted more troops. Johnson had half-heartedly authorized one last increase, to over 500,000 by the end of 1967. He knew that any additional increase in manpower would require marshalling the reserves, and further revealing the mounting costs of the war.

Now, it was Nov. 2, 1967, that about 12 of America’s most revered foreign policy officials gathered to meet with President Johnson. While the president kept an unapologetic public face on the war, it was looming to devour his Presidency, and so he sought the wisdom of these foreign policy advisers called the “Wise Men” (14 informal advisers). These wise men were extremely influential wealthy business men who had constructed key institutions like NATO, the World Bank and the Marshall Plan. President Johnson’s first series of such meetings, on Nov. 1-2, 1967 was rather positive. Then, the Wise Men had unanimously opposed leaving Vietnam. “Public discontent with the war is now wide and deep,” Bundy had said, but he told Johnson to “stay the course.”⁴⁵



Then about two months later, we enter a new year and the Tet Offensive. It was a synchronized sequence of North Vietnamese strikes on more than 100 cities South Vietnam. The offensive was an effort to increase a revolt among the South Vietnamese and persuade the United States to scale back its participation in the War. Though the offensive itself fail to generate the revolt, international news coverage of the enormous offensive stunned the American public and tore away support for the war effort. Nonetheless, the North Vietnamese attained a strategic victory with the Tet Offensive, and the strikes celebrated a turning point in the Vietnam War; the sluggish and painful American withdrawal from the region had begun.

⁴⁵ Schmitz, David F., *The Tet Offensive: Politics, War, and Public Opinion*, p. 64

It all began about **1 a.m.** on January 31, 1968 with rocket and mortar attacks. The Northern attacks were repulsed but their psychological effect was overwhelming. The myth of an impending American victory was violently exploded by the surprise, the breadth, the ferociousness, and the resolve of the fight by the North. The Tet Offensive had exposed the way U.S. leaders had misled the public about the war in Vietnam. The North Vietnamese or Viet Minh and the Vietcong unleashed a massive military offensive that consisted of simultaneous attacks by some 85,000 troops under the direction of the North Vietnamese government that proved the erupting Southeast Asian conflict was far from over. At the least, the North Vietnamese hoped it would assist stopping the ongoing escalation of bombing in the North. Rather than a clash of attrition, the Viet Minh leadership devised a massive assault that intended to challenge and weaken the morale of the South Vietnamese and the American public. President Johnson declared that the North Vietnamese was challenging the resolve of the United States to “meet the trials that these times impose.” Johnson went on to promise that America will continue till victory.

The crisis of Tet was the beginning of the year of the “Monkey.” Reaching Saigon, NLF fighters laid siege to the American embassy. Nineteen NLF soldiers lost their lives in the fight for the embassy; whereas five Americans were killed. This was just one of many offensives that took place as the communists handled their offensive in five major cities, and numerous capitals and smaller hamlets across the South Vietnam. President Johnson cautioned legislators that the anti-war protests currently in the U.S. were being generated by allies of the communists. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara confidentially told Johnson, “I think it shows two things, Mr. President. First, that they have more power than some credit them with ... My guess is that we will inflict very heavy losses on them, both in terms of personnel and materiel and this will set them back some, but after they absorb the losses, they will remain a substantial force.”⁴⁶ The fighting ended when the U.S. and South Vietnamese reclaimed the city of Hue. The Tet Offensive revealed that Johnson had been lying about having “reached an important point where the end begins to come into view.”⁴⁷ Perhaps, one of the more infamous images from that period was that of a South Vietnamese Nguyen Ngoc Loan, the chief of the national police, murdering Nguyen Van Lem, a captain in the Vietcong with a bullet to his head. Walter Cronkite signed off his television broadcast challenging Johnson

⁴⁶ Sieg, Kent, David S. Patterson Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, V. 6: Vietnam, January..., United States. Department of State,

⁴⁷ <https://www.cfr.org/blog/twe-remembers-general-westmoreland-says-end-begins-come-view-vietnam>

and joining journalists who had been saying that the government was not telling the truth regarding American progress. Cronkite said,

“Who won and lost in the great Tet Offensive against the cities? I’m not sure. The Vietcong did not win by a knockout but neither did we ... For it seems now more certain than ever, that the bloody experience in Vietnam is to end in a stalemate. To say that we are closer to victory today is to believe in the face of the evidence, the optimists who have been wrong in the past.”⁴⁸



By early 1968, the U.S. death toll in Vietnam had risen to more than 70 a day, and as the numbers increased, U.S. public support declined. By the time that the Tet Offensive was over in 1968, the American ploy in Vietnam converted from the ‘haunting victory’ to ‘finding a way out.’ “We were beaten that day,” one North Vietnamese leader said. “But after that, the Americans started negotiating.”⁴⁹

Johnson was left with an enormous ‘credibility gap’ that loomed over everything he had done on domestic policy. When stories circulated that General William Westmoreland had asked for over 200,000 more troops in response to Tet, Americans were livid in opposition and as a result, the request failed.⁵⁰ The reason given was “they’re (Johnson’s administration) going to need the troops at home for ‘civil disorder control...In fact the ‘civil disorder’ was also one of the reasons why the “Wise Men” came to Washington with a lot of money in their pockets...and told President Johnson, “You’re through; you’re not running for reelection.” And he didn’t.”⁵¹ Dean Acheson, concisely reported the recommendations from 11 of the wise men, the “majority feeling that we can no longer do the job we set out to do in the time we have left, and we must begin to take steps to disengage.”⁵² That was a complete turn-about from their November 1-2, 1967 meeting. Five days

⁴⁸ <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=106775685>

⁴⁹ http://factsanddetails.com/southeast-asia/Vietnam/sub5_9b/entry-3361.html

⁵⁰ Gibson, James Wilson, *The Perfect War: Technowar in Vietnam*, p. 355

⁵¹ Chomsky, Noam, *Understanding Power*, Penguin Books India PVT, Limited p. 190

⁵² Schmitz, David F., *The Tet Offensive: Politics, War, and Public Opinion*, p. 144-145

later, on March 31, 1968, Johnson announced that he would ‘not ask for, seek or accept nomination for a second term as president.’

The outraged fumed over into the Democratic Convention in 1968, as liberal Democrats and the anti-war movement opened a virtual civil war. Paradoxically, the person to gain the most from the war was presidential candidate Richard Nixon. For decades, the handling of Tet continued to conservatives as a representation of why the liberal democratic establishment could no longer be trusted to give an accurate and truthful assessment of national security issues. Ultimately, the Tet offensive confirmed that blind trust and wrongfully laid confidence in political and military leaders can without difficulty lead to dangerous paths.

8. Operation: ‘MADMAN,’ ‘He Has His Hand on the Nuclear Button’

President Nixon and Henry Kissinger formulated a plan to make the USSR think the U.S. was prepared to launch a nuclear strike against Moscow. They decided on the most destructive thermonuclear technology in the U.S. arsenal for immediate use against the USSR. The mission was so covert that even senior officers from the Strategic Air Command were not primed of its true intent the scheme was set in motion on October 10, 1969.

So, the morning of October 27, 1969, 18 B-52s bombers began thundering the skies, from the western U.S. pointed toward Moscow. Each bomber was equipped with nuclear weapons hundreds of times more powerful than the ones that had annihilated Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It was during his campaign for the presidency in 1968 that Richard Nixon had sworn to end the War; however, more than 4,000 U.S. had died in Vietnam in the first six months of 1969, including over 80 soldiers at Hamburger Hill. The Paris Peace talks had broken down. The North had stated that they would concede nothing, “until the chairs rot.”

Frustrated at the lack of action, Nixon decided to try something new: threaten the Soviet Union with a massive nuclear strike and make its leaders think he was crazy enough to go through with it. Its code name was the “madman theory.” It was an effort to convince Moscow that Nixon was just irrational or crazy enough to do it. Nixon had hoped that the Soviets would be so terrified of events spiraling unrestrained that they would coerce the North’s Hanoi, to make concessions at the negotiating table or jeopardize Soviet military support.⁵³ The B-52s pushed Soviet airspace for several days. They bordered enemy territory, taxing USSR defenses and goading Soviet aircraft. What made this campaign so extreme or mad was that this the is the only moment known when a president chose a nuclear strategy as an end to fantasize the launch of a nuclear World War III, ⁵⁴ with exception to the Kennedy Cuban fiasco of October 1963.

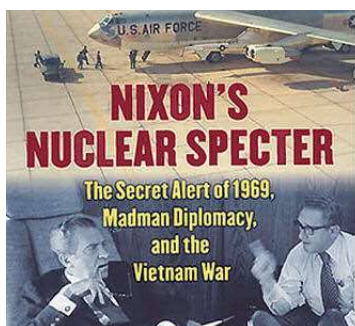


⁵³ (The ‘madman theory’ was an extension of “flexible response:” Here the U.S. would answer to small threats in small ways and massive threats in massive ways. If you need military leverage to have flexible response you need to convince your opponents that even the most mad, crazy option is actually on the table. And one way to do that is to make them think you are crazy or mad.)

⁵⁴ <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/nukevault/ebb517-Nixon-Kissinger-and-the-Madman-Strategy-during-Vietnam-War/>

So, if you convince your adversary that you're crazy and liable to hop off in any direction at any moment, he'll probably cry uncle immediately. If your enemy thinks you're crazy or predisposed to in any direction at any moment, he'll probably reconsider his actions, and accept agreements they would have normally rejected. The new equilibrium would emerge as leaders in Moscow and Hanoi would imagine how appalling things could be if they inflamed a mad president to experiment with the death itself.

H. R. Haldeman, Nixon's chief of staff, wrote in his diary that Kissinger believed evidence of US irrationality would “jar the Soviets and North Vietnam.” Nixon encouraged Kissinger to



expand this approach. “If the Vietnam thing is raised” in conversations with Moscow, Nixon advised, Kissinger should “shake his head and say, ‘I am sorry, Mr. Ambassador, but [the president] is out of control.’”⁵⁵ Nixon told Haldeman: “I want the North Vietnamese to believe that I've reached the point that I might do anything to stop the war. We'll just slip the word...you know Nixon is obsessed about Communism. We can't restrain him when he is angry — and he has his hand on the nuclear button' — and Ho Chi Minh himself will be in Paris in two days begging for peace.”

⁵⁵ http://www.ipscdc.org/nixons_madman_theory_was_not_the_vietnam_wars_only_test_case_for_nuclear_weapons/

9. The Church and War

Samuel P. Huntington stated, “If religion is unimportant, it can be tolerated. If it is important, governments will insist on controlling it, regulating it, suppressing or prohibiting it, or manipulating it to their own advantage.”⁵⁶

Throughout American history, Christianity has molded public opinion to an ungodly manner, sanctified political leaders, and stayed at the center of national issues, not the least of which was Vietnam. We must examine the religious context: what emerged, why, and how. For sure, there was no unified religious or U.S. Christian reply to the swift escalation of the Vietnam War in the early-1960s. Many Protestant denominations, living by their own their self-regulating restrictions, did little to address the war itself. Mark G. Toulouse noted, “Up to about 1965, the dissent expressed in the pages of *Christian Century* and *Christianity and Crisis* had been fairly mild. The journals largely supported America’s motive for its presence in Vietnam. Prior to the 1964 presidential election, support for American policy had been consistent. After 1965, editorials began openly to question the escalation carried out by Johnson. They criticized the failure to negotiate, and the impossible conditions expected before negotiations could take place. In the fall of 1965, Christians began to organize more effectively against the war. At that time, the existing dissenting Christian groups were largely composed of pacifists. Further, the newer dissenting groups representing the New Left, were often as willing to overlook violence on the left as they were to reject it on the right. There seemed to be no middle ground. Many Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish leaders sought a way to express their dissent without identifying completely with any of the existing groups.”⁵⁷ It was in 1965 that the war took on stronger opposition.

On October 15-16, during a parade down Fifth Avenue in Manhattan, N.Y., Tom Cornell, a twenty-two-year-old Catholic Worker burned his draft card. In describing the effect of Johnson’s legislation in the movement’s newsletter:

“In psychological terms it’s a kind of castration symbol and an Oedipal thing. Your kid is flying in the face of authority... There is a kind of civil or state religion which has subsumed large elements of Christianity, Judaism, whatever else there is, and it has its symbols, obviously secular symbols like the flag... It’s subsumed a good part

⁵⁶ Huntington, Samuel P., “Religious Persecution and Religious Relevance,” in *The Influence of Faith: Religious Groups in US Foreign Policy*, ed. Elliott Abrams (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), p. 55–64.

⁵⁷ Toulouse, Mark G., CHRISTIAN RESPONSES TO VIETNAM: THE ORGANIZATION OF DISSENT, *Religion and Culture Web Forum*, Professor of American Religious History, Brite Divinity School, June 2007

of our traditional real religion. And the draft card then becomes a sacrament. And there's nothing worse that you can do in sacramental terms than defile a species of the sacrament. And this was a defilement, a real blasphemy against the state.”⁵⁸

Criticism of these [anti-war] protests appeared everywhere. On February 14, journalist James Reston published an article in *The New York Times* stating that “The United States is now involved in an *undeclared war* in South Vietnam. This is well known to the Russians, the Chinese Communists, and everybody else concerned except the American people...Has the President made clear to the Congress and the nation the extent of the U.S. commitment to the South Vietnam government and the dangers involved?”⁵⁹ Carl F. H. Henry, in *Christianity Today*, described burning draft cards as “certainly a far cry from ‘panty raids’ in the springtime.” These students [burning their draft cards] committed acts “perilously close to treason.” *America* theorized that the protests bore the “earmarks of a planned propaganda effort of dubious and suspect origin, whose real purpose was not so much to influence US policy as to arouse world opinion against it.” ...Bill Moyers, President Johnson's press secretary at the time, quoted LBJ's surprise that any American would “feel toward his country in a way that is not consistent with the national interest.” In other words, in one fell swoop, Johnson placed all those who questioned the wisdom of his policies in an anti-American position, even though most of these protesters believed they acted in the best interests of the country. The response of religious leaders to the political mudslinging against anti-war protesting was swift.⁶⁰

“From 1966 on, this kind of argument emphasizing the disjuncture between values and behavior became predominant in the journals opposing the war. In April 1966, the *Century* claimed that the use of idealistic arguments to support American involvement in Vietnam *no longer worked*. The “self-righteous argument” that Americans were in Vietnam “because a freedom-loving people summoned us to their aid” had “eroded and collapsed not because wise men exposed its error...but because it can no longer stand against the relentless assaults of unfolding events...In most cases, the major fear behind these restrictions was the fear that controversial issues would lead to conflict

⁵⁸ The details of these protests, the draft card, and the quotation from Cornell are found in Nancy Zaroulis and Gerald Sullivan, *Who Spoke Up? American Protest Against the War in Vietnam, 1963-1975* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, 1984), 51-58.

⁵⁹ Mann, Robert, *A Grand Delusion: America's Descent into Vietnam*, New York: Basic Books, 2001, p. 257

⁶⁰ Toulouse, Mark G., CHRISTIAN RESPONSES TO VIETNAM: THE ORGANIZATION OF DISSENT, *Religion and Culture Web Forum*, Professor of American Religious History, Brite Divinity School, June 2007

and, ultimately, division. Therefore, the *Century* editor concluded, “most of the Protestant churches stand mindless and mute before the great events which shake the ecclesiastical, cultural and social foundations of our time.” Since Protestants want no one to speak on their behalf, “no one knows whether there is a majority opinion and commitment” about pressing issues. No one knows whether a consensus exists and, if it does, “no one knows whether it is Christian.” He continued:

“It may be that in the United States Christians are now so thoroughly dispersed in and absorbed by the general fabric of society that it is wholly impossible to obtain a Christian opinion on anything. It may be that the churches are saying nothing about the issues facing the people because as churches they have no mind to speak...If this is the situation we need to know it. Do the churches have anything to say to the world about the world’s affairs that the world cannot say just as well to itself? We need to devise methods of answering this question, even though in the process we run the risk of conflict and division. Better turmoil in the church than total irrelevance...A growing number among Christian leaders began to question more openly their abilities to trust American leadership and its decisions.”⁶¹

David E. Settje set out to look at the diversity of American Christian responses to the Cold and Vietnam Wars to establish how Americans retained debates about foreign policy constructed on their personal theological beliefs. Settje maintains that faith-based religions held an anti-communist posture throughout the war but were inspired by what they called a “theology of human improvement” to subordinate the reason of ‘war and containment’ to a faith-based ‘pursuit of peace and the mitigation of human suffering,’ while using strident criticism of U.S. actions as hostile to such Christian ends. Apparently, it was not the Vietnam War that incited this position; it was, rather, a fixed, preexisting theological belief. However, such distinction is absent when coverage turns to the more conservative Protestant and Catholic (and, interestingly, the African Methodist Episcopal Church) estimation. Ostensibly, theological conviction was engrained in a “reactionary” view of a “monolithic [communist] Other.” Consequently, having fed at the table of official U.S. marketing, the view failed to distinguish the unambiguous differences between Soviet, Chinese, and Vietnamese communism, sacralized the United States, and supported categorically the government’s containment policy, especially during the Nixon presidency.⁶² Settje looked at

⁶¹ *IBID*

⁶² Settje, David E., *Faith and War: How Christians Debated the Cold and Vietnam Wars* Hardcover, June 13, 2011, pp. 81, 169, 24

Christianity Today, *Christian Century*, Catholic periodicals, the Southern Baptist Convention, and the United Church of Christ. It appears that American religious responses to international affairs, were across-the-board to say the least. Christian peace organizations protested rising American involvement; however, mainstream groups such as the U.S. Catholic bishops conference and the Evangelicals resolutely supported the warmongering policies of President Lyndon Johnson. Meanwhile, *Christianity Today* and *America* continued their efforts to hearten and reassure American resolve in Vietnam and to defend the constant bombardment of North Vietnam. The war would end the second the aggressors from North Vietnam stopped their aggression.⁶³

Eventually, Catholic theologians and journals denounced the war even as their bishops prayed publicly for victory. The Catholic Church, buying into the propaganda, even got involved.

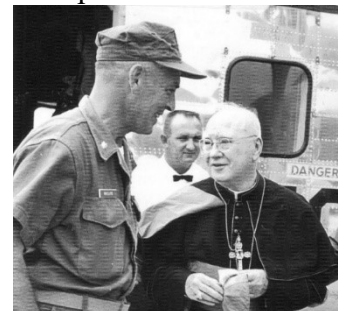
Cardinal Spellman, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of New York and military vicar of the U.S. armed forces for Roman Catholics, visited the American forces in South Vietnam, and said in a speech in December 23, 1966, “This war in Vietnam is, I believe, a war for civilization. Certainly, it is not a war of our seeking. It is a war *thrust upon us* and we cannot yield to tyranny.” Continuing, Spellman said, “anything less than victory is inconceivable.”



Spellman anointed with religious nomenclature that the U.S. soldiers in Vietnam were there for “defense, protection, and *salvation* not only of our country, but... *of civilization itself*.” Vatican sources quickly expressed irritation and disapproval with Spellman’s statements saying, “The Cardinal did not speak for the Pope or the Church.” The Pope had previously called for negotiations and an end to the war in Vietnam. Confusion was rampant: ‘The Catholic Church’s bishop expressing a political position, favoring the American government’s involvement in a Southeast Asian War in Vietnam which was all the while supported by an American Evangelical Christian base in the United States and quickly renounced by The Catholic Church in Rome.’ The most common Evangelical complaint about Vietnam was still that the conflict wasn’t waged firmly enough, not enough dead to merit anything but furthering the war till enough had been killed.

⁶³ Toulouse, Mark G., CHRISTIAN RESPONSES TO VIETNAM: THE ORGANIZATION OF DISSENT, Religion and Culture Web Forum, Professor of American Religious History, Brite Divinity School, June 2007, p. 5

Christianity Today kept up its steady drumbeat for the war deep into the Nixon administration...Billy Graham offered more explicit to his great friend Nixon...” In 1969, Billy Graham criticized Harry S. Truman for firing General Douglas MacArthur and championed the general’s plan to invade China. He went on to advise Richard M. Nixon to bomb dikes in Vietnam, all the while knowing that it would kill close to a million civilians. “A generation of bishops had come of age knowing that the best way to establish their faith's bona fides was to outdo Protestants in patriotic fervor.”⁶⁴



The turning against the war took a significant step in the spring of 1967. The 1964 Nobel Peace Prize winner took the stage at the Riverside Church in New York City, and without hesitation



said, “I oppose the war in Vietnam because I love America. I speak out against it not in anger but with anxiety and sorrow in my heart... This war is a blasphemy against all that America stands for.” It marked the end for the Johnson administration. Public opinion changed with the escalation of the war between 1968 and 1969. Eventually, by late 1971, the nation’s Catholic bishops had reversed their hawkish views, saying the Vietnam war no longer met the religious criteria for a “just war.”

“In Los Angeles, King had described Vietnam’s move for independence in 1945, and America’s decision to block that bid for self-rule and support France in its war to take control of the peninsula. King said, “We again fell victim to the deadly Western arrogance that has poisoned the international atmosphere for so long.” These paragraphs appear in the Riverside speech as well, but there they become the prelude to a new section, in which King drafts the narration of the war as it might be perceived by a peasant in Vietnam:

“We have destroyed their two most cherished institutions: the family and the village. We have destroyed their land and their crops. We have cooperated in the crushing of the nation’s only noncommunist political force, the unified

⁶⁴ Douthat, Ross, *Bad Religion: How We Became a Nation of Heretics*, p. 67-68

Buddhist Church. We have supported the enemies of the peasants of Saigon. We have corrupted their women and children and killed their men.”⁶⁵

“King had come to see war, poverty, and racism as interrelated; taking on one necessarily meant confronting the others. He told his audience at Riverside that the United States was “on the side of the wealthy, and the secure, while we create a hell for the poor.” He was talking about Vietnam, but the sickness that he named, that “far deeper malady,” could be detected in everything America did.

It was also the point on which most of the backlash against Riverside settled. “There are no simple or easy answers to the war in Vietnam or to racial injustice in this country,” the *Times*...wrote in an editorial, published on April 7, 1967, headlined “Dr. King Error.” “Linking these hard, complex problems will lead not to solutions but to deeper confusion.” Similar rebukes were issued from other newspapers, and even from civil-rights groups, including the N.A.A.C.P. But King did not retreat.”

On April 4, 1967, at Riverside Church in New York City, and exactly one year before the day he was murdered Martin Luther King Jr. was still unyielding in addressing the audience with his talk, *Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence*’ offering a wholesale denunciation of American foreign and domestic policy with remarkable unrestraint saying: ‘[E]nding U.S. militarism and imperialism was a moral imperative.’ John Lewis spoke of it as a speech for all “humanity—for the world community.” Speaking to his attorney Clarence Jones, King said, “The Vietnam War is either morally right or morally wrong.”⁶⁶ King went on to call the U.S. government “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today.” His denunciations stretched far beyond the war in Southeast Asia: “[This] war in Vietnam is but a symptom of a far deeper malady within the American spirit.” He insisted that no significant social ill could be solved if the U.S. remains “a nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift.” For this reason, he argued, “it should be incandescently clear that no one who has any concern for the integrity and life of America today can ignore the present war.” That's because: “If America's soul becomes totally poisoned, part of the autopsy must read Vietnam. It can never be saved so long as

⁶⁵ <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/martin-luther-king-jr-s-searing-antiwar-speech-fifty-years-later>

⁶⁶ *IBID*

it destroys the deepest hopes of men the world over. ⁶⁷ King indicted Vietnam as “one of the most unjust wars that has ever been fought in the history of the world.” ⁶⁸

It was Thursday, April 4, 1968, Martin Luther King Jr. had withdrawn to room 306 of the Lorraine Motel, agonizing about a sanitation strike in Memphis to work on his next talk for that Sunday. This same day, in the afternoon, just prior to his assassination, he called his mother to give her his next Sunday’s sermon title: “*Why America May Go to Hell.*” He warned that “America is going to hell if we don’t use her vast resources to end poverty and make it possible for all of God’s children to have the basic necessities of life. If this horrifically unjust tax bill passes we will be well on our way there!” ⁶⁹ Then came the shot...

Though many Christians who protested the war in Vietnam, and those who did not were both overly confident that God absolutely blessed their viewpoint, through the experience each learned something about the ambiguity of politics. Before the war began, most Christians in America possessed a naïve belief in the inherent goodness of all things American. Even though they knew their government could make mistakes, they trusted their government implicitly to act properly in the long run, when ultimate matters were on the line. In the years following Vietnam, and later Watergate, this trust in American institutions and government officials dissipated as one of the options truly available to thoughtful Christians. Each of these journals, in their own ways in the years during and following the war, witnessed to a “lost innocence” where America was concerned. An editorial that appeared in *Christianity Today* after the negotiated treaty in 1973 expressed a considerably different tone than had been common for the journal. The editor asked whether America had learned these important lessons: “that great nations have power limitations; that no nation can police the world or make it safe against Communism; and that no country should resort to war unless its necessity and justification can be made plain and understandable to its people.” ⁷⁰ The 9/11 came, memory was lost again. ⁷¹

⁶⁷ Hagopian, Patrick, *The Vietnam War in American Memory: Veterans, Memorials, and the Politics of ...*, p. 327

⁶⁸ Harvard Sitkoff, *King: Pilgrimage to the Mountaintop* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008), 218–219.

⁶⁹ https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/why-america-may-go-to-hell_us_5a0f4dd4e4b023121e0e9281

⁷⁰ “The Viet Nam Pact,” *CT* (25 April 1975): p. 34.

⁷¹ <https://divinity.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/imce/pdfs/webforum/062007/vietnam.pdf>

10. What Happened —“Crucifixion of Southeast Asia”

For the people of the former French Indochina including Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, the question of central significance is what happened to them and their war-ravaged countries in one of the worst war crimes since WWII: the hideous assault and aggression upon the Vietnamese civilian population, land, culture, crops and beasts, largely in South Vietnam. The savage depth of the American devastation in Vietnam, with its broadening geographic lens to later incorporate Laos and Cambodia in its conflagration is a myopic recitation of an extraordinarily one-sided implacable war. It was a war where the world’s most powerful industrialized nation and military assault genus attacked, invaded and attempted to purge from earth a relatively unknown peasant nation in Southeast Asia, with more than 13-years of ‘saturation bombing’ reminiscent of, but greater than in all WWII.

The war in Indochina between 1962-1975 was distinguished by the extensive use of conventional high explosive munitions, incendiaries and chemical agents as a defoliant. It is appropriate and certainly necessary to distinguish between the discriminating bombing of North Vietnam, or at the man-made environment (industries, railways, bridges, roads, etc.) and the indiscriminate bombing of South Vietnam, aimed primarily at areas of the countryside suspected of hiding troops. The bombing of North Vietnam proved to be of only limited effectiveness, due to the remarkable ability of the society to adapt itself in appropriate ways. The B-52 heavy bombers, dropped nearly ten times as many bombs in South Vietnam as in the North. This strategy-which has been described as “counterinsurgency from 30,000 feet,” [It must be remembered that there is absolutely zero difference between boots on the ground, and a helicopter crew in the sky, or a B-52, and yet people have accepted a differentiation fed them by the administration.] causing an extremely disproportionate destruction to the environment and has countless effects upon the civilian population, who were forced to leave the area or face unimaginable extermination.⁷²

The situation in Laos and Cambodia was even worse than in South Vietnam; “the bombing and war, there is probably a higher percentage handicapped or lame people among the population in Laos than among the population of South Vietnam, and, perhaps, even of Cambodia.” In

⁷² Lumsden, Malvern. “‘Conventional’ War and Human Ecology.” *Ambio*, vol. 4, no. 5/6, 1975, pp. 223–228. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/4312151.

Cambodia...half the population had become refugees. Many Vietnamese left their country to emigrate illegally, by boat, to other countries. Some of the refugees who were called the “boat people” drowned or were attacked and murdered by pirates in their attempts to leave. “Nearly 50 percent of the hospital facilities have been destroyed; over 40 percent of the roads are out; some 35 percent of all the bridges are down; communications and transportation are severely disrupted; and its meager industrial capacity shattered.” The capital city, Phnom Penh, increased from 700,000 to over 2 million, yet “nutritional deficiency is exceedingly widespread in Cambodia... [but] was nowhere as in... rural areas, as it was in the city of Phnom Penh. Large numbers of children in Phnom Penh are currently suffering severe nutritional damage. The government had been unable to respond to these nutritional needs which have been primarily accentuated by the swelling population of this capital city.”⁷³

The methods used in addition to area bombing included, the scattering of millions of small anti-personnel mines across the country-side and spraying with chemicals. About 75 percent of the some seven-million-tones-of ground munitions expended, were fired randomly into the country-side as a means of “harassment and interdiction” of the guerrilla forces. Even without the war, the population of South Vietnam had been subject to widespread malaria, tuberculosis, typhoid, cholera and plague.⁷⁴

‘There can be little doubt that future large-scale wars in the third world would exacerbate all the major problems already present in these areas: malnutrition, disease, rapid urbanization, unemployment, inflation, and lack of investment. Further, since those countries depend almost entirely on imports to fight major wars, military investments with which to conduct such wars do little to increase the economic base required to support their populations; indeed, they will result in increased debts to the arms suppliers and in the squandering of precious national resources. Thus, future wars will probably be most detrimental to the very societies which can least afford them.’⁷⁵

⁷³ *IBID*

⁷⁴ *IBID*

⁷⁵ *IBID*

11. Failed Attempt at Imperialism?

The Vietnam War was not a textbook example of imperial aggression. According to historian Michael Parenti: “Imperialism is what empires are all about. Imperialism is what empires do,” as “one country brings to bear...economic and military power upon another country in order to expropriate [its] land, labor, natural resources, capital and markets.” Imperialism ultimately enriches the home country’s dominant class. The process involves “unspeakable repression and state terror,” and must rely repeatedly “upon armed coercion and repression.” The ultimate aim of modern U.S. imperialism is “to make the world safe” for multinational corporations and banking systems. When discussing imperialism, “the prime unit of analysis should be the *economic class* rather than the nation-state.”

U.S. actions in Vietnam are often described as reflecting “national security,” or “national defense.” Actually, wars in perpetuity represent the class interests of the powerful who own and govern. However, to understand imperial wars, we need to investigate the domestic social structure of the aggressor. Who decides foreign policy? What interest are represented? What is the source of their power?

However, we must be advised about construing imperialism too narrowly. It may be sufficient as a broad statement on imperialism but is somewhat confusing with regard to Vietnam. It will be understood as though the U.S. wanted to develop Vietnam’s resources for gain rather than stop a successful independent economic and nationalist agenda in Vietnam that might motivate others to follow the same course.

The mistake, dare I even say that, in U.S. reasoning was a certain misinterpretation of Communism as a massive singular power. Communists around the world, certainly Russia and China, had completely unrelated motivations for implementing Communism, and rather than a single monolithic political force, they epitomized a diverse group whose values and interests would come into conflict even with one another, notably as the movements mounted on the world’s stage grew. The Soviet-American mania with its “bipolarity or fixation” drove the political elites to choose one side or another. It was ‘nationalist impulses’ that triggered Ho Chi Minh and Southeast Asia to struggle and fight the U.S. military for more than a decade. The artificially constructed ‘Communist monolith’ for political gain proved to be nothing; it was a fabrication in the American

elite's imagination that cost millions of lives, but great gain for the military industrial complex in Washington.

12. A False Impression Revealed—Body Count

America's fixation on body counts, the number of enemy dead, played a key role in furthering America's botch to win against a small, if not insignificant, third world country with a significantly smaller fighting force. Military pundits have contended that the "unique conditions involved in fighting a war in Vietnam" imposed the use of body counts explaining, "In a war without front lines and territorial objectives, where 'attriting [sic] the enemy' was a major goal, the 'body count' became the index of progress...Use of body counts was visible early in the Vietnam War. Bernard Fall, author of *Viet-Nam-The Agonizing Reappraisal* wrote in 1962 that in Vietnam "the military 'kill' becomes the primary target—simply because the essential political target is too elusive for us, or worse, because we do not understand its importance." ⁷⁶

As the war raged on, both the Pentagon and the White House, began banking on the release of "body counts" of the dead North Vietnamese soldiers and guerrillas. The American public was led to believe that the North was disheartened, demoralized, dejected and very near defeat. Just a little more effort and victory was theirs. But victory never came; however, more dead U.S. soldiers and Vietnamese grew. The greatest world power was seemingly brought to its knees. Vietnam arguably was the most complex [asymmetrical] war in which the United States had engaged to that point...The U.S. military was simultaneously trying to hold together a faltering ally while its own morale ebbed... [A]nd decisionmakers in the military, the Pentagon, and the White House to bring the war to a successful conclusion." ⁷⁷



Gordon M. Goldstein, biographer of Nation Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy commented in discussing Westmoreland's attrition assessment program said, "How many casualties would be required to compel them to quit? How many years would it take? Where, exactly, was the tipping point—the threshold of pain and loss that would extract a fundamental reversal in Vietnamese nationalist ambitions?" "[They [body count] were the] bane of my existence and just about got me fired as a division commander. They were gross exaggerations by many units primarily because of

⁷⁶ Gartner, Scott Sigmund, and Marissa Edson Myers. "Body Counts and 'Success' in the Vietnam and Korean Wars." *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, vol. 25, no. 3, 1995, pp. 377–395. JSTOR, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/205692.

⁷⁷ Connable, Ben, *Embracing the Fog of War: Assessment and Metrics in Counterinsurgency*, p. 145

the incredible interest shown by people like McNamara and Westmoreland. I shudder to think how many of our soldiers were killed on a body-counting mission—what a waste. The immensity of the false reporting is a blot on the honor of the Army. A fake—totally worthless.”⁷⁸ In *War Without Fronts*, Thomas C. Thayer’s also expressed doubt regarding the accuracy of guesstimates of enemy dead coming from the field: “It is doubtful whether anybody, including Hanoi [Democratic Republic of Vietnam], really knows how many communist troops died...Thayer goes on to detail why body count estimates from the field were so inaccurate: the communists’ emphasis on reclaiming bodies, difficult terrain, duplicate reporting, and the temptation to exaggerate, among other reasons...An official CIA analysis of the body count provided by U.S. and GVN military forces in the wake of the Tet Offensive called the estimate “exceedingly difficult to accept... This pressure to rack up high body counts may have resulted in the deaths of civilians... [F]alsification and extreme inflation (ten times higher in one case) of body counts by combat units...Alain Enthoven and K. Wayne Smith eviscerate the body count process: “Errors could and did frequently creep in through double counting, counting civilians...or counting graves, or through ignoring the rules because of the pressures to exaggerate enemy losses or the hazards of trying to count bodies while the enemy was still in the area.” They explain how the body count system encouraged inflation, exacerbating an already difficult problem: Few commanders were bold enough to volunteer the information that they had lost as many men in an engagement as the enemy—or more. The net result of all this was that *statistics regarding body counts were notoriously unreliable*.⁷⁹

Regarding body counts, two flaws stand out. One, body count is inaccurate and two, body count as evidence leads to an excessive and predictable strategy of ‘manufactured attrition’ through ‘search-and-destroy anything and when dead, call it a VC.’ The simplicity of this would seem to be conduct the opposite, just use accurate metrics and secondly, conduct counter-insurgency instead. However, the simplicity fails again in a culture inclined towards military aggressiveness, shared with enticements for increased body count. Such creates unbelievable pressure on search-and-destroy missions at the expense of political resolutions. The United States government’s problems

⁷⁸ Quotes from Kinnard, 1977, p. 75. The first was in response to Kinnard’s survey of U.S. general officers in 1974.

⁷⁹ CONNABLE, BEN, *Embracing the Fog of War, Vietnam-Era Assessment* (2012) Stable URL <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/mg1086dod.14>, p. 107-110

in Vietnam was precisely that it never moved from the *logic* or *rationality* of attrition. Body count focused on aggressive pursuit of the enemy arose in economics.⁸⁰

There is the *Goodhart's law* of economics that states,

“As soon as the government attempts to regulate any particular set of financial assets, these become unreliable as indicators of economic trends.” The same principle would apply with a *military strategy in war*, with the following:

Or,

‘As soon as the government attempts to regulate *‘the attrition of the enemy by using the enemy’s body count against him in time of war,’* [this regulation or] *attrition of the enemy by using the enemy’s body count against him* becomes unreliable as indicators of [military progress] trends.’”

So, by trying to anticipate the outcome or consequence of a policy [body count] and then enacting programs which amend its outcome [anyone dead was a VC] more favorable to the user [the more people killed the higher the VC body count]. Simple math.

Moreover, the media was leaked confidential Pentagon documents which exposed that the numbers of enemy dead or wounded were significantly exaggerated and overstated. It was also learned that support for the North was much more extensive than ever thought by the United States. It was at that point, that anti-war movement developed to large nationwide protests. Finally, with the special CBS News broadcast on Feb. 27, 1968, Walter Cronkite's addressed the nation.

“Tonight, ...we'd like to sum up our findings in Vietnam, an analysis that must be speculative, personal, subjective. Who won and who lost in the great Tet Offensive against the cities? I'm not sure. The Vietcong did not win by a knockout but neither did we...We've been too often disappointed by the optimism of the American leaders... For it seems now more certain than ever, that the bloody experience of Vietnam is to end in a stalemate. To say that we are closer to victory today is to believe in the face of the evidence, the optimists who have been wrong in the past. To say that we are mired in stalemate seems the only realistic, if unsatisfactory conclusion...But it is increasingly clear to this reporter that the only rational way



⁸⁰ 99th edition of Pears Cyclopaedia (1990--1, pp. G 27, G 31)

out then will be to negotiate, not as victors, but as an honorable people who lived up to their pledge to defend democracy and did the best they could.”⁸¹

Thus, the end of LBJ’s administration. Richard Nixon was elected President promising to end the war quickly. In fact, Nixon, hoped to win the continuing war and dawdled his feet to bring about a close. Public pressure intensified, and Nixon was driven to change strategies. Finally, in 1973 an arrangement was reached at The Paris Peace Accords that would end U.S. involvement with the return POWs and MIAs. America, by most measures, was effectively absent for Vietnam. South Vietnam was unable to stop the North’s advance. The South’s military equipment was abandoned, and thousands of weapons, supplies and vehicles sat useless. By 1975, the collapse was impending. The longest war in U.S. history, at the time, divided America in ways which still have not healed, while the level of trust the population had for the United States government deteriorated.

⁸¹ <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=106775685>

13. The Not So Accurate Theory

‘The Not So Accurate Theory’ or “The Domino Theory” came from the belief of ‘containment and control’ that oversaw American foreign policy from the end of WWII. Supposedly, if one country fell to communist control, all neighboring countries would quickly follow in a domino effect. The United States elite and allies used the ‘domino theory’ as justification for bombing Vietnam to stop the spread of Communism. The government propaganda for the mainstream was said repeatedly, ‘we must not let communism spread. Supposedly, if one country fell to communist control, all neighboring countries would quickly follow in a domino effect. The United States elite and allies used the ‘domino theory’ as justification for bombing Vietnam to stop the spread and force a containment of Communism.⁸² However, the theory failed completely; the motivating force behind North Vietnamese was that of nationalism, and independence, not the communists. Frederik Logervall said, “It is curious that the passage of time since 1949 had only made U.S. officials more attached to this kind of theorizing. Never mind that in no previous case had the fall of a country to Communism triggered the rapid fall of a whole string of other countries. Even in a weaker form, envisioning only a short row of dominoes, in this case only those countries nearby in Southeast Asia, the theory seemingly bore little relation to reality. China, the world's most populous country had gone Communist in 1949, but that event had not caused dominoes to fall... Stalin had minimal interest in Indochina and indeed, saw the conflict there as a nuisance. Neither he nor his Kremlin successors had major ambitions in that part of the world.”⁸³

Was Logervall’s assessment correct? Did the U.S. need a national strategy of containment against communist aggression? Former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara said in 1995, “I think we were wrong. I do not believe that Vietnam was that important to the communists. I don't believe that its loss would have lead - it didn't lead – to Communist control of Asia.” Kennedy Cabinet appointee, American diplomat and historian George F. Kennan came to believe that a communist victory in that war would not alter the global balance of power as the Domino Theory had claimed. Kennan testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in early 1966,

⁸² Young, Marilyn B., *The Vietnam Wars 1945-1990*, ed.1991, p. 25

⁸³ Logervall. Frederik, *The Indochina wars and the Cold War 1945-1975*, p. 281-304

asserted that, “Vietnam is not a region of major military, industrial importance. It is difficult to believe that any decisive developments of the world situation would be determined ... by what happens on that territory ... even a situation in which South Vietnam was controlled exclusively by the Viet Cong ... would not, in my opinion, present dangers great enough to justify our military intervention.”^[84, 85] Gradually, however, Kennan turned on the Vietnam War that he had initially backed, troubled that the United States was spending money, arms and deaths in excess of what the conflict required, suggesting that U.S. credibility would be better served by the “liquidation of unsound positions than by the...stubborn pursuit of extravagant or unpromising objectives.”⁸⁶ John Kerry, in his speech for the “Winter Soldier,” on April 4, 1971 said regarding the Vietnamese, “[M]ost [Vietnamese] people didn't even know the difference between communism and democracy. They only wanted to work in rice paddies without helicopters strafing them and bombs with napalm burning their villages and tearing their country apart. They wanted everything to do with the war, particularly with this foreign presence of the United States of America, to leave them alone in peace, and they practiced the art of survival by siding with whichever military force was present at a particular time, be it Vietcong, North Vietnamese, or American.” In addition, several significant factors that could not be foreseen occurred in the 1960s-70s that took any storm out of the “domino-theory.” **1.** The deaths of two crucial men, view as if ‘semi-divine’ (Ho Chi Minh and Chairman Mao); **2.** the increasing concern for nuclear war from the Soviets and movement in the direction of detent; and **3.** the U.S. de-commitment and withdrawal from Vietnam in 1973.

Interestingly, it must not be forgotten, several years before the USSR and China reached out to the Vietminh, Ho Chi Minh had reached out to President Truman for support but was rejected. American policy makers failed to understand the essential aim of Ho Chi Minh was to gain independence for all Vietnam rather than propagating communism throughout Southeast Asia. No better illustration was there than by the Vietnamese-Cambodian War in 1978–1979. The Vietnamese invaded and defeated its former ally the Khmer Rouge where the Chinese communists

⁸⁴ Sempa, Francis P. *author of Geopolitics: From the Cold War to the 21st Century (Transaction Books) and America's Global Role: Essays and Reviews on National Security, Geopolitics and War (University Press of America).*, George Kennan's Geopolitics of the Far East, A worldview based on “unsentimental calculations of the balance of power.” April 15, 2015

⁸⁵ Isaac, Joel, Duncan Bell, *Uncertain Empire: American History and the Idea of the Cold War*, p. 94

⁸⁶ David Brown, “The Fall of Vietnam Would Not Have Lead to Communist Control of Asia” *The Christian Science Monitor* (April 28, 1995), p. 18.

attacked Vietnam in return. (In 1948, President Truman began contributing money, weapons and supplies to the French war effort in Vietnam.)

George Herring discussed the impact of the Cold War on the American psyche. Six successive U.S. Presidents justified America's intervention by claiming that the war in Vietnam was part of a monolithic communist movement to take control newly emerging, post-colonial countries. Herring tells us, "that U.S. policy makers over stated the threat and the capabilities of Moscow and Beijing leaders of Vietnam's Communist Party often disagreed with their more powerful allies. Herring reminds us that the cold war created a culture of fear and militant anticommunism in the U.S. Every decision in Washington was filtered through a cold war lens, and this led to myopia and mistakes." ⁸⁷

In the end; however, the American effort to stop a communist seizure of Saigon failed, and North Vietnam paraded into Saigon in 1975. However, communism *did not spread* throughout Southeast Asia. Except for Laos and Cambodia, the Southeast Asia countries continued out of communist control.

So, why was the United States so worried about an independent South Vietnam? In reality, concern was that a "takeover" of South Vietnam by nationalist forces would be hailed and received well. The Domino was not communism, but was more economic, strategic trading and nationalism that might leave the United States out and alone. If such a 'takeover' were satisfying and productive it would encourage strong national, social and economic development, and the entire region would be 'infected with disease.' The United States needed to destroy the 'virus' of nationalism and economic growth [Vietnamese national independence] and inoculate [Laos, Cambodia, Indonesia] the remaining region from the virus. This was clearly a nationalist movement which would detach and keep separate Vietnam from the American influence. It may trade with the United States, but it would not function as a semi-colony to American. That would be dangerous; there could be an erosion from within by indigenous



⁸⁷ Brigham, Robert K. "Foreword: The Wars for Vietnam." *OAH Magazine of History*, vol. 18, no. 5, 2004, pp. 4-6. *JSTOR*, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/25163714.

forces of American domination in the region. It was presumed that the key to this issue was thwarting, by war, any effective national movement from fulfilling any thoughtful national, social or economic development inside Indochina apart from the United States. Its goal was a new “co-prosperity sphere” congenial to U.S. interests and incorporating Southeast Asia and Japan. ⁸⁸

The theory’s influence was not overwhelming, even during the early 1950s. President Eisenhower’s administration had questioned the domino theory and concluded that the ‘loss’ of Vietnam would not be a disaster for the ‘free world’ and that Laos and Cambodia were in little danger. ⁸⁹ It was in the spring of 1995, former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara said he now believed that the domino theory was wrong. “I think we were wrong. I do not believe that Vietnam was that important to the communists. I don't believe that its loss would have lead - it didn't lead - to Communist control of Asia.” ⁹⁰ McNamara had decidedly taken a stand against his own conduct of the war, acknowledging that it was “wrong, terribly wrong.” In fact, “The CIA repudiated the theory internally in 1961, four years before the U.S. escalation, but the public never got the memo.” [^{91,92}]

As the U.S.A. got further and further embroiled in Vietnam, the domino theory and geopolitical considerations began to lose their importance. During the 1960s it became increasingly clear that China and the USSR were in severe disagreement and that communism was not a monolithic entity; by 1970 it was established that the Vietnamese communists were independent of China and the USSR and that the Vietnam war was not ‘containing’ China. ⁹³ It was also shown that the fall of the North Vietnamese ‘domino’ had had no effect on the political persuasion of Southeast Asia nor was likely to, with the exceptions of Cambodia and Laos. ⁹⁴ Britain and France were strong allies of the U.S. and were no longer requesting American involvement in the area. However, with these considerations largely removed, the US discovered that withdrawal from

⁸⁸ Chomsky, Noam, *For Reasons Of State*, p. 31

⁸⁹ Immerman, ‘US interests in Indochina’ in L.S. Kaplan, D. Artaud, M.R. Rubin (eds.), *Dien Bien Phu and the Crisis of Franco-American Relations, 1954-1955* (Scholarly Resources Inc., 1990) p. 17

⁹⁰ David Brown, "The Fall of Vietnam Would Not Have Lead to Communist Control of Asia" *The Christian Science Monitor* (April 28, 1995) p. 18.

⁹¹ <https://www.commondreams.org/views/2015/02/01/did-us-learn-any-lessons-vietnam>

⁹² <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP80-01601R000300360117-4.pdf>

⁹³ Gene T. Hsiao (ed.), *The Role of External Powers in the Indochina Crisis* (Andronicus, 1973)

⁹⁴ Bell P., *The World Since 1945: an international history*, (Arnold Publishers, 2001)

Vietnam was virtually impossible because of the blow that a defeat would deal internationally, to American pride and prestige, and domestically, to the popularity of the President.

Communist and socialist movements became popular in poorer countries because they brought economic improvements to those countries in which they took power. For this reason, the U.S. put so great effort into suppressing so-called “people's movements” in Chile, Vietnam, Nicaragua, Laos...etc. “The weaker and poorer a country is, the more dangerous it is as an example. If a tiny, poor country like Grenada can succeed in bringing about a better life for its people, some other place that has more resources will ask, ‘Why not us?’” Chomsky refers to this as the “threat of a good example,” or “the rotten apple example.” [95, 96]

The most anyone could possibly predict was that U.S. ally Japan would be at danger of falling, which of course it wasn't and didn't. The domino theory was falsified: Japan remained free of the communists, along with Thailand, the Philippines, Australia, and New Zealand. Meanwhile the unified Vietnam fought Red China and invaded neighboring communist country Cambodia, that was ruled by the murderous oppressor Pol Pot and overthrew him, resulting in a war with China, known as the Third Indochina War. The War lasted 27 days, or from February 17, 1979 – March 16, 1979.

⁹⁵ Chomsky, Noam, *How the World Works*, p. 21

⁹⁶ Winter James P., *Lies the Media Tell Us*, p. 216

14. National Pride Trumps Human Life

For some Americans, the Vietnam experience fueled a fear that the brown philistines were omnipresent and ready to strike Mason City, Nevada. For others, it was a profound signal of the loss of pre-eminence; we are the beginning of Americans losing. The war was a traumatic set-back for the U.S. military industrial complex, as well for those Americans whose self-image had been hitched to ‘American exceptionalism,’ and certainly those Evangelicals whose core or fundamental tenet is that America is a “city upon a hill,” or as Ronald Reagan said, “a shining city on a hill.” These Americans felt humiliated by the harm to America’s prescient moral image. The anti-war movement had in America succeeded in helping to end the war, but it failed in helping Americans come to a mea culpa with defeat.

The Tet Offensive had humiliated Westmoreland's attrition strategy and hopelessly weakened American public support for the war, suggests that the politicians, bankers and pundits were driven less by military confidence than by a craving to establish a robust record of rejected pleas as ammunition in the unavoidable postwar debate over responsibility for ‘losing Vietnam’ as was ‘losing China’ in 1949. The search for an ‘honorable peace’ continued for another four years after Tet under the Nixon administration, which could have liquidated U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War at a suitable domestic political price. Instead, the Nixon administration, pre-occupied with saving American honor and prestige, chose to pursue a policy of ‘defeat avoidance,’ based on a restrained application of U.S. air power and a ‘Vietnamization’ strategy premised on the hypothesis that a stronger militarized South Vietnamese army might succeed where American arms had failed. In the end, Nixon’s saving face managed to postpone Saigon's inevitable day of reckoning with Hanoi for a few years, till 1975.

Kissinger was fixated with repairing the image of the American military and its power. After the fall of Saigon in 1975, Kissinger told reporters, “the United States must carry out some act somewhere in the world, which shows its determination to continue to be a world power.”⁹⁷ In April 1975, Gerald Ford originally preached with sorted amnesia: “Today America can regain the sense of pride that existed before Vietnam. But it cannot be achieved by refighting a war that is

⁹⁷ Fettweis, Christopher J., *The Pathologies of Power: Fear, Honor, Glory, and Hubris in U.S. Foreign Policy*, p. 120.

finished as far as America is concerned.”⁹⁸ Jimmy Carter detected a crisis of confidence in Americans after the war saying, “Well, the destruction was mutual...I don’t feel we ought to apologize or castigate ourselves or to assume culpability. Now, I am willing to face the future without reference to the past... I don't feel that we owe a debt, nor that we should be forced to pay reparations at all.”⁹⁹ One need only look at Saigon after the war and compare it to Times Square, N.Y. to see how the “destruction was mutual.” Finally, regarding diplomatic apologies Vice President George H. W. Bush said in 1988: “I will never apologize for the United States; I don't care what the facts are... I'm not an apologize-for-America kind of guy.”

To hear claims that ‘our government was afraid to let the soldiers win’ is a strange indictment against those American pundits, political and military leaders that had put enormous energy into encouraging and endorsing the war. These allegations serve to excuse and immunize the same pundits of war and, by inference, the American people, from feeling any responsibility for this defeat. What more was required to win is left unknown. Was the use of nuclear weapons being suggested resulting in World War III? What would victory have meant, precluding the total annihilation of all of Vietnam, which some extreme hawks supported. Wars are usually fought for explicit political and or geo-political purposes. They are not all-out street fights where the winner is the only one standing. The goal in Vietnam, as told the public, was apparently the survival of a pro-western South Vietnamese government, but that message fell flat and disingenuous as the war progressed. The more outside intervention there was, the less indigenous or homegrown and legitimate the South Vietnamese government, the more it would appear to be a puppet of the American outsiders.

⁹⁸ Roper, J., *The United States and the Legacy of the Vietnam War*, p. 158

⁹⁹ Martini, Edwin A., *Invisible Enemies: The American War on Vietnam, 1975-2000*, p. 45-46

15. Letter from Ho Chi Minh to President Lyndon Johnson, 1967

Annotation: Ho Chi Minh stated that he would not negotiate until the United States stopped bombing Vietnam. ¹⁰⁰

Document:

To His Excellency Mr. Lyndon B. Johnson, President, United States of America

Your Excellency:

On February 10, 1967, I received your message. This is my reply. Vietnam is thousands of miles away from the United States. The Vietnamese people have never done any harm to the United States. But contrary to the pledges made by its representative at the 1954 Geneva conference, the U.S. has ceaselessly intervened in Vietnam, it has unleashed and intensified the war of aggression in North Vietnam with a view to prolonging the partition of Vietnam and turning South Vietnam into a neo-colony and a military base of the United States. For over two years now, the U.S. government has, with its air and naval forces, carried the war to the Democratic Republic of (North) Vietnam, an independent and sovereign country.

The U.S. government has committed war crimes, crimes against peace and against mankind. In South Vietnam, half a million U.S. and satellite troops have resorted to the most inhuman weapons and most barbarous methods of warfare, such as napalm, toxic chemicals and gases, to massacre our compatriots, destroy crops, and raze villages to the ground. In North Vietnam, thousands of U.S. aircraft have dropped hundreds of thousands of tons of bombs, destroying towns, villages, factories, schools. In your message, you apparently deplore the sufferings and destruction in Vietnam. May I ask you: Who has perpetrated these monstrous crimes? It is the United States and satellite troops. The U.S. government is entirely responsible for the extremely serious situation in Vietnam.

The U.S. war of aggression against the Vietnamese people constitutes a challenge to the countries of the socialist camp, a threat to the national independence movement, and a serious danger to peace in Asia and the world.

The Vietnamese people deeply love independence, freedom and peace. But in the face of U.S. aggression, they have risen up, united as one man, fearless of sacrifices and hardships. They are determined to carry on their resistance until they have won genuine independence and freedom

¹⁰⁰ http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/dispatch_textbook.cfm?smtID=3&psid=3641

and true peace. Our just cause enjoys strong sympathy and support from the peoples of the whole world, including broad sections of the American people.

The U.S. government has unleashed the war of aggression in Vietnam. It must cease this aggression. This is the only way to restoration of peace. The U.S. government must stop definitely and unconditionally its bombing raids and all other acts of war against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, withdraw from South Vietnam all U.S. and satellite troops, recognize the South Vietnam National Front for Liberation, and let the Vietnamese people settle themselves their own affairs. Such is the basis of the five-point stand of the government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, which embodies the essential principles and provision of the 1954 Geneva Agreements on Vietnam; it is the basis of a correct political solution to the Vietnam problem.

In your message you suggested direct talks between the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the United States. If the U.S. government really wants these talks, it must first of all stop unconditionally its bombing raids and all other acts of war against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. It is only after the unconditional cessation of U.S. bombing raids and all other acts of war against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam that the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the U.S. could enter into talks and discuss questions concerning the two sides.

The Vietnamese people will never submit to force, they will never accept talks under threat of bombs.

Our cause is absolutely just. It is to be hoped that the U.S. government will act in accordance with reason.

Sincerely,

Ho Chi Minh

16. My Lai Was a Massacre, Not an “Incident”

The massacre where over 500 unarmed Vietnamese civilians [elderly men, women and children and infants] were massacred by U.S. soldiers on March 16, 1968 had been effectively covered up for more than a year by officers in the chain of command in Vietnam at the time. The most revealed and publicized U.S. massacre was at My Lai where civilians were shot down at point blank range. The court singled out Lieutenant William Calley, “as if the deaths of all those Vietnamese civilians, carried out by dozens of men at the behest of higher command, could be the fault of just one junior officer.”¹⁰¹ Historian Kendrick Oliver concluded, “This is not a society which really wanted to know about the violence of the war that its armed forces were waging in Vietnam.” Many Americans “perceived they had more in common with...Calley than with any of his victims.... It was the lieutenant...who became the object of public sympathy, not the inhabitants of My Lai whom he had hastened to death.” “Both the President and the Pentagon were not anxious to offer any new stimulus to the controversy: American war crimes were not what they wanted the public to be discussing whilst there remained an American war to be fought; and further investigation...members of the White House staff were instructed to say nothing, on or off the record about the massacre cases.”^[102,103]

You cannot separate guilt from responsibility; however, an argument could be made that those elite officials responsible for military engagement are ‘as much or more’ reprehensible than those who are following their orders. Guilt, without question, must lie with those who fire into designed ‘free fire zones’ knowing civilians are there, guilt must lie with those who keep ‘body counts’ knowing the abuse to the civilian population in order to maintain the highest count, guilt must lie with those who ‘encourage men to men kill anything that moves and not ask questions,’ guilt must lie with those who ‘allow in training to do calisthenics to four counts, and on the fourth count of which we stand up and shout “kill” in unison’ or to use ‘posters in barracks with a crucified

¹⁰¹ Nick Turse, “Misremembering America’s Wars, 2003–2054,” TomDispatch, February 18, 2014, <http://tomdispatch.com>.

¹⁰² Kendrick Oliver, *The My Lai Massacre in American History and Memory* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2006), p. 8-9, 232

¹⁰³ Kolko, “War Crimes,” 414; “Kolko, “On the Avoidance of Reality,” Crimes of War,” 12.

Vietnamese, and underneath it says “kill the gook.” If any country is going to demand respect for the law, it must at the same time try by law all those people who have a responsibility for the shared guilt. To treat one group, separate from and different is the height of hypocrisy. 18 people [generals and colonels] were indicted for the same crime and were freed from shared ‘guilt or responsibility.’ This is not justice. Calley must have faced the charges, but so must the others who are as guilty in calling for this mindset and more in being responsible for initiating it. If you drop a bomb from a plane, though you see not the carnage you commit, you are no less guilty or responsible for such carnage than if you saw them and shot them in the back of their head. One and all the same a zero-sum end.

Under pressure, from military officials and thousands of American zealots of ‘My Country Right or Wrong’ came to his defense. Some believed it a patriotic justification against the unhinged, godless Communists, others believed he had been unfairly singled out in a war with similar atrocities by others. One Colonel Henderson said in 1971, “Every unit of brigade size has its own Mai Lai hidden some place, because every unit doesn't have a Ridenhour,” or the soldier who reported the atrocities. Thus, “far from being evidence of our higher moral evolution, the very attention to atrocities like Mai Lai is a misdirection. It would be shocking and perverse to condemn only rape and murder in wartime while continuing to tolerate the strategic bombing of non-combatants.”¹⁰⁴ The massacre at Mai Lai by ordinary rank and file soldiers was a small event, perhaps, even a prelude, when compared with plans from the high-level military and civilian leaders for a more massive destruction (immune from prosecution from behind the walls of Congress) of a civilian population of brown and small Vietnamese, Laotian and Cambodians. Noam Chomsky called the war “an overwhelming atrocity.”¹⁰⁵ Finally, Nixon intervened, freeing Calley from the stockade, after 36 hours, and allowed him to live in his personal bachelor’s quarters at Fort Benning, Georgia, under house arrest while appealing his conviction. Calley was ultimately placed on parole in 1974 after serving one-third of his sentence.

¹⁰⁴ Quadrio, Philip Andrew, Carrol Besseling Politics and Religion in the New Century: Philosophical Reflections, Gods and State, p. 45

¹⁰⁵ McGilvray, James The Cambridge Companion to Chomsky, p. 267

17. Tonkin Gulf Termination of Bombing in the North

The Vietnam War rested on ongoing government lies, misdirection and deception. Daniel Ellsberg exposed one such lie of the conflict: the Tonkin Gulf crisis of August 1964. President Johnson and Defense Secretary Robert McNamara told America that the Ho Chi Minh and the North Vietnamese, for the second time in two days, had attacked U.S. warships on “routine patrol in international waters”; a “deliberate” pattern of “naked aggression.” The ensuing second attack, as was the first, was “unequivocal”; that the attack had been “unprovoked”; and that the United States, by responding was dissuading any further repetition, intended no wider war. ¹⁰⁶ These assurances were fallacious and a pure fabrication from the very top of government down.

By the time of the Gulf of Tonkin incident, August of 1964, Vietnam was the all-consuming obsession. Little more than a year later, in early 1966, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs John McNaughton, declared, “We...have in Vietnam the ingredients of an enormous miscalculation....” By 1967, it was nearly impossible for the President Johnson to announce a national mobilization for war. Now, demonstrations and teach-ins started to increase in volume. His policy just disintegrated and then came the Tet Offensive throughout all South Vietnam’s cities overnight. The Tet Offensive created a crisis within the Johnson administration, which became increasingly unable to convince the American public that it had been a major defeat for the communists. A decision need be made; ‘either another World War [WWIII], or we leave.’ According to Michael Parenti, “The jingoists would have applauded the use of nuclear weapons in Vietnam. ...[A]nd U.S. would have "won" the war, creating another radioactive cemetery and calling it peace.” ¹⁰⁷

“On Sept. 19, 1966, Mr. McNamara telephoned Johnson. “I myself am more and more convinced that we ought definitely to plan on termination of bombing in the North,” Mr. McNamara said, according to White House tapes. He also suggested establishing a ceiling on the number of troops to be sent to Vietnam. “I don’t think we ought to just look ahead to the future and say we’re

¹⁰⁶ Daniel Ellsberg, *Secrets* (New York: Penguin, 2002), 12.

¹⁰⁷ Parenti, Michael, *Superpatriotism, “America Love It or Leave It,”* p. 39-40

going to go higher and higher and higher and higher — 600,000; 700,000; whatever it takes.” The president’s only response was an unintelligible grunt.”¹⁰⁸ The war... “is becoming increasingly unpopular as it escalates — causing more American casualties, more fear of its growing into a wider war, more privation of the domestic sector, and more distress at the amount of suffering being visited on the noncombatants in Vietnam, South and North.” “Most Americans,” Mr. McNamara continued, “are convinced that somehow we should not have gotten this deeply in. All want the war ended and expect their president to end it. Successfully. Or else.” McNamara was more blunt with his staff, declaring, “Ho Chi Minh is a tough old S.O.B. And he won't quit no matter how much bombing we do.”¹⁰⁹

Even before the Tet Offensive, ‘defeat avoidance’¹¹⁰ was becoming the predominant U.S. war aim. Finally, on the morning of January 30, 1968, the Vietnamese People's Army (VPA) launched their Tet Offensive (the lunar new year) named for the Vietnamese new year holiday. The Offensive ignited a popular revolt against the corrupt Saigon regime in South Vietnam and its American patrons that continued for about 21 days. Though the Tet Offensive miscarried in its intention of defeating and ousting the Republic of South Vietnam, it became a tidal wave in turning the war aims of the United States. It convinced a large segment of the U.S. citizenry that the government’s assertions of progress toward winning the war were misleading and deceptive despite years of massive U.S. military aid to the Republic of South Vietnam. Now, the corporate business community believed it was time to leave. The media began to challenge the Johnson administration's pledges of success and to have reservations on the value of the progressively costly war.

¹⁰⁸ Weiner, Tim, *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA*, p. 307

¹⁰⁹ Anderson, Terry H., *The Sixties*,

¹¹⁰ JCS Memorandum to the Secretary of Defense. Reprinted in George C. Herring, ed. *The Pentagon Papers, Abridged Edition* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993), p. 115.

18. The Power of Resistance at Home

If America's soul becomes totally poisoned, part of the autopsy must read "Vietnam."

MLK, 1967

However, there was another reason for the decline in American superiority. The heart of the resistance rested between the antiwar movement and American political leaders, who had designed its foreign policy in Vietnam from the 1950s to mid-60s, and typically without accessing public opinion or having any meaningful open debate. Military draft evasion is said to have characterized every military conflict of the 20th-21st centuries. The Vietnam War was no exception. Some succeeded in circumventing the law, others took a public stand against the law regardless of the consequence, while some believed they had to leave the country. Whether one was involved in draft avoidance, draft resistance, or draft evaders they all felt a need to reject the hammer of the government over their lives and chose to be guided by their conscious in some manner.

The middle working-class were at a much greater risk to get drafted than those of the middle class since college students could acquire deferments. Draft deferments of avoidance involve following the letter law to obtain a legally valid deferment or exemption. Sometimes these were given by political considerations. Others may have chosen circumvention or manipulation, or clandestinely disregard the substance of the draft laws to acquire a deferment or exemption. Examples include:

‘Conscientious objector based on religious or ethical beliefs, college and graduate student deferments, health issues, buying exemptions, medical, physical or psychological problems, indispensable civilian occupation etc. Some refused by participating in public draft card burnings, moving abroad, going to trial and fighting their cases in the federal courts, or going underground.’

In 1969, with intense criticism of the draft's monetary, racial, gender biases and inequities, the government implemented a lottery system to determine who was called to serve based on their date of birth. My personal lottery number was 291, for August 21. of which I appealed. This conscription with its lottery ended in 1973.



“Opponents of the Vietnam War...galvanizing in great numbers of protesters...overthrew the sacrosanct notion that one could not oppose the war while the country was actually at war...They exposed the selfish material interests behind U.S. overseas intervention. And began...to question the whole elitist political system....”

Criticism of these protests ran amok. Carl F. H. Henry, in *Christianity Today*, described burning draft cards as “certainly a far cry from ‘panty raids’ in the springtime.” These students committed acts “perilously close to treason.” Such acts would only reassure the Vietcong and spend more American blood and lives. Johnson reacted as if to say anyone who would act this way would “feel toward his country in a way that is not consistent with the national interest.” Johnson leveled that all who questioned the wisdom of his policies were anti-American, even though most of these protesters thought they acted in the best interests of the country. ¹¹¹ The answer of the religious leaders to these protests protesting was immediate and straightforward.

“The First amendment preserves the right of even one man against a majority in this basic freedom. For the functioning of the democratic process, then, dissent is both legitimate and essential. Our government, thus, has an obligation to protect the right of dissent, especially in times of war or national emergency, when civil liberties are most threatened.”



Parenti went on to say, “[S]ome protesters...attacked the patriotic symbols of our country. Some burned American flags...The war resisters mistakenly put the blame on an entity called America, sometimes writing it as “Amerika,” intended to give the word a more Germanic Nazi-like tone, or “Amerikkka” with three k's the initials of the Ku Klux Klan, treating the word like a curse. Thus, the protesters mistakenly made America the issue, blaming the nation itself for what had been perpetuated in its name by U.S. leaders.” ¹¹²

It should be noted on a personal level some struggled with the abuses hurled at them for taking a stand in opposition to the war. Was such guilt warranted? The hidden premise is that when

¹¹¹ James Reston is quoted in Mitchell K. Hall, *Because of Their Faith: CALCAV and Religious Opposition to the Vietnam War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 13; Henry’s editorial is “Dodging the Draft,” *CT* (5 November 1965): 36; “Peace Demonstrations: Rights and Wrongs,” *Am* (30 October 1965): 490; and Moyers is quoted in “Students’ Sturm and Drang,” *CC* (3 November 1965): 1339-1340.

¹¹² Parenti, Michael, *Superpatriotism*, “America Love It or Leave It,” p. 12-14

the *government* requires you to participate in something you view wrong and immoral should you sacrifice your principles and obey; do you have a moral obligation to do it. When stated candidly, it is typically positioned in terms of your “*country*” calling; however, *the country never* that calls, it’s impossible. Here it is the representative of the elected government that calls. They turn out to be imperfect, prejudice, partisan, bigoted and discriminating people you don’t even know, and perhaps don’t want or care to know, who are calling you for their unique political agenda. It’s the government. In the case of Vietnam, and one need only remember, Johnson, Nixon, McNamara, Kissinger [Today, Clinton, Bush, Powell, Cheney, Rice, Obama and Trump] and their war crimes committed to understand. A call by those deceitful and mendacious social engineers doesn’t sound so inspiring.

In addition, the most powerful army in the world began to weaken internally with strong anti-war resistance at home, draft resistance, fragging, desertion, self-inflicted gunshots to get sent home and more. It was fighting a colonial war with a civilian conscript army. This colonial war was a very cloudy war. The conscripts were not fighting militarily trained armed forces, rather unarmed civilians: elderly, women and children. That kind of war entails professional killers: mercenaries. And though the United States military did plenty of that as well, after a while, it couldn’t take it... ‘The anti-war movement also publicized the terrible aspects of the Indochina conflict: villages destroyed, innocent people massacred, children burned with napalm, groves, orchards, villages, and jungles razed to the ground. Wildlife and peasants were poisoned with chemical weapons. All this largely suppressed by the news media and government officials. “The movement reached into the US military itself, creating a climate of dissent that affected the performance of soldiers in Vietnam...[I]nfantry squads and platoons sometimes refused to advance deeply into the jungle to make contact with the enemy...[S]ome 700 US servicemen deserted, and a few outright mutinies occurred, including at least one of company size [80-150 soldiers]...At home the peace movement assisted conscientious objectors and other draft resisters, and helped create a climate of opinion against the war.”¹¹³

¹¹³ Katsiaficas, George, Vietnam Documents: American and Vietnamese Views: American and Vietnamese Views, Chapter 49

19. 'Blundering Effort [or] Disastrous Mistake.'

Departures from the mainstream orthodoxy were extremely rare among the intelligentsia. Few journalists were more critical of the war than the liberal Anthony Lewis of the New York Times, but for different reasons; he summed up his attitude in 1975 by explaining that the war began as “blundering efforts to do good.” Lewis went on to say, “American decisions on Indochina can be recognized as blundering efforts to do good. But by 1969 it was clear to most of the world...that the intervention had been a disastrous mistake.”¹¹⁴ Here was a leading ‘left liberal,’ who could only come as far as to conclude that the war was a “*blundering effort [or] disastrous mistake.*” The Washington Post similarly editorialized, “For the fundamental ‘lesson’ of Vietnam surely is not that we as a people are intrinsically bad, but rather we are capable of error—on a gigantic scale. That is the spirit in which the post-mortems on Vietnam ought now to go. Not just the absence of recriminations, but also the presence of insight and honesty is required to bind up the nation's wounds. Note again the words “wrong,” “misguided,” “tragic,” [and] “error.” That is as far as “insight and honesty” can carry us in reaching our judgement. The [Washington] Post encourages us to recall that “some part of the purpose” of our policy in Vietnam was “right and defensible,” namely, our effort to help the people of South Vietnam “to decide on their own form of government and social order.”^[115,116] Consider the blather created by pundits at the end of the war: “honorable though fraught with mistakes and misjudgments;” “good impulses came to be transmuted into bad policy;” it would be unfair to leave “the impression somehow the United States was responsible for the carnage in Southeast Asia;” “our blundering efforts to do good” turned into a “disastrous mistake;” and so on.”¹¹⁷ Townsend Hoopes (former undersecretary of the Air Force from 1967-1969) wrote, “our intervention in 1965 was *misconceived.*”¹¹⁸ Perhaps, a more notable extract is from Arthur M. Schlesinger, a member of John F. Kennedy’s administration. He said, “[S]o the policy of ‘one more step’ lured the United States deeper and deeper into the *morass.* The policy of...[W]e find ourselves entrapped today in that *nightmare* of American strategist, a land war in

¹¹⁴ Chomsky, Noam, *The Chomsky Reader, The Responsibility of Intellectuals*, p. 131

¹¹⁵ Chomsky, Noam, Anthony Amove, *The Essential Chomsky*, p. 277

¹¹⁶ Washington Post, April 30, 1975.

¹¹⁷ Chomsky, Noam, Anthony Amove, *The Essential Chomsky*, p. 344

¹¹⁸ Hoopes, Townsend, *The Limits of Intervention*, 1969

Asia—a war which no President...desired or intended. The Vietnam story is a tragedy without villains.”¹¹⁹ [*Italics mine*]

There is a record of public opinion. In 1969, the extreme dissident end was able to regard that the “blundering efforts to do good” may have become too costly to us; however, about 70% of the population in the United States regarded the war as “fundamentally wrong and immoral.” The corporate business community believed that the war had essentially been won by 1969. The *maximal aims* were to turn Indochina into the model for the corporate business community, described as the model of Indonesia after the 1965 coup d’état by General Suharto. Suharto killed about a million people, mostly poor peasants, wiped out the only popular based political party in the Indonesia, and went on to institute a regime of torture, oppression and violence. It was one of the CIA’s worst mass murders of the 20th century, even comparing it to Hitler and Stalin.

In Vietnam, the US had no real interest in sustaining control or colonizing Vietnam. The war aim in Vietnam, was to destroy the country and for good rational. It’s what’s called a “virus” or ‘contagion’ that might infect others, so, we must destroy the virus and inoculate the region. And that was what happened, the virus [national independence] was destroyed, never going to be a model to anybody and the potential victims were inoculated like in Indonesia with overwhelming mass slaughter and the same in surrounding countries: Marcos in Philippines etc.

By 1968, it was clear that Vietnam would be fortunate to survive. The virus was demolished, the region had been inoculated so the world was safe. McGeorge Bundy said after 1965, that the staggering mass slaughter in Indonesia had become “excessive.” In other words, it was costing the United States too much in blood and public relations. So, henceforth, it was a bad tactical decision to keep going after basic war aims after the war had been won. Now, the business community could turn against the war with the extreme dissident left of intellectual pundits. Now we are permitted to call the war “a mistake” that began with “blundering efforts to do good.”

Looking back on this gruesome U.S. victory, it becomes more apparent that U.S. policymakers “went to war in Vietnam for a ‘very good’ reason. They were afraid [not of Communism as they propagandized for public saturation] Vietnam would be a successful model of

¹¹⁹ Schlesinger, Arthur M. Jr., *The Bitter Heritage* (Boston: Little Brown, 1974) p. 164

independent development and that would have a ‘virus effect’ – infect others who might try to follow the same course seeking independence from the U.S. sphere. There was a very simple war aim-destroy Vietnam. And they did it. The United States basically achieved its war aims in Vietnam by [1967]. William Blum, an investigative journalist summarized the effect of the Vietnam war: “Most people believe that the US lost the war. But by destroying Vietnam to its core, by poisoning the earth, the water and the gene pool for generations, Washington had in fact achieved its primary purpose: preventing what might have been the rise of a good development option for Asia.”¹²⁰ So, it’s called a loss, a defeat, because they didn’t achieve the *maximal aims*, the maximal aims being turning it into something like the Philippines. They didn’t do that. [But] they did achieve the *major aims*.” They did so by turning Vietnam into a model of the kind of destruction one can expect for defying the corporate business of Washington. [*Italics and underlining mine*]¹²¹ So, we have two aims (1) the maximal aim [failed] of corporate business in southeast Asia and (2) the major aim [succeeded] a complete destruction of Vietnam with no ‘bright light to the region for economic or national independence.’

¹²⁰ Blum, William, *Rogue State*, (Common Courage Press, 2000) pp.87 - 88

¹²¹ Chomsky, Noam, *Vietnam Remembered-Part 1*, 2009

20. “Vietnamizing” Vietnam

There are signs that the vast demonstrations of October and November of 1969 limited Nixon’s ability to escalate the war. The domestic population was not having any of it without recourse. It was clear by the scale of opposition that the population was no longer going to be a passive on-looker. So, why 1969? How significant was 1969. Well, that was about a 1 ½ years after the Tet Offensive, and after the United States corporate business community turned against it, in part, because it was too costly in loss of American lives and money, and in part because the United States had essentially won the war with its major war aim and was unwarranted to continue. South Vietnam had been pulverized in mass bombings since 1962. Any example of an independent nation state gaining economic and political reform outside of the grasp of corporate America was destroyed.

With the Nixon administration in 1969, the U.S. war effort continued in massive overload; however, the decision to de-escalate had by now been reached. It marked the beginning of Richard Nixon’s Vietnamization of the war. This was Melvin Laird’s response to “de-Americanized” the war. It was adopted on a January 28, 1969 meeting of the National Security Council. The expression “de-Americanized” was replaced with “Vietnamizing” to place the correct emphasis on the outcome. This was Nixonian policy to end U.S. involvement in the War. It was a program to “expand, equip, and train South Vietnamese forces” by transferring all military responsibilities to the Republic of South Vietnam.

It was early 1969 in a memorandum written by National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger to President Nixon that assessed the situation in Vietnam. In 17 pages Kissinger outlined a new strategy for an old and tiring war; Kissinger recommended replacing diplomacy, politics, and negotiation for the failing strategy of pacification and military victory. This line would become the foundation for Nixonian policy in Vietnam. Even here, with this new tactic Kissinger confirmed an ominous fact; “I believe that this consensus can be summed up as indication that a U.S. military victory is certainly not attainable within a year or two and may not be attainable at any time in the future.” Kissinger realized by late 1965 that the United States, “Must realize that only possible outcome is limited one ... in which VC [Viet Cong, the Communist guerrillas] have some kind of role.” Such a compromise was the only

respectable option available. Outright victory in South Vietnam was unattainable because “we know nothing about nation-building.”¹²²

Kissinger had come to realize by 1966 that the U.S. intervention in defense of South Vietnam was a fated initiative and that only a diplomatic solution would end the conflict. He looked at the Indochina war in terms of what could be accomplished through different means, other than ‘search and destroy; such as negotiation and diplomacy. With this new approach, he was able to refocus American objectives with a prototype to Nixon’s Vietnam policy. This new approach had three objectives.

1. Give the South Vietnamese people the chance to decide their own political future without outside interference.
2. In Paris, seek to negotiate a mutual withdrawal.
3. In South Vietnam, move towards a Vietnamization of the war with a reduction of U.S. casualties.¹²³

¹²² <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/10/henry-kissinger-vietnam-diaries-213236>

¹²³ <https://www.nixonfoundation.org/2015/10/developing-nixons-vietnam-policy/>

21. Mainstream Media's Mania

The claim that the mainstream media opposed and weakened the war effort is one of the many legends or mythologies of the Vietnam conflict. They recognized and sanctioned U.S. support of French colonialism with millions of dollars of capital investment, while only emerging as strategic and tactical detractors of the war only until the Tet Offensive. It was around 1965-68 that things started to change in the media.

The multinational corporate business media never defied the central premises of this war until late in the War believing it to be 'excessive.' President Nixon's declaration before Congress that he would not leave, or abandon Vietnam prompted William F. Buckley, a conservative political commentator, to declare, "By God, I was proud of Richard Nixon."¹²⁴ Well, the United States did leave and left 58,220 U.S. military fatal casualties in combat and millions of Vietnamese dead, including countless thousands of the elderly, women and children orphaned or injured. Inarguable this U.S. wartime policy emboldened the displacement, death and destruction of hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians in the war zone. This appalling and troubling war left the concept of 'American exceptionalism' in shreds as the conflict came to be seen by the citizenry as needless, pointless and immoral. It was the nascent of undermining the fundamental American belief that the 'United States with God' is the greatest power for good in the world. The total number of Vietnamese people killed in this conflict will never be known but was probably not fewer than three million, and the total number of casualties not fewer than 8 million.

Failed stories about why the U.S. lost the war included criticisms of the media; however, John Pilger describes two significant stories about the media:

"The first is that the Americans lost the war because the media coverage in the United States, notably on television, undermined the military and political effort. The second is that most journalists and broadcasters opposed the war. Neither is true. Indeed, the truth may well be the opposite ... that on the whole the American media, while questioning the way in which the war was being fought, supported what Stanley Karnow, formerly of the *New York Times*, has since called a failed crusade. In his classic study of war correspondents, Phillip Knightley described the reporting

¹²⁴ Scanlon, Sandra. "The Conservative Lobby and Nixon's 'Peace with Honor' in Vietnam." *Journal of American Studies*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2009, pp. 255–276. *JSTOR*, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/40464380.

from Vietnam during the *early* 1960s as... not questioning the American intervention itself, but only its effectiveness. Most correspondents, despite what Washington thought about them, were just as interested in seeing the United States win the war as was the Pentagon. What the correspondents questioned was not American policy, but the tactics used to implement that policy.”¹²⁵

An article in the French paper, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, entitled *Show Us the Truth about Vietnam*, April 2000, underscored that the war was the most covered topic in the U.S. than any other issue. Nonetheless the coverage was very biased. For instance, just 3% of coverage was from Hanoi’s viewpoint. In reporting, Pilger noted, the *nature* of war was atrocious; this was the story of the war, but it was rarely evaluated to be news and therefore seldom told, except in fragments. Perhaps because it would have been so difficult for a nation to come to terms with what their leaders may have been doing, contrary to what they were saying. Atrocities were reported as mistakes which were blundered into. Behind this more palpable version terrible events could continue as part of a carefully thought out and effectively implemented strategy, contrary to the popular misconception of stumbling generals, pundits and political policy-makers.

The Vietnam War only became a subject of significant news coverage in the United States after a significant number of U.S. troops had been dedicated to the war by the spring of 1965. Previously, the number of U.S. newsmen in Indochina had been relatively small, perhaps two score. With the mid-60s newspaper reporting placed in a major role, for the first-time television was also employed to bring the terror of war into the living room. By 1968, there were about 600 credited journalists from all nationalities in Vietnam, reporting for U.S. wire services, radio and television, and major newspapers and magazines. That immediacy to the battlefield brought clear risks; more than 60 journalists were killed during the war. Many reporters, however, spent most of their time in the South Vietnamese capital, Saigon, and got their stories from the Government or the Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office’s daily briefings (known as “the five o’clock follies”). The American public quickly saw this contradiction, and the severe reaction against the war was like that previously unseen in American history.

Most nightly TV news stories were not film records new from Vietnam but rather briefs or reports based on wire service dispatches [AP] and read by anchormen. The role of the media in the

¹²⁵ Pilger, John, *Heroes*, (Jonathan Cape 1986, Vintage 2001), p. 254

Vietnam War is a theme of ongoing debate. Some believe that the media played a large role in the U.S. defeat. They argue that the media's propensity with respect to negative reporting assisted the demoralizing support for the war in the United States while its uncensored reporting offered valuable information to the enemy. However, many experts have concluded that prior to 1968 most reporting was actually supportive of the U.S. effort in Vietnam, and that the change to question the war occurred after the demoralizing Tet offensive.

By 1968 television pundits were making an increasing number of editorial comments, both for and against the War. It was on February 1968, that Walter Cronkite, the anchor of the *CBS Evening News* (known as "the most trusted man in America"), said that the conflict was "mired in stalemate" moved Lyndon B. Johnson to state, "If I've lost Cronkite, I've lost Middle America." What most weakened support for the war was the level of U.S. casualties: with the ratio going on the greater number of casualties, the lower the public support for the war. The American public quickly saw this contradiction, and the severe reaction against the war was like that previously unseen in American history.

Television, now for the first time, was capable and succeeded in bringing the bloody horror of war home to the kitchen, living room and the bedroom, and showed the uncensored character of warfare in a way newspapers, magazines or radio couldn't. For this reason, Michael Arlen called the Vietnam War the "living-room war."¹²⁶ Americans witnessed firsthand not only the decrepit, bombed landscape of Vietnamese huts, jungle, and fields, but also the similarly beaten soldiers; all of this had to affect the nation psychologically, Television coverage focused on negative news more so than print. The three network television stations, ABC, CBS and NBC, were always competing for higher ratings, or the more provocative stories to report Vietnam's negative side: casualties, lost battles, or scandals.

Historian Steve Michael Barkin stated, "At some point the Vietnam War and television news became inseparable, joined in a relationship of suspicion and hostility between the government, the American public, and broadcast journalists."¹²⁷ However, government officials were known to become annoyed and irritated with what networks were airing; newscasts and newflashes often

¹²⁶ Barkin, Steve M., *American Television News: The Media Marketplace and the Public Interest: The ...*

¹²⁷ Pierson, David, *American Television News: The Media Marketplace and the Public Interest*, p. 39

incited public anger, protests and doubt about America's continuing involvement in Vietnam. For example, CBS aired a program twice in July 1970, *The World of Charlie Company*,¹²⁸ detailing how an American military company had destroyed an entire Vietnamese village thought to be launching guerrilla attacks. The documentary showcased the American soldiers as "unsure of their military objective and unimpressed by their own officers," which angered the American command staff. The Company of soldiers are exhausted by the grueling conditions of heat, impenetrable foliage and biting insects and express varied opinions about the war. One soldier, opposing the war, says he hasn't fired his weapon since arriving in South Vietnam, while others talk about killing as routine. One said, "Killing gooks don't mean nothing." The medic, a pacifist, says, "Killing for peace just don't make sense." It showed GI's close to mutiny, balking at orders that seemed to them unreasonable. This was something never seen on television before.¹²⁹ Then we see nightly scenes of suffering, massacre, bloodbath and death caused and sustained by Americans: and the unforgettable almost-naked little girl running from the fighting, her eyes a mirror of appalling terror and skin burned with napalm.

In September 1968, American public war support plummeted to its lowest, an abysmal 19%, and this was due in large measure to journalism's role in the war. Without question, the state of American public opinion was swayed by the uncensored journalism coming out of Vietnam, and the result was nation- jarring riots, harsh government criticism, and an anti-war movement previously invisible on American soil. We can only wonder what may have happened if journalism had taken control early in the initial stage of the war.

¹²⁸ Barkin, Steve M., *American Television News: The Media Marketplace and the Public Interest: The ...*

¹²⁹ Bliss, Edward, Jr. *Now the News: The Story of Broadcast Journalism*, p. 349

22. The Polarization of Our Society, and Shattering Faith in Government.

America's delusions of invincibility and exceptionalism had been publicly shattered, its moral confidence traumatized. It was a radical diminution of trust. Opposition to United States participation in the Vietnam War began slowly with demonstrations in 1964 against the escalating U.S. involvement. A sweeping social movement informed and facilitated the vigorous and polarizing debates for and against the war during the 1965 North Vietnam bombing campaign. Opposition escalated and strengthened with involvement from the African-American men, civil rights, women's liberation, ethnic movements, along with segments of organized labor. As the protests mounted, police began utilizing vicious tactics against peaceful demonstrators.

The protests, walk-outs and demonstrations didn't begin to develop in earnest until several years after South Vietnam was being exposed to saturation bombing by B-52s, hundreds of thousands of troops there, thousands had been killed. The protests ultimately developed in the U.S. and Europe largely fixated on a peripheral issue – the bombing of North Vietnam which was undoubtedly a war crime, but not the bombing of South Vietnam.

Meanwhile, Johnson had directed a colossal public relations barrage in the end of 1967 to persuade the public that the war was nearing the end and that the United States was winning. In a typical stubborn and unyielding fashion, Johnson went on to promise that "America will persevere. Our patience and our perseverance will match our power. Aggression will never prevail." (State of the Union Addresses By US Presidents) Little did he know at the time whose aggression he was talking about.

At the same time, the Polls revealed that an escalating majority of Americans believed the U.S. involvement in Vietnam to be a mistake. But why; why a mistake now? The military conscription threatened lower class and middle-class registrants especially though not conclusively of color. Other factors included student activism, greater free speech opportunities and the civil and voting rights movements of 1964-1965. The more ruckus public began to accuse the United States

of having imperialistic goals in Vietnam and to condemn the war as “immoral.”¹³⁰ The war left hundreds of thousands of maimed, traumatized orphans. Vietnamese civilian deaths became the focus of tremendous protest when photographic evidence of casualties emerged. Sayings such as: “Hey, hey, LBJ, how many kids did you kill today?” This was ritually followed by “Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh, NLF is gonna win! I'm happy to set the record straight.” It became the anti-war anthem.¹³¹ Many Asian Americans were understandably opposed to the Vietnam War. They saw the war as being U.S. imperialism and “connected the oppression of the Asians in the United States to the prosecution of the war in VietNam.” Contrasting Caucasian Americans, they viewed the war “not just as imperialist, but specifically as anti-Asian.”¹³²

Another polarizing element of the American opposition was the perception that U.S involvement in Vietnam was not only legally unjustifiable but was unconstitutional. Communism’s



threat was a simply a scapegoat to conceal U.S. imperialistic and corporate business aims; others argued that the America’s intervention in South Vietnam meddled with the Vietnam’s “right of self-determination.” America had no right to intervene in a country’s revolutionary war.

Television, carried the chilling images of a wartime blood-letting into the living room; battlefield footage of the dead and dying to the kitchen, and uncensored explicit footage of casualties on the nightly news removed any myth of the glory of war. Finally, the media had to censor the more inhumane images of the fighting, blood spills and the death of millions of innocent civilian people of all ages.

There was yet another, profound cost to the United States: the polarization of our society, and the shattering of common faith in government. Those who opposed the war believed it nor more than a meat grinder for draftees, unfairly affecting the poor, the uneducated, and numerous minorities. On the other hand, those who had served in the military as veterans of past wars, along

¹³⁰ Schuman, Howard. 2000. ‘Two Sources of Antiwar Sentiment in America,’ in Hixson, Walter L. (ed) *The United States and the Vietnam War: Significant Scholarly Articles*. New York: Garland Publishing, pp. 127–150

¹³¹ New York Time Opinion, ‘Hey, Hey, LBJ...’ LETTERS TO THE EDITOR, January 5, 1995.

¹³² Daryl J. Maeda. *Chains of Babylon: The Rise of Asian America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009) p. 99, 126.

with the conservative right and its pundits in the media being misled believed they had been betrayed at home. Michael Parenti, noted historian said, “Steeped in the belief that any war fought by the United States must ipso facto be a noble undertaking irrespective of the human costs, the superpatriots could only conclude that the antiwar protestors were little better than traitors who gave aid and comfort to the enemy.”¹³³ Predictably, little time was wasted for the reverential patriotic cry “America: love it or leave it” to begin appearing on placards, clothing, signs and bumper stickers, finding its way into the proclamations of hawkish politicians. Those who opposed the war were portrayed as apologists for North Vietnam.

One hawkish individual of the state was Henry Kissinger, the architect of foreign policy under the Nixon Administration. Writing in *Newsweek* on the legacy of Vietnam, Kissinger portrayed the decriers of his Nixonian war policy as radical extremists who “challenged the very essence of American foreign involvement.”¹³⁴ Their legacy, he suggested, was somehow ‘unpatriotic.’ These attitudes that did such damage then, persist today. These wounds have not yet healed. Interestingly, it was on October 15, 1969 (at the height of the Vietnam War) in a speech at Columbia University, Mayor John Lindsay of New York City stated, “We cannot rest content with the charge from Washington that this peaceful protest is unpatriotic...The fact is that this dissent is the highest form of patriotism.”¹³⁵ Howard Zinn, author of “Declarations of Independence: Cross-Examining American Ideology” published in 1991 said, “If patriotism were defined, not as blind obedience to government, nor as submissive worship to flags and anthems, but rather... as loyalty to the principles of justice and democracy, then patriotism would require us to disobey our government, when it violated those principles.”¹³⁶

Perhaps the worst occasion for protestors took place at Kent State University in May 1970, when National Guardsmen shot four students dead. On May 4, 1970, the National Guard were guilty of killing four and injuring nine others. The horrendous massacre is regarded as a ‘historic moment of public unrest’ during the War. The Kent State students, were shocked and infuriated. Some screaming, “My God! My God! They're killing us...I thought the soldiers had gone insane or it was

¹³³ Parenti, Michael, *Superpatriotism*, “America Love It or Leave It,” p. 12

¹³⁴ Lewis, Anthony, *Abroad at Home; Ghost*, *New York Times*, May 6, 2000.

¹³⁵ Reported by Bernard Weinraub, “Bells Toll and Crosses Are Planted Around U.S. as Students Say 'Enough!'” to War: Campuses Remember Slain G.I.'s,” *New York Times*, October 16, 1969, 19.

¹³⁶ Zinn, Howard, *The Zinn Reader: Writings on Disobedience and Democracy*, p. 408

some kind of accident.” None of the students were closer than “75 feet to the troops who had killed them,” and there was no suggestion that they had been singled out as targets. It appeared that all the dead students were undoubtedly innocent bystanders. Some guardsmen demonstrated little regret over the killings. “It’s about time we showed the bastards who’s in charge,” said one. James Minard, a 22-year-old drama student, said that he saw an officer give the command to fire. “This lieutenant had his arm raised and carried a baton, [w]hen the baton came down, they fired. I was apparently the only one who saw it; nobody believed me.” A well-connected guard source flatly told *Newsweek’s* James Jones and Jon Lowell: “There had to be some kind of preliminary order.” Beyond that there was little left but to bury the dead. In New York City, nearly 5,000 mourners attended services spoken by Dr. Benjamin Spock, who acknowledged that the Kent State killings “may do more to end the war in Vietnam than all the rest of us have been able to do,”¹³⁷ or as Noam Chomsky said in 2000, “that their sacrifices and their struggle made an enormous difference.”¹³⁸

Christian Appy, American military scholar and historian, argued that the conclusions derived by the *Pentagon Papers* and other documents provide sufficient evidence to contradict the above media’s mainstay interpretation of the “blundering effort [or] disastrous mistake” on the part of the United States in its humanitarian efforts in Vietnam. Appy commented, “The United States did not inadvertently slip into the morass of war; it produced the war quite deliberately.”¹³⁹ Noam Chomsky, Professor of Linguistics at MIT, author, philosopher and American dissident noted, “By 1969 about 70% of the public had come to regard the war as “fundamentally wrong and immoral,” not “a mistake,” largely...the impact of student protest on general consciousness. And that mass opposition compelled the business community and then the government to stop the escalation of the war.”¹⁴⁰ Or when we read that U.S. involvement began from an “excess of righteousness and disinterested benevolence” to describe Kennedy’s invasion of South Vietnam, later expanded to all of Indochina, at the dissident extreme, well after the Tet offensive convinced U.S. business leaders that the enterprise should be liquidated. John King Fairbank, Asian specialist from Harvard, in speaking of what he calls our “defense” of South Vietnam said it was ‘misconceived’ and not

¹³⁷ <http://www.newsweek.com/my-god-theyre-killing-us-our-1970-coverage-kent-state-328108>

¹³⁸ Chomsky, Noam, On the Kent/Jackson State Killings, Delivered at Kent State, May 4, 2000

¹³⁹ Appy, Christian, *Working Class War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1993) p. 253.

¹⁴⁰ Chomsky, Noam, Statement on Week of Campus Resistance, March 2005

properly developed or as Stanley Karnow, a PBS analyst said, a “failed crusade,” “noble,” but “illusory” and undertaken with the “loftiest intentions.”¹⁴¹ This in turn leads many to believe at face value the United States government is at least, or minimally, worthy honor and respect. Yes, it will make mistakes from time to time, but it does not commit humanitarian or war crimes. The United States may be foolish; however, never wicked or acting with evil intent, and significantly, it does not act in self-interest, as other states do. However, “[F]or most analysts, the ending of the Vietnam war was disgraceful, not just because the US lost, but because the US broke faith. When the peace agreements were signed, in Paris in January 1973, the US made promises to the South and threats against North Vietnam. Both...were disregarded. This inability to uphold promises and follow agreements has probably hurt the US most. Since 1975, the US has been seen as having a *reputation* for bad faith. Further, the loss in Vietnam caused Americans to lose faith in the competence and integrity of their government and their institutions in general. Consequently, the U.S. is now trusted less by its citizens and friends alike and feared less by its enemies,¹⁴² and the Vietnam War was reduced to an American psychodrama.

¹⁴¹ Chattarji, Subarno, *Memories of a Lost War: American Poetic Responses to the Vietnam War*

¹⁴² M. S. S. “Vietnam War and US: Haunting Legacy.” *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 36, no. 21, 2001, pp. 1793–1795. *JSTOR*, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/4410657.

23. War Crimes, Including Torture

Here is an official definition of torture. According to the UN Convention Against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment, which was adopted in 1984, torture can be defined as:

‘Any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as (1) obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, (2) punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or (3) intimidating him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity’ (CAT, 1984: Art. 1).

So, let’s take a look. It should be easy to see that the use of torture to protect human rights from terrorism leads to the absurdity that human rights are violated by those protecting one against terrorism or torture.

It is certainly not lost why the so-called “American War” is better described by Noam Chomsky as the “Crucifixion of Southeast Asia” (COSA). Gabriel Kolko, author of *War Crimes and The Nature of the Vietnam War* commented, that the Vietnam War was waged “against the entire Vietnamese population,” designed to terrorize them into submission. The United States “made South Vietnam a sea of fire as a matter of policy, turning an entire nation into a target. This is not accidental but intentional and intrinsic to the U.S.’s strategic and political premises.” In such an attack “against an entire people...barbarism can be the only consequence of [U.S.] tactics,” conceived and organized by “the true architects of terror,” the “respected men of manners and conventional views who calculate and act behind desks and computers rather than in villages in the field.”¹⁴³ John Marciano said, “U.S. war crimes in Vietnam were legion; the evidence is overwhelming. The most death-producing and devastating war crime “was the widespread U.S. bombing and use of artillery against villages throughout Indochina.” These bombings were

¹⁴³ Kolko, Gabriel, “War Crimes and The Nature of the Vietnam War,” in Richard Falk, Gabriel Kolko, and Robert Jay Lifton, eds., *Crimes of War* (New York: Vintage, 1971), 412–13; Kolko, “On the Avoidance of Reality,” *Crimes of War*, 15.

calculated and planned, part of the deliberate mass murder of civilians...” Anthony Russo worked during the War with the Rand Corporation reporting “on the systematic torture of NLF by the CIA... [and] blew the whistle on American torture policy in Vietnam.” They “were tortured ‘as a matter of course’ ...waterboarding, electric shock to the genitals, and solitary confinement.”¹⁴⁴

To assert that torture is a violation of American principles and values is simply disingenuous. It is as ‘American as apple pie,’ and commonly practiced though condemned by the Geneva Convention of 1954. For the rest of the world, what should be of essential significance is how these war crimes are rendered, explained and decoded by the aggressor state. For the intelligentsia in the United States, it’s rather easy to decide with the extensive declassified record.

For example, in 2001, revelations about Democratic senator Bob Kerrey's war record appeared where “Kerrey admitted that a combat mission which he led during the Vietnam war was responsible for shooting dead more than 20 unarmed civilians, mostly women and children. After the killings, the squad's commander reported that the unit had killed 21 Viet Cong, and Kerrey was awarded a Bronze Star. This incident occurred on February 25, 1969 in Thanh Phong village in the Mekong Delta...”

“The disgusting details of this incident came to light as a result of a joint investigation by The New York Times magazine and CBS News and Gerhard Klann, one of the seven members of that combat unit. Speculation arose that Kerrey's decision not to compete with Al Gore for the Democratic presidential nomination in the 2000 presidential race came only weeks after Newsweek magazine had interviewed him and presented documents relating to the Vietnam mission, although Newsweek never published the story. Gerhard Klann describe the event “as-a crime and accused his former squad leader Kerrey of intentionally targeting civilians...”

Kerrey responded: “To describe it as a war crime, I think, is wrong. We merely returned fire and found only afterward that we had killed unarmed civilians. However, he was evasive as to why he and others did not reveal the facts at the time. He also denied that he ever ordered a round-up and slaughter of unarmed civilians. However, available documents indicate that the standing order for raids such as that carried out on Thanh Phong was to take no prisoners and to kill any

¹⁴⁴ Marciano, John, *The American War in Vietnam: Crime Or Commemoration?* pp.127-128.

Vietnamese who crossed paths with the US forces...The American war in Vietnam, as a counter-revolutionary effort, necessarily involved the slaughter of civilians on an indiscriminate scale...[A] few fundamental questions arise: why did unarmed people, as they normally would do, not hit the ground or seek shelter? Why did they all die? Why did none survive wounded? Obviously, a detailed and independent investigation can hope to get to the truth... After 32 years, Bob Kerrey faces accusations of leading a massacre of innocent Vietnamese villagers and the accuracy of such reports mainly relying on memory...A few senators argued that no state investigation should be conducted as any probe would be complex and would have to place the incident in a very broad context, preferring to 'let sleeping dogs'...

“While Kerrey and others may be guilty of war crimes, there are others who should face investigations and trial before him and that list should include some of the surviving top U.S. political and military officials responsible for the genocidal policies in Vietnam, from Henry Kissinger, William Westmoreland, to former CIA director Richard Helms, and the numerous administrators and diplomats who played essential roles in the war...Were the Kerrey and such other revelations new in the U.S.? Probably not. Since the end of the Vietnam war, several such instances of massacres or killings on various scales were reported, and in most cases, with the exception of Mai Lai events, no decisive action was taken by the US government.

“Of all the anti-war documentaries [“Winter Soldier”] had the most impact on public opinion. The screening of this documentary was boycotted by the mainstream U.S. media.” Those participating in the film “recounted the horrors that they committed once they had been turned into killing machines: rape, torture, villages burned, summary executions, shooting of children, prisoners thrown out of helicopters, mutilating bodies, etc. They also acknowledge that there will never be an international crimes tribunal to look into atrocities committed during the Vietnam war...They explained how their moral conscience stifled and how they were encouraged to release their instincts of aggression....

The passage of three decades (1975-2001) dulls and distorts perceptions. Bob Kerrey, in one agonizing moment, has merely revealed what the U.S. has been hearing year after year. Although more details are coming out on the Kerrey episode, it is unlikely that little more than

polite debate on assigning responsibility for the misdeeds and missed opportunities of the Vietnam war will result...”¹⁴⁵

By 1965, the Mekong Delta, with its green lush paddies and canal-side hamlets, was the rice bowl of South Vietnam and home to about 6 million Vietnamese. The investigation paints a disturbing picture of civilian slaughter on a scale that indeed dwarfs My Lai, and of a cover-up at the Army’s highest levels. The killings were no accident or aberration. They were instead the result of command policies that turned wide swaths of the Mekong Delta into “free-fire zones” in a relentless effort to achieve a high body count. While the carnage in the Delta did not begin or end with Speedy Express, the operation provides a harsh new snapshot of the abject slaughter that typified US actions during the Vietnam War.



The My Lai massacre is repeatedly held to have been an anomaly or aberration, but the evidence uncovered has revealed that war crimes were committed by the US military on a far larger stage. Far more macabre operations, like Speedy Express, could be recalled, however through cover-ups and white washes at the highest military levels, few are. Speedy Express was a provocative military venture directed in the Mekong Delta. It was part of a U.S. military “pacification” effort against the VC or National Liberation Front of South Vietnam under Gen Julian Ewell, who became known as the ‘Butcher of the Delta.’ Speedy Express is referred to as “an operation that would eventually yield an enemy body count of 11,000,” but seized only seven hundred weapons.¹⁴⁶The secret investigation into Speedy Express remained classified for decades. The phrase “kill anything that moves” became an order on the lips of some American commanders whose troops carried out massacres across their area of operations. While the U.S. lost more than 58,000 dead in the war, an estimated three to five million Vietnamese slaughtered, another 5 million wounded and over 10 million became persons in exile in their own country.

¹⁴⁵ M. S. S. “Vietnam War and US: Haunting Legacy.” *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 36, no. 21, 2001, pp. 1793–1795. *JSTOR*, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/4410657.

¹⁴⁶ BBC, Was My Lai just one of many massacres in Vietnam War? August 28, 2013,

“The most death-producing and devastating war crime ‘was the widespread U.S. bombing and use of artillery against villages throughout Indochina...[D]eliberate mass murder of civilians...The American war was waged against the entire Vietnamese population, calculated to intimidate and designed to terrorize the population into submission.” The United States “made South Vietnam a virus or disease as a matter of policy, transforming a nation into a target. This is not accidental but intentional and intrinsic to the U.S.’s strategic and political premises.” “Policies that could be considered as war crimes include the Phoenix Program... aerial and naval bombardment of undefended villages... destruction of crops and villages... search and destroy missions... forcible removal of civilian populations, and...reliance on a variety of weapons prohibited by treaty....Regarding My Lai, the war, and the United States, historian Kendrick Oliver concludes, "This is not a society which really wanted to know about the violence of the war that its armed forces were waging in Vietnam... Among those who responded to the conviction in 1971 of “Rusty Calley for the murder of Vietnamese is that hamlet, is former President Jimmy Carter... [Carter] called for "American Fighting Man's Day" in Georgia... asking people to drive with their headlights on to “honor ...Rusty [Calley.]” He later denied it. ¹⁴⁷ The U.S. abuse of Vietnamese civilians and prisoners of war was strictly prohibited by the Geneva Convention, which the United States signed. U.S. officials and media pundits continue to assert that torture is a violation of “our values.” This is not true. Torture is as American as apple pie, widely practiced in wars and prisons.

¹⁴⁷ Marciano, John, *The American War in Vietnam: Crime or Commemoration?* p. 127, 128, 144, 145

24. Ecocide a War Crime and Reparation?

The year 2018 marked the 47th anniversary of the end of the operation of the herbicide Agent Orange in the Vietnam. Despite the expansion of a wide range of herbicides in the early 1940s, the United States and its allies abstained from using biological or chemical warfare during World War II, perhaps because of revulsion against the use of gas warfare during the World War I [perhaps, because of the color of one's brown skin]. [*Brackets mine*]

It was really a fear that the Soviets could instigate conflict and revolution around the world without the United States' nuclear arsenal posing any realistic threat, President. Kennedy foreign policy emphasized "Flexible Response," to his foreign policy. This was the development of diverse military technologies to combat insurgency around the world. With an insurgency mounting in Vietnam, Agent Orange appeared to the U.S. government as a textbook solution.

The U.S. military sprayed Vietnam with Agent Orange, to defoliate the trees for military purposes. This decision turned the war into an illicit, immoral, and humiliating challenge for the United States and an ecological devastation for Vietnam. Arthur Westing hypothesized that it would take centuries to undo the ecological injury that Agent Orange exacted on Vietnam, because its 'ecological and social ramifications are inevitably widespread, long-lasting, and severe.'

From 1964 to August 15, 1973, the United States Air Force dropped in Indochina, "a total of 6,162,000 tons of bombs and other ordnance... This tonnage far exceeded that expended in World War II and in the Korean War combined."¹⁴⁸ Three times as much by weight as both the European and Pacific amphitheatres of WWII bombing combined and about 13 times the total tonnage in the Korean War. From 1961 until 1971, the US military dropped more than 19 million gallons of toxic chemicals on over 4.5 million South Vietnamese in Operation Ranch Hand. The chemicals were identified by the colors painted on their 55-gallon-drum shipping containers. The most infamous known was Agent Orange. We must remember, the Vietnamese enemy never set foot on or attacked American soil.

¹⁴⁸ Clodfelter, Michael (1995), *Vietnam in Military Statistics: A History of the Indochina Wars, 1772-1991*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Agent Orange had finally become “the centerpiece weapon in a strategy of counterinsurgency to expose and starve out NLF [National Liberation Front] guerillas operating throughout rural South Vietnam.” The military decided in 1961 to use this new technology as part of a comprehensive strategy to remove the forest cover along the Cambodian and Laotian border, to defoliate a portion of the Mekong Delta, to destroy man grove swamps. It was an estimated spray of 12 million gallons of toxic chemical agents over more than 6 million acres in Vietnam. Agent Orange is one of the most hazardous chemicals known to man. It has been recognized by the World Health Organization as a carcinogenic and by the American Academy of Medicine as a teratogen or causing birth defects decades later. An estimated 2.5 to 4.8 million people were exposed to Agent Orange while roughly 12% of the land area of Vietnam was sprayed.”



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However, with early years of the Vietnam War, there was worry at the highest levels of the administration that actions by the United States could be subject to international criticism. To



counter that possibility the United States recruited South Vietnamese leaders to publicly say that these toxic chemicals did not pose a risk to the health of humans or animals, despite the lack of such evidence. Additional, the Kennedy administration rationalized that these chemicals were only antiplant weapons, not antipersonnel weapons. While it was the

Kennedy administration that initiated the use of Agent Orange and other dangerous herbicides in Vietnam, the Johnson administration escalated this facet of the war. The total volume of herbicides increased from about 1 million liters in 1964 to over 20 million two years later, eventually spraying 5 million acres, or 12 percent of South Vietnam. “Operation Ranch Hand,” as this program was called, “marked the beginning of large-scale chemical warfare—unseen in major battles” since WWI. ¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ Cohn, Marjorie, Global Research, Agent Orange Continues to Poison Vietnam, June 14, 2009 Crimes against Humanity

¹⁵⁰ Markowitz, Gerald. “Environmental History.” *Environmental History*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2012, pp. 431–433., www.jstor.org/stable/23212593.

“There are provisions of humanitarian law that aim to define and address the crime of ecocide emerged in response to the massive herbicidal campaign carried out by the U.S. [o]n Vietnam. Debates on the crime of ecocide were not only influenced by an ecological view of nature and humanity as interdependent, but also by a new formulation that positioned nature as a kind of Pandora's Box, filled with creative and destructive forces that humanity has the power to unleash, yet not control. Finally, with the rise of international justice institutions, the expansion of the environmental movement as well as the human rights movement, nature has also been framed as a victim, or potential victim, of war crimes. In this formulation, humaneness and human agency are defined in relation to the criminal justice binary of guilt and innocence.”¹⁵¹

The modern rationale for Ecocidal warfare: the U.S. in Vietnam. “There have been three choices open to the peasantry. One, to stay where they are; two, to move into the areas controlled by [the U.S., or] three, to move off into the interior towards the Vietcong. The application of our air power since February (1965) has made the first choice impossible from now on. It is not possible to stay in the line of fire and live... Our operations have been designed to make the first choice impossible, the second attractive, and to reduce the likelihood of anyone choosing the third to zero.”

The horrendous and illegal chemical warfare against the Vietnamese was commented on by biologist Arthur Galston, “as a result of the Nuremburg Trials, we justly condemned the willful destruction of an entire people...calling this a crime against humanity genocide... ought similarly to be considered as a crime against humanity, to be designated by the term ecocide.”¹⁵² Arthur Westing, the leading U.S. authority on ecological damage during the war, addresses these effects at the Agent Orange symposium in 2002 saying, “Damage to the human environment in time of war is thus as old as warfare.” Westing went on to state that the “massive and sustained expenditure of herbicide chemical warfare agents against the fields of South Vietnam...resulted in a largescale devastation of crops, to widespread and immediate damage to the island and coastal forest ecosystems, and in a variety of health problems among exposed humans.”¹⁵³ Addressing the effects of chemicals at an Agent Orange symposium in 2002, Westing said that the “Second Indochina War

¹⁵¹ Leebaw, Bronwyn. “Scorched Earth: Environmental War Crimes and International Justice.” *Perspectives on Politics*, vol. 12, no. 4, 2014, pp. 770–788. *JSTOR*, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/43280032.

¹⁵² Knoll, Erwin and Judith Nies McFadden, *War Crimes and the American Conscience* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), p. 71.

¹⁵³ Marciano, John, *The American War in Vietnam: Crime or Commemoration?* p. 147

of 1961–1975 (the ‘Vietnam Conflict,’ the ‘American War’) stands out today as the [model] of war-related environmental abuse.”¹⁵⁴ Historian Edwin Martini said, “[Officials] showed a wanton disregard for human life...Regarding the use of Agent Orange, "in the final analysis, the language of chemical warfare and war crimes is a matter of international law.”¹⁵⁵

Time has long sense expired; both the American government and the industry should own up to and admit responsibility for the harm of Agent Orange. The scientists have since been able to enter Vietnam and document the “massive and potentially irreversible damage the spraying program had caused” and to convince politicians and the public that such activities constituted a “war crime unjustifiable under any circumstances.”¹⁵⁶ The significance of the scientists’ actions has wider implications for our understanding of the relationship between the counterinsurgency tactics of the Vietnam War and the dissent it created.

¹⁵⁴ Arthur Westing, “Return to Vietnam: The Legacy of Agent Orange,” lecture at Yale University, April 26, 2002; Westing, *Ecological Consequences of the Second Indochina War* (Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 1974) p. 22.

¹⁵⁵ Marciano, John, *The American War in Vietnam: Crime or Commemoration?* p. 89, 90

¹⁵⁶ Markowitz, Gerald. “Environmental History.” *Environmental History*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2012, pp. 431–433., www.jstor.org/stable/23212593.

25. Paris Peace Accords 1973

Signed on January 27, 1973, the Paris Peace Accord, was an agreement between North Vietnam's Le Duc Tho, U.S. National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger and South Vietnam President Nguyen Van Thieu in 1973. The clandestine negotiations took place over the course of five years in Paris, from 1968 with the end of the Johnson administration to the Nixon administration, to only collapsed on April 1975 with Saigon being seized by the North. Within 60 days after the signing of the accord, all forces of the United States and of U.S. allies were to leave Vietnam. No new military advisers, or personnel were permitted to enter as well as technical military personnel, armaments, and munitions; however, it was to include free and democratic elections under international supervision. This formed a ceasefire and permitted an exchange of prisoners of war. The U.S. removed its ground forces from the Southeast Asian region under tremendous pressure from



the American public. However, the subtraction of American troops undermined the calm and swayed the balance in favor of the Northern forces. The treaty allowed for two legitimate yet competing governments to co-exist: The Republic of Vietnam and the People's Revolutionary Government; nevertheless, President Nixon continued "recognize the government of the Republic of Vietnam as the sole legitimate government of South Vietnam."¹⁵⁷ Though the treaty looked at the war's end, President Nixon had secretly promised Thieu of The Republic of Vietnam that the U.S. would "react very strongly and rapidly" and "with full force" if South Vietnam was threatened.¹⁵⁸ Another lie; it never happened or was intended to happen. The Thieu regime, refused to recognize the Provisional Revolutionary Government (Viet Cong), and would only sign a unconnected agreement apart from all references to it. Each side, essentially, maintained those terms that were in its interest, which meant that the Agreement was meaningless. Revolutionary

¹⁵⁷ Porter, Gareth, *A Peace Denied: The United States, Vietnam, and the Paris Agreements, 1975*, p. 186.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

wars rarely end with diplomacy. ¹⁵⁹ The Democratic Republic of Vietnam, still regards these initiatives as justification for asking for reparations and aid today.

The Agreement provided for a Joint Military Commission but gave the voting process to the commission that could act only by unanimity; all but impossible to attain between Communists and anti-Communists forces, it was purely ceremonial. South Vietnam President Nguyen Van Thieu said, “It is only an agonizing solution, sooner or later the government will crumble, and Nguyen Van Thieu will commit suicide.” ¹⁶⁰ So, Nixon had lied. A little over a year earlier, April of 1971, Nixon had said, “The day the South Vietnamese can take over their own defense is in sight. Our goal is a total American withdrawal from Vietnam. We can, and we will reach that goal through



our program of Vietnamization.” ¹⁶¹ To make ‘Vietnamization’ look effective, Nixon spread out the withdrawal of troops across four years, slowly dropping the number of U.S. soldiers in Vietnam from over 500,000 in January 1969 to less than 50,000 by the end of 1972.

In this manner, Nixon made slow and measured retreat look like solid, steady progress. By 1975, the South Vietnamese Army was failing against a well-disciplined, organized and funded Northern army. Much of the North's ammunition and financial support came from the Soviet Union and China. Nixon had made numerous nationally televised speeches to publicize the partial troop withdrawals, asserting each one demonstrated that ‘Vietnamization’ was working, while leaving enough Americans fighting and dying to obscure the fact that ‘Vietnamization’ had been failing. In an interesting tape discussion with Nixon, Kissinger told him, “So we've got to find some formula that holds the thing together a year or two, [after the ‘72 elections] after which after a year, Mr. President, Vietnam will be a backwater. If we settle it, say, this October, by January ‘74 no one will give a damn.” An interesting observation about politics, war, death and “a backwater” called Vietnam. ¹⁶² Essentially, whatever the Paris Agreement was envisioned to achieve, the 1973 Paris

¹⁵⁹ Kolko, Gabriel, *The 1973 Paris Peace Agreement Reconsidered*, p. 443

¹⁶⁰ Hughes, Ken, *Fatal Politics: The Nixon Tapes, the Vietnam War, and the Casualties of ...Idealism with Integrity*

¹⁶¹ Nixon, Richard, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Richard M. Nixon, 1972*, p. 282

¹⁶² <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/election-role-in-vietnam-pullout/>

Agreement brought only a pause in the War absent the United States. The Agreement did not stop the fighting in South Vietnam as both the South and the North blatantly violated the ceasefire to acquire as much territory as possible.

As part of the arrangement to end war and rebuild Vietnam, the President Nixon offered \$3.25 billion of grant aid over 5 years for the U.S. contribution to postwar Vietnam reconstruction, though Vietnam intended to receive ‘*reparation money not reconstruction money.*’ It was never happened. Vietnam did not disclose all the prisoners of war that was part of the arrangement for the aid. This itself is a sad issue for those Americans who were unaware of the fortune of their loved ones. However, for Vietnam, it was though they had to pay for a war created by U.S. aggression against them as William Blum describes, almost cynically:

“However, Vietnam has been compensating the United States. In 1997 it began to pay off about \$145 million in debts left by the defeated South Vietnamese government for American food and infrastructure aid. Thus, *Hanoi is reimbursing the United States* for part of the cost of the war waged against it...[This] is extortion. The enforcers employed by Washington include the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and Export-Import Bank, the Paris Club and the rest of the international financial mafia.[sic]... At the Vietnamese embassy in Washington ... the First Secretary for Press Affairs, Mr. Le Dzung, told the author in 1997 that this matter, as well as Nixon’s unpaid billions, are rather emotional issues in Vietnam, but the government is powerless to change the way the world works.”¹⁶³

¹⁶³ Blum, William, *Rogue State*, (Common Courage Press, 2000) pp.87-88

26. “Oppose the War but Support the Troops.”

“Oppose the war but support the troops.” The slogan implicitly arouses the memory during the war in Vietnam, but what does the slogan even mean? It can mean anything to everything, or very little to nothing. That’s what makes it so valuable. It’s something everybody can get behind because no one knows what it means other than sounding nice. The slogan, though, creates disconcerting questions. How does one oppose a conflict while glorifying the soldiers who execute



it? If opposing a war is because innocent men, women and children are murdered or killed, how could one ever support the troops who murdering or killing the innocent? Is not there a moral responsibility for each person involved? Should they not bear political responsibility for a war they indirectly bore

through their votes, and actions, and especially critical for an all-volunteer army as opposed to a mercenary or private army. How does one ‘support our troops?’

What does it even mean, except some ‘niceity of language?’ The slogan’s ‘support our troops’ implies a refusal to accept civilian deaths. There is no responsibility taken. No civilians equal no civilian deaths to be held accountable for. A conflict run amok. What lies buried in the slogan is the forgiveness of the same people who declare the slogan. If the troops are wiped clean from any responsibility, so are these civilians who support them. As for the American soldiers maimed or dead, they have not been injured or died for nothing; freedom, liberty and democracy are what the politicians and churches say they died for, though the historical reality will not be evidence for such claim. The story of supporting the troops upholds a long held American identity capitalized and immersed in American conflict, the discriminating memory of a country that envisions itself as a ‘shinning city on a hill,’ or a perpetual hallowed entity fighting for justice.

Placing the military into the dominion of the sacred illogically and absurdly turns it into the ultimate partisan trophy. Believed in by many Americans, it is hoped the military’s hallowed glow will blind us to the tawdriness of political hide and seek, change the discussion and outright lies and deception. Our reverential national mentality toward the military is often on full display by both major parties who have been historically excited to exploit it for their political gain during times of war. The Republicans trot out retired Army General. and the Democrats countered with

retired Marine General regardless of the issues or conflict, and the Independents aren't sure what to do. With the rhetorical language of theology loud and clear, we hear expressions: "the final sacrifice," "nothing can be more revered," "to be so honored," "the most hallowed place" in speaking of war and the military, national consecration and salvation of a godlike military should make us deeply uncomfortable. To call something "hallowed, revered or sacred" is to assert that it's elsewhere or 'outside the theater of politics.' But with the military, conflict, brutality and the human loss that inescapably follows, it can't be placed outside the theater of politics. Nor ought it be. Should we wish to retain the dialogue or debate of some of the most existential questions most indispensable to a democracy, we must and should always question the leaders: What wars should we fight? Why, how long, and at what cost? But over time, the military culture became ever more sacralized and any criticism of American military policy has been reframed as 'un-American,' anti-American,' 'Red,' or even 'traitorous.' Such is imperative to a democracy, yet such is often lost in times of war or conflict. Vietnam was no exception. Christian Appy noted, "...by the 1980s, mainstream culture and politics promoted the idea that the deepest shame connected to the Vietnam War was not the war itself, but America's failure to embrace its veterans."¹⁶⁴

Perhaps, those against the troops are the ones that sanctify their deaths into some glorious calling who send our poor and impoverished to die in a rich corporate war of colonization and imperialism. Flag-waving partisans, those most obstinate about 'supporting the troops' are often the ones who care the least about the welfare of the troops when returning home. Eugene Debs in 1918 while in Canton, Ohio said,

"Wars throughout history have been waged for conquest and plunder. In the Middle Ages when the feudal lords who inhabited the castles...[to] increase their power, their prestige and their wealth they declared war upon one another. But they themselves did not go to war any more than the modern feudal lords, the barons of Wall Street go to war. The feudal barons of the Middle Ages, the economic predecessors of the capitalists of our day, declared all wars. And their miserable serfs fought all the battles. The poor, ignorant serfs had been taught to revere their masters; to believe that when their masters declared war upon one another, it was their patriotic



¹⁶⁴ Appy, p. 241.

duty to fall upon one another and to cut one another's throats for the profit and glory of the lords and barons who held them in contempt. And that is war in a nutshell. The master class has always declared the wars; the subject class has always fought the battles. The master class has had all to gain and nothing to lose, while the subject class has had nothing to gain and all to lose—especially their lives.

They have always taught and trained you to believe it to be your patriotic duty to go to war and to have yourselves slaughtered at their command. But in all the history of the world you, the people, have never had a voice in declaring war, and strange as it certainly appears, no war by any nation in any age has ever been declared by the people.

And here let me emphasize the fact—and it cannot be repeated too often—that the working class who fight all the battles, the working class who make the supreme sacrifices, the working class who freely shed their blood and furnish the corpses, have never yet had a voice in either declaring war or making peace. It is the ruling class that invariably does both. They alone declare war and they alone make peace.”¹⁶⁵

So, maybe what we have is an inter-imperialist war of colonial control in a far-reaching peasant country of the world that poses no danger to us militarily, so why not engage them in a bludgeoning one-sided little war for the ‘corporate masters’ who care not over the deaths of innocent people irrespective of their political or non-political positions.

If you believe that the U.S. military is in the business of protecting the freedoms of U.S. citizens, you are simply wrong. Except for the American Revolutionary War for (1775-1783), the military has never really fought a defensive war, never a defensive war on our country's soil, and much less against an aggressor that intended to take our freedoms from us. To the contrary, our freedoms have only been weakened with each military engagement by our own government taking them away: Patriot Act, mass surveillance, use of the espionage act, first amendment violations, etc.

It a complicated task to defend any of the U.S. military's actions over the last century. Much of the world knows us for the violent aggressor we are. We have a moral obligation not to fight in immoral wars; we must hold people responsible for their own actions. (Perhaps reviewing the Nuremberg trials and Robert Jackson's summary of the ‘poisoned chalice’ would help. Jackson

¹⁶⁵ Magoc, Chris J., *Imperialism and Expansionism in American History: A Social, Political, and ...*, p. 956

said, “[t]o pass these defendants a poisoned chalice is to put it to our lips as well.”¹⁶⁶) Thus, we have the principle of universality: ‘if is wrong for them, it is also wrong for us, and if it is right for us, it is also right for them.’ Such principle is doubly agreed upon and doubly reject by imperial powers. This glorification of the armed forces is to weaponize the interests of the state, the military industrial complex and its corporate cronies, and contribute to the mindless deification and sanctification of killing and dying for the state.

The government’s orthodox and the religious right and left’s sacrosanct appeals to ‘support the troops’ represent a subcontracting or farming-out of its responsibility regarding: housing, healthcare, education for those returning from the killing zone. Many veterans return home to derisory and insufficient medical coverage, prodigious psychological afflictions, and increased risk of no follow up. The ‘free market and corporate’ entity is expected to tackle these matters but has failed. In fact, neither has it the function; rather the function of the ‘free market and corporate’ entity is the bottom line, corporate profit over medical and psychological expenditures. A new combat follows: class warfare, without the consciousness.

But another question arises. Can you separate the troops from the war? Each enlisted soldier must swear: “**I, (state name of enlistee), do solemnly swear** (or affirm) that...**I will obey the orders of the President of the United States** and the orders of the ...”¹⁶⁷ So, what happened with Vietnam? Howard Zinn, author and historian wrote, “All together, about 563,000 GIs had received less than honorable discharges. In the year 1973, one of every five discharges was “less than honorable” indicating something less than dutiful obedience to the military. By 1971, 177 of every 1,000 American soldiers were listed as "absent without leave," some of them three or four times. Deserters doubled from 47,000 in 1967 to 89,000 in 1971.”¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ <https://scholarlycommons.law.case.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1427&context=jil>

¹⁶⁷ <https://history.army.mil/html/faq/oaths.html>

¹⁶⁸ Zinn, Howard, *A People's History of the United States*, pp. 469, 471, 496

27. Lessons Lost in Vietnam

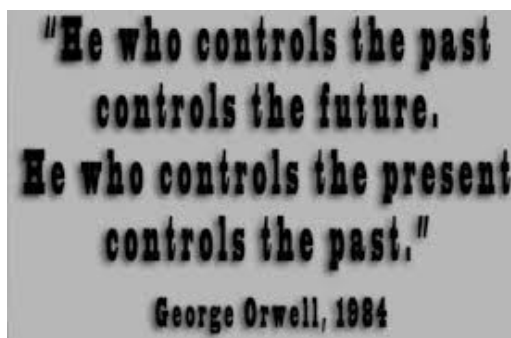
In its totality America failed in its maximal aim in Vietnam, and it is hard to convince the policymakers that there is anything to learn from a losing effort. Now, 42 years since the American war in Vietnam ended in 1975, the fundamental issue is the struggle for the heartland's memory. The irony is apparent, the U.S. went to war with Vietnam to stop the spread of independent nationalism. Millions of lives were lost and orphaned. Now, decades later, it's in the U.S. national interests to support Vietnam's independence, modernize its economic market-place and stay a powerful voice in Asia. Whose ideas about the war will triumph? Such struggle will assist us in deciding how, 'we the people, of the people, and by the people,' will respond to future international conflicts of aggression. If we are to recognize the role of the United States government with its corporate elites as architects designing perpetual wars, we must develop a truthful and comprehensive understanding of the history of the Vietnam conflict; difficult as it may be. Such an analysis will provide the critical means with which to respond to the hyper-patriotism and bigotry of the official Vietnam narrative, where lessons are constructed on the misleading and dishonest accounts of U.S. generosity, benevolence and humanitarianism: a nation ceaselessly faithful in its quest for justice that follows eternally a virtuous path in its wartime comportment.

As citizens, we must question, challenge Presidential edicts for war. The military must establish truthful, accurate and compelling reasons necessary to maintain security of the country, along with a clear mission and an exit strategy lest we experience Vietnam again. "As Noam Chomsky wrote in 1971, more than three years before the formal end of "the Vietnam War": "Perhaps the [real] threat [posed to the American empire by the Vietnamese national and social revolution] has now diminished, with the vast destruction in South Vietnam and the hatreds and social disruption caused by the American war. It may be that Vietnam can be *lost* to the Vietnamese without the dire consequence of social and economic progress that might be meaningful to the Asian poor. That statement seems prophetic today, with Vietnam reintegrated into the world system as a source of cheap labor and raw material." [*Italics mine*]

As American citizens we must ask threatening questions. How much longer will our politicians and military allow the Iraq, Afghanistan, Syrian, Libya and Yemen war to continue with

our direct or indirect support? Do we want to be perpetually at war? Should we and our allies switch to a strategy of asking why terrorism exists, what can be done through appropriate channels as the United Nations Security Council and stop participating in terrorism? Should there be pushback against Congress's seemingly endless wars? Is war so profitable for multinational corporations, banks and politicians that we can't stop the addiction?

Vietnam was a killing zone, but it also was a learning ground. We cannot allow revisionists to conceal its lessons by covering them in white stars and blue stripes with red and glamorizing so-called 'gallant wars of history,' where young come to die in futility with badly mismanaged and needless wars sustained by leaders who are too patriotic to quit or care only for their image. Do we need weapons that if used will destroy life as we know it? What is the point of winning the war and destroying all life except bacterial life forms, roaches and beetles? Have we become in danger of becoming a nation where war is preferred rather than peace? We cannot allow decades of misrepresentation and revision to sanitize an impossibly soiled record of humanity. War deserves study and investigation, not celebration. We only live once, and we are gone forever. For some of us it may only be minutes, hours, days or weeks. For those of us allowed to live decades we must demand better of all leaders, or life becomes a hopeless lottery of suffering and futility. Have we fought wars for democracy, freedom and human rights, or for Exxon Mobile, Enron, the military industrial complex, multi-national corporate institution and banks, foreign resources, settler colonization, oil, political partisanship of who can race to the bottom the fastest with the most callous, cruelest war hat on, making the 'sands of Raqqa glow,' private military contractors such as DynCorps, and the Blackwater/Xe/Academis and Halliburton, economic stagnation, I would say the later. And finally, we own the world, 'we do as we want to whom we want and when we want, for as long as we want; the rest do as they must because of what we say.



It's rare for a country to try to fight an imperial or colonial war with a conscripted (non-volunteers) army who are not trained to be murderers or mercenaries. They are usually fought with mercenaries or private armies. Nonetheless, U.S. intervention was 'fundamentally wrong and immoral' irrespective of who won for several reasons: (1) It was wrong because it violated the

rights of all Americans not to be cannon fodder for corporate bought politicians. (2) It was wrong because it was not our responsibility to pick up the imperial mantle relinquished by the defeated France to keep France as an ally for the Marshall Plan after WWII. (3) Finally, it was wrong and immoral, because the unrestrained carpet-bombing of civilians was no threat to U.S. sovereignty and a violation of International Law. This immoral and unconstitutional war sent 58,282 Americans [not counting the MIA and wounded] to their graves, more than 150,000 wounded, not to mention the emotional levy the war had on American values. along with two to three million Vietnamese deaths and millions more injured and displaced. It accelerated the deterioration of America's hegemony and love for freedom, democracy and liberty. That's a damning accusation, yes, and I believe true.

The Vietnam War was a military and political disaster, but it was also a moral tragedy. It was prejudiced in its ends, for the perpetuation of a dictatorial, authoritative and repressive anti-communist regime in South Vietnam under Diem. The Vietnam War was also unjust in how it was fought, as it violated every condition of the 'just-war philosophy,' or moral behavior in warfare. A different, truthful and new story that must be told: a reign of terror against the people of Vietnam, a disgraceful war that no government rhetoric can conceal and a 'fundamentally wrong and immoral venture.' Lest we forget, between negotiations and actual war there an infinite number of possible solutions to any conflict, and given such, any solution can come without any blood being spilled. Finally, if the answer is 'war' we are asking the wrong question. So, is it true that it is better to be stupid and live, or smart and dead? We may soon find out.

War Ends Saigon Surrenders



Fighting Spanning 35 Years Now Over

SAIGON (UPI) — South Vietnam surrendered Wednesday to the Communists. The collapse came 2½ hours after the United States pulled down the Stars and Stripes and left the country it had spent 14 years trying to keep out of Communist hands.

President Duong Van Minh announced the surrender in a 60-second address to his people at 10:20 p.m. EDT Tuesday.

He told his soldiers to stop fighting and said he was ready to meet Viet Cong leaders "to discuss the turnover of the administration both civilian and military."

War is Hell!

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