

This paper will take both the Vietnam War (remember that it is a part of the larger Cold War), and the foreign policy and wars of the United States since 9/11/2001 (Iraq and Afghanistan) into account. I will compare these two time periods looking at both the military means used and the popular opinion for the wars on the home front in the United States. The paper will be organized chronologically, beginning with the Vietnam War, and then considering the post-9/11 foreign policy, with each section sub-divided into the two areas I'll look at. At the tail end I'll make a final conclusion based on the findings that I discuss in this paper.

Vietnam

The United States had the Second World War in mind at the start of the Vietnam War. Most people believed that the Vietnam War would be a similar war, with a clear front and areas in which fighting of a "westernized sort" would take place. Yet the environment in Vietnam was radically different. One basic example, for instance, was that American soldiers needed guides to get around the area, and friends by day could easily be enemies by night.

As with much of the Cold War, containment was the ultimate goal in Vietnam. America didn't get involved militarily until after President Eisenhower saw that the French were failing. Guerilla warfare, mostly at night, accounted for much of the fighting of the war. The Vietnamese soldiers could slip into the natural woodwork of

their homeland and be untraceable to US soldiers. After such a tactical retreat, US soldiers would simply find them a few days or weeks later back at full strength.

The physical structure of the US military during the Vietnam War was based on the draft (H 841). A few soldiers were volunteers, but by far the majority were draftees. Everyone had at least a theoretical chance of ending up in military service. Some tried to dodge the draft, but many ended up in service at some point. Tours of duty were generally one year in length, and then one could forget about the experience. If a soldier stopped to think while in Vietnam about what they were doing it would make them nuts, but drawing conclusions based on that would have been downright terrifying. Throughout the Vietnam War there were a half million US troops deployed.

How successful were the military means used? Ultimately the US didn't win the Vietnam War, so these means weren't too successful. We didn't win the war because we thought we were fighting a war like WW2, and we tried to use methods and strategies that were built for that kind of war. Yet Vietnam is physically quite different from Europe, and the political and religious landscape is vastly different as well. One of the problems was that our cultures are so very different, and the Vietnamese exploited the differences to such an extent that they had an insurmountable advantage over us.

The battlefields in Vietnam were not the only place the war was taking place. Due to the draft many people from all over the US had loved ones in the war. The US home front was hopping with opinion and policy related to the war. The government's responses shifted over the course of the war and there was never one

solid, stable and coherent argument for the war. This lack of overall commitment to and vision for the war likely resulted from the war being a problem passed down from one president to the next. President Lyndon Baines Johnson was considered a control freak when it came to Vietnam (often seeking to micro manage it), but President Kennedy distanced himself more from the war. There was popular support for the troops, but not for the overall goals of the war.

The one question that was on everyone's mind given the success of the Second World War was how could we possibly lose the Vietnam War? The loss called into question exactly what winning means. There are a few reasons of why we think we lost the war: a simplistic view of communism and democracy; using technology in area where it matters little; home front support waned; cultural differences; didn't know the land; negative media; lack of presidential support; difficult to tell who the enemy was; attitudes and sanity; craziness of events going on in the US; mine explosions; troops knowing that in a year they could forget the experience; effort to win war politically versus militarily; and many others.

We know the stereotypes of who was against the Vietnam War and why, those are embedded in all the history books of the period, but who was actually against the war? Older people were more against the war than younger people as they had first-hand experience of war. Women were more against the war than men because they didn't want their husbands/sons in battle. Blacks were against the war more than whites since they didn't want the war to distract from the Civil Rights Movement. Jews were against the war more than Christians since they had the horror of the Second World War to teach them that innocent people shouldn't die.

College students going to residential liberal arts institutions were more against the war than those attending community colleges since they had more time for activism. Within liberal arts institutions those in pre-professional tracks were less against the war than those in humanities or social science majors because they didn't have the time.

There were a few violent protests against the Vietnam War, but many of the protests went off peacefully. The protestors would regularly call the law enforcement authoritarian, and these law enforcement agents called the protests anarchist and un-American. It was these protests and the news media that made the real war visible on the home front and created a credibility gap between what the government reported about the war and the reality of what was going on in Vietnam.

Because of the draft many citizens ended up with personal connections to the conflict, so popular opinion on it kept slipping lower and lower. With the numerous presidential administrations having a role in the war support from the government (and for the government from the people) was not stable. As with any wars accounting for the "why" question from just the perspective of one country will leave parts out, but I feel as if this half of my paper is sufficient enough for our purposes.

Comparisons

After the attacks of 9/11, soldiers were sent on multiple tours of duty each longer than one year to Iraq, unlike in Vietnam where they were restricted to one

yearlong tour or duty. Unlike during the Vietnam War, our current military is an all-volunteer force with no draft. Statistics of who makes up our military today are these: 68.02% are White; 19.25% are African American; 3.58% are Asian; 1.77 are Native American/Alaskan; 0.60% are Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander; 5.86% are of unknown background; and 11.19% are Hispanic (<http://co.mcc.org/us/co/stories/militaryrecruitment.html>). Most enlistees join for the money they get for education.

An interesting exploration that I'll spend some time on here is that of the ever-changing foreign policy since the Cold War. There isn't much comparing to be done here but I feel it is important to add anyways. The myth of military supremacy can only be held up if the US military isn't unleashed (H 967), which it of course is during both of these time periods. Therefore Bush's main mistake was overestimating where the US came out regarding supremacy after the Cold War (H 967). The European Union was gaining more supremacy than the US (H 968).

Up until 2003 the Iraq War had claimed 150,000 lives (<http://users.erols.com/mwhite28/wars21c.htm#Iraq03>). Between then and now that total has climbed quite a bit. In Afghanistan well over 8,000 have died up until last summer (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2010/aug/10/afghanistan-civilian-casualties-statistics>). The basic warfare seems similar to me between these two conflicts and eras. In both the terrain and culture of the battleground were/are an unknown to the soldiers. This automatically imposed a certain layer of hostility

towards the enemy on the US soldiers and public, and gave that enemy an advantage, because Americans tend to look negatively on people that are different from them.

The US can do everything right and still lose the war (OW). We experienced this with the Vietnam War and now history may be repeating itself in a way, as the question of if we'll win in Afghanistan is being discussed right now. The Cold War was fought between the Soviet Union and the US through proxy wars such as the Vietnam War, this differs from the Afghanistan War that isn't a proxy war. Obama has said that to fix Afghanistan we don't really need to occupy it (OW), so these two time periods are similar in this sense. Like in Vietnam, the temperatures in Afghanistan are at the extremes (OW). In complete contrast to the Vietnam War in Afghanistan we have a war about personal relationships (OW). The counter-insurgency force is spending its time rehumanizing the "enemy" instead of fighting them (OW).

Like with the Vietnam War there are many different groups of people who are making up the Iraq and Afghanistan anti-war movement in the US home front. Each deserves straightforward answers about the reasons for this war and none are getting them (OW). As with the Vietnam War returned soldiers are one group against the current military conflicts. This group of dissenters focuses on getting immediate withdrawal, reparations, and full benefits for veterans (<http://www.ivaw.org/about>). Another influential group of dissent to the current Middle East conflicts is that of military families and their supporters. This is a group of families whose main goals are to voice the opinions of the soldiers on the

battlefield and rally support from the wider US public

(<http://www.mfso.org/article.php?list=type&type=61>).

Accounting for these methods and their success is not easy since the conflicts are not all over at the moment (regardless of how many of us want them to be). The executive administration and Congress make the military means look successful but the news media shows them to fall short in places. Anti-war activism in the US home front is more measurable before completion of military operations. The efforts of the groups mentioned above and others have been fairly successful with meeting their goals. What they'd need to really help end the conflict is representation in Congress, which they don't have at the moment. Now that Osama bin Laden has been killed, it remains to be seen whether or not there is any kind of justifiable reason to stay involved in Afghanistan. Will the general public support our involvement there? Or will the US government face ever-increasing pressure from the public to leave as we did with the Vietnam War?

Conclusion

At face value the Vietnam War and post-9/11 foreign policy have many differences between them. But when you look at and acknowledge the changing contexts these conflicts have a lot in common. They are similar due to our unfamiliarity with the locations and the similar underlying pull for the conflicts' start. Furthermore, you can say that the Middle East conflicts had some remnants of

the Cold War in them because conflicts at those scales will never be self-contained episodes of aggression and instead feed on the past.