The war in Vietnam deeply divided the American people. Many of the younger generation denounced the war and even their own country. But most Americans supported military action as a concrete way to fight communism.

In 1964, US Senator William Fulbright observed that “in a contest between a hawk and a dove the hawk has a great advantage, not because it is a better bird, but because it is a bigger bird with lethal talons and a highly developed will to use them.” As you read the following quotations, identify the arguments of the “hawks” and the “doves.”

**Ronald Reagan, Candidate for California Governor, Oct. 1965**
“We should declare war on North Vietnam. We could pave the whole country and put parking stripes on it and still be home by Christmas.”

**Hanson W. Baldwin, Journalist, 1965**
“The reasons we must fight for Vietnam have little to do with making Saigon safe for ‘democracy’ or ‘freedom.’ There has been far too much cant on this point, far too much effort devoted to trying to establish a politically legitimate South Vietnamese Government, after our own image. Nor does it do much good to argue the past, debating whether or not we should have become involved in Vietnam in the first place. The facts are that Communist expansionism in Asia has been consistent, related, and progressive, that the end of the Korean war, without a simultaneous settlement in Vietnam, gave Peking and North Vietnam’s Ho Chi Minh the opportunity in South East Asia they have so well exploited....

“Vietnam is a nasty place to fight. But there are no neat and tidy battlefields in the struggle for freedom; there is no ‘good’ place to die. And it is far better to fight in Vietnam—on China’s doorstep than fight some years hence in Hawaii, on our own frontiers.”

**US Senator Mike Mansfield, 1964**
“The conflict in Vietnam remains a Vietnamese conflict, and in the end it must be resolved by the Vietnamese themselves. We have given extraordinary support to two successive governments in Vietnam. We can do no more and should try to do no more for a third. We have teetered for too long on the brink of turning the war in Vietnam which is still a Vietnamese war into an American war to be paid for primarily with American lives.”

**US Senator Wayne Morse, 1963**
“So I would have the United States get out of South Vietnam and save the American people the hundreds upon hundreds of millions of dollars that our Government is pouring down that rat hole—and I use the descriptive phrase ‘rat hole’ advisedly.

“On the basis of the present policies that prevail there, South Vietnam is not worth the life of a single American boy.... [I]... will not vote to continue to sacrifice the lives of American boys in South Vietnam.”

Responding
1. What do the terms “hawk” and “dove” mean?
2. Which of the arguments from the hawks makes the most sense to you, and why?
3. Which of the arguments from the doves makes the most sense, and why?
4. After reading both sides of this question, which side do you support—the hawks’ or the doves’?
Give reasons to support your decision.
McNamara's 11 lessons

In 1995, former U.S. secretary of defence Robert McNamara published In Retrospect, the first of his three books dissecting the errors, myths and miscalculations that led to the Vietnam War, which he now believes was a serious mistake. Nine years later, most of these lessons seem uncannily relevant to the Iraq war in its current nation-building, guerrilla-warfare phase.

We misjudged then -- and we have since -- the geopolitical intentions of our adversaries ... and we exaggerated the dangers to the United States of their actions.

We viewed the people and leaders of South Vietnam in terms of our own experience. . . . We totally misjudged the political forces within the country.

We underestimated the power of nationalism to motivate a people to fight and die for their beliefs and values.

Our judgments of friend and foe alike reflected our profound ignorance of the history, culture, and politics of the people in the area, and the personalities and habits of their leaders.

We failed then -- and have since -- to recognize the limitations of modern, high-technology military equipment, forces and doctrine. . . . We failed as well to adapt our military tactics to the task of winning the hearts and minds of people from a totally different culture.

We failed to draw Congress and the American people into a full and frank discussion and debate of the pros and cons of a large-scale military involvement . . . before we initiated the action.

After the action got under way and unanticipated events forced us off our planned course . . . we did not fully explain what was happening and why we were doing what we did.

We did not recognize that neither our people nor our leaders are omniscient. Our judgment of what is in another people's or country's best interest should be put to the test of open discussion in international forums. We do not have the God-given right to shape every nation in our image or as we choose.

We did not hold to the principle that U.S. military action . . . should be carried out only in conjunction with multinational forces supported fully (and not merely cosmetically) by the international community.

We failed to recognize that in international affairs, as in other aspects of life, there may be problems for which there are no immediate solutions. . . . At times, we may have to live with an imperfect, untidy world.

Underlying many of these errors lay our failure to organize the top echelons of the executive branch to deal effectively with the extraordinarily complex range of political and military issues.

dsaunders@globeandmail.ca
Opinions After the War

Many who had fought on the side of the Viet Cong or the Viet Minh continued to see it as having given their nation freedom from foreign domination. That had been primary in their struggle. But there were those who believed also that the war had been fought for socialism – a lesser number no doubt. And they were dismayed by Vietnam's move toward free enterprise and accommodation with the capitalistic global economy.

Some of the Vietnamese who had fought on the side of the Saigon regime (Saigon was now renamed Ho Chi Minh City) and had fled to the United States saw themselves as having fought for freedom because they had fought against communism, and they described their loss of the war as a result of having been abandoned by the United States. Twenty years of US support, and eight years of intensive US military firepower were not enough for them. The idea expressed by President Johnson in 1964 that it was a war that the Vietnamese rather than "American boys" had to win was not acceptable to them. Neither was President Nixon's "Vietnamization" of the war.

There were those in the United States who doubted. One of them was Hannah Arendt, who was to write:

"That 'Vietnamization' would not work could have surprised nobody; it was a public-relations slogan to excuse the evacuation of American troops ... What came as a surprise was the way [President] Thieu himself, without even consulting his protectors in Washington, managed to accelerate the disintegration of his government to such an extent that the victors [the Communist forces] were unable to fight and conquer; what they found, when they could make contact with an enemy who fled more rapidly than they could pursue him, was not an army in retreat but an unbelievable route of a mob of soldiers and civilians on a rampage of gigantic proportions." *(Responsibility and Judgment, p 258, edited by Jerome Kohn)*
But there were also those in the US who continued to see the war as simply the North having invaded the South – as simply Communist expansion. They believed that those fighting on the side of the Saigon regime were stabbed in the back by a withdrawal of material support and by US television, journalists, demonstrations and weak-kneed politicians having supported a withdrawal of support. A few described help from the Soviet Union and China as having made the Communist victory possible – without comparing the level of that support to the support that the United States gave to Saigon for more than a decade.

It was not terribly different from France's withdrawal from Vietnam. Some French military men were upset as they left behind those Vietnamese they had promised never to abandon. Those in Vietnam who had supported the French were exposed to the hostilities of other Vietnamese, and many had swum to the French ships and begged to be taken aboard. The French watching this felt shame and that their Vietnamese allies had been betrayed.

Watching the US pull out of Vietnam in 1975, Americans were challenged to make a distinction between a minority who sided with the US and the majority who did not. They could have asked why the Saigon regime could not have performed more successfully and what was the high rate of desertion among those drafted into Saigon's army about? Regarding why the war was lost, one of Saigon's wartime prime ministers, Nguyen Kao Ky, took an exceptional position among Vietnamese veterans living in the United States. He saw the roll of hearts and minds in Saigon's defeat. In his book, *How We Lost the War in Vietnam*, he described the US role in Vietnam as "misguided" and naive concerning the opinions of the common Vietnamese.

The US could have applied more fire power. It could have flattened and devastated the whole of Vietnam, conquering it as had Japan and Germany at the end of World War II. But would it have been the right thing to do? We did not fight the war for narcissistic pleasures.

There were those in the United States who continued to believe that the US should not have withdrawn from the war. And there were those who believed that the US made mistakes regarding Vietnam early in the Cold War. They believed that US support for the French there was a mistake and that the US getting involved with its won troops and more of its treasure were added mistakes, and that no amount of additional blood and treasure would have erased those mistakes.

**Sources**

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Pro

Initially, the North and South were divided with communism reigning in the North and capitalism in South Vietnam. Quickly North Vietnam and communist sympathizers in the South began committing acts of aggression against the people of South Vietnam and their government.

In the beginning, Kennedy sent U.S. soldiers as advisors to help train South Vietnamese forces. After the Tonkin Gulf incident, with the attack on the Maddox being confirmed, we passed the Tonkin Gulf Resolution and sent hundreds of thousands of soldiers.

By then we gave large amounts of funds, arms, munitions, and vehicles to the South Vietnamese effectively making them a strong military and economic ally. With the USSR and China aiding communist forces to attack a good ally of ours it was a justified action to take to send armies to South Vietnam and aid in the defense of our ally. The only real mistake we made was not invading North Vietnam once and for all to effectively end the attacks and the ensuing conflict.

All in all sending soldiers to defend South Vietnam and invade the North would have been as justified as invading Nazi held Europe.

Con

justified: to defend or uphold as warranted or well-grounded[1]

Me and my opponent will be debating whether or not the Vietnam War was justified. We will not be looking at this event through the eyes of one alive at the time of the war, but we will look back on it using hindsight.

We have the advantage of knowing all the effects that would come about as a result of our involvement. I will argue that looking back at the outcome that came about, our involvement was not justified.

1.) The Draft

In order to keep up with the growing need for soldiers, military and political leaders began to draft male citizens, many times against their will. 25% of the men drafted had family incomes below the poverty level and more than 75% of the men drafted came from lower middle class backgrounds.[2] These men were forced to join the army and made very little money and were not given an option to pursue a better career. Whatever was gained from the Vietnam War it was not worth this blatant taking away of the rights of American citizens.

2.) We lost

I know that we were merely aiding an ally in a Civil war but the United States failed to meet the objectives set out in the beginning of the war. The U.S. may have caused many more casualties and occupied most urban cities but in the end was forced to pull out after failing. Looking back now, knowing that the U.S. would fail in it’s objectives, makes the war unjustified.

3.) Dead, Wounded

As the war went on between North and South Vietnam before and after the U.S. became involved and this debate focuses solely on the U.S.’ alleged just cause I will only include statistics based on American servicemen.

Out of the more than 2.5 million army personnel who served in Vietnam, more than 58,000 were killed with more than
I thank my opponent for accepting this debate.
I will be arguing that the Vietnam war, even in hindsight, was justified and that rather than have withdrawn from Vietnam, the U.S. should have invaded Hanoi.

1) The draft

The draft is not unconstitutional and has been used many times in U.S. history and was even used by President Abraham Lincoln to draft men in the U.S. Civil War to fight against the Confederacy, Woodrow Wilson to draft men to fight in World War 1 and even Franklin Roosevelt in World War 2, hopefully causes my opponent doesn't oppose. Every U.S. citizen has the obligation to serve when the time comes and they are physically able. The point I'm trying to make is that the draft is currently a legitimate and constitutional form of the United States to recruit soldiers in a time of war and always has been. To argue that during the Vietnam war drafting was unjustified and the theft of one's liberties would mean Lincoln, Roosevelt, and Wilson were opposed to civil liberties.

2) We Lost

We in fact did not pull out after "failing", as my opponent claims. We began to pull out as a result of Nixon's Vietnamization program which was designed to gradually return the control and responsibility of the fight to the South Vietnamese army.

We did in fact, bring North Vietnam to negotiating at the peace table after the massive bombing campaign, Linebacker II, was launched against Hanoi, the North Vietnamese capital, and the seaport of Haiphong harbor.

North Vietnam then signed the Paris Peace Accords agreeing to cease military actions in the South which allowed us to pull out the remaining soldiers we had and that is how we left the war, with South Vietnam fully in control of South Vietnam with a very effective military at their disposal.

3) Dead, Wounded

Soldiers and civilians die by large numbers in every war, to say the Vietnam war was unjustified on the basis of number of people who died would mean all wars are wrong and every instance of armed conflict is unjustified. While it is regrettable that so many men died it cannot be ignored that South Vietnam was engaged in the war to defend themselves and prevent the annihilation of their democratic government in the South. Now if the South Vietnamese and Americans were fighting to enslave and kill native populations in the region then the casualties caused and absorbed would be ridiculously high, but South Vietnam was fighting to defend themselves which is the most justified reason for ever going to war.

A war was inevitable due to the fact the North would not relent in attacking South Vietnam so large amounts of casualties due to a civil war were going to be unavoidable.

And to say that there wasn't anything gained, which I assume you are referring to mean as, effectively ending the war by taking North Vietnam by force, would not mean the war was justified, simply poorly conducted by U.S. politicians.
After the U.S. left, Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia committed a massacre of more than 2,000,000+ civilians in 4 years by executing the intellectuals and subjugating everyone else to slave labor, effectively oppressing Cambodia and making the people more poverty stricken and killing up to more than 3 million people.

Had a strong U.S. presence still been in Vietnam such a government committing such murders would have been stopped or prevented by forces from the neighboring nation of South Vietnam.

After the fall of Saigon thousands of ARVN soldiers, supporters, and officials were sent to concentration camps to be tortured and killed by the forces of the North.

1) The draft

"The draft is not unconstitutional and has been used many times in U.S. history and was even used by President Abraham Lincoln to draft men in the U.S. Civil War to fight against the Confederacy, Woodrow Wilson to draft men to fight in World War 1 and even Franklin Roosevelt in World War 2, hopefully causes my opponent doesn't oppose."

The draft is most certainly unconstitutional. And just because something has been done before does not mean it is right. True, the draft was used in the Civil War and the World Wars, and my personal feelings on those matters are actually not relevant here, but I am firmly opposed to the draft. The draft takes everyday men and forces them to go into battle and fight for causes which they may not believe in. It is a violation of their rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

"Every U.S. citizen has the obligation to serve when the time comes and they are physically able."

Why? If the US invades Europe and implemented the draft would you fight? A person should have the right to decide which causes they believe are worth fighting for. Blind patriotism solves nothing, it turns citizens into slaves of their governments.

"The point I'm trying to make is that the draft is currently a legitimate and constitutional form of the United States to recruit soldiers in a time of war and always has been."

Just because something has not been yet ruled unconstitutional does not make it right. Slavery was 'constitutional' for the first hundred years of American history. Segregation was 'constitutional' until the 60's. Your point that it is currently legal serves no purpose in this debate.
What a logical fallacy we have here. You are jumping to conclusions that make no sense. I do believe the Vietnam War helped the government steal the liberties of citizens and in this respect FDR, Lincoln, and Wilson took liberties away. Lincoln especially did this, he suspended habeas corpus for god's sake. This does not mean that they were opposed to personal liberties, only that they took civil liberties away in that sense.

2) We lost

The Vietnam War as you pointed out was the U.S. aiding our ally (S. Vietnam) against the aggression and invasion by N. Vietnam. The U.S. pulled out of Vietnam in '73 and just over two years later, Saigon fell and the two Vietnam's converged to create the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in '75. If our objective was to defend our ally against their Communist aggressors, we failed.

3) Dead, Wounded

My opponent misunderstands my point. I am saying that in hindsight if we were to see that so many of our own soldiers died only to fail at our objective in becoming involved (see point 2) the Vietnam War would not have been justified.

"A war was inevitable due to the fact the North would not relent in attacking South Vietnam so large amounts of casualties due to a civil war were going to be unavoidable."

A war between the two Vietnam's was inevitable at the time. I am not disputing that. I am claiming that our involvement in said war was not justified. And after the U.S. pulled out, N. Vietnam just went back in and took over. Do you think we should again implement the draft and go back in?

4) The atrocities committed after the U.S. left Vietnam

My opponent brings up a new point and claims that since there were human rights violations in Vietnam after we left, ending the war was not justified. This is not part of the debate. We are putting ourselves in the shoes of American leaders before they made the decision to go into Vietnam. What did S. Vietnam gain from the war? what did the U.S. gain from the war? Nothing. Just about 50,000 dead soldiers just on the American side.

http://en.wikipedia.org...
http://www.english.illinois.edu...

1. Congress has the stated power in Article 1 Section 8 of the U.S constitution to raise and support armies. It does not say anything opposed to conscription or forced military service, simply that Congress can create a military. The reason it was left so vague was because if need be forced conscription should be an option. Had Lincoln, FDR and Wilson hadn't taken such liberties away Slavery, World war 1 and World War 2 would have lasted longer without the surge of men conscription provided.

2. Yes defending South Vietnam was our initial reason for going to war but it wasn't our intention when we left. For a decade we sucessfully defended South Vietnam. Towards the end we decided that while we weren't going to invade the North we would turn over the defense of South Vietnam to the ARVN. That was our goal before we left. We left with the ARVN as a fully capable military force and with North Vietnam abiding by the ceasefire established in the Paris peace
Debate Topic: The U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War was justified.

http://www.debate.org/debates/The-U.S.-involvement-in-the-Vietnam...

4. "We are putting ourselves in the shoes of American leaders before they made the decision to go into Vietnam"

That is in direct contradiction of one of the first statements you made upon entering this debate
You clearly stated and I quote,

"We will not be looking at this event through the eyes of one alive at the time of the war, but we will look back on it using hindsight" - socialpinko

I know I'm new to this website but I don't think you can change the rules when it best suits you.

Using hindsight we now know of the multiple atrocities committed against humanity after the U.S. left Vietnam. Millions of Cambodians were massacred, millions more were poverty stricken, thousands of South Vietnamese supporters were sent to concentration camps, hundreds of thousands were forced to evacuate and Vietnam is still oppressive against political, sexual and religious minorities.

1) The draft

You miss my point completely. I was not disputing that at the moment the draft has not been ruled unconstitutional or a violation of basic human rights. I am not arguing that it is illegal. I am arguing that the draft is morally wrong and an incredible violation of individual rights. You never refuted my actual arguments so I will extend it.

Also, your examples of historic implementations of the draft are not relevant. This claim is the same as saying that because out of the 6 million or so Jews Hitler exterminated, chances are at least one of them was a murderer who had gotten away with the crime. Therefore if the Holocaust had not taken place, that murderer would have gone unpunished. My point is that while the outcome may have been positive, the means to achieve that outcome were unwarranted and wrong.

2) We lost

So you are saying that we went in and defended South Vietnam for how ever many number of years and then right after we left, everything we had worked for during the war was lost. But that was not a loss? Over 58,000 American soldiers died over the course of that war. And you are claiming that the only reason hundreds of thousands of men were forced to travel halfway across the world to fight in hostile territory where more than 50,000 of them died was so that we could keep North Vietnam out of South Vietnam for a measely ten years? The Vietnam War was a colossal failure if I ever saw one.
Debate Topic: The U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War was justified.

My opponent does not seem to think that this is much of an argument in that he believes that the Americans were successful in their involvement which is of course false.

Allow me to use an analogy to illustrate my point. Let's say you were walking down the beach one day. Let's say you saw a man drowning in the water. So you ran and dove into the water to save him by keeping the drowning man's head above the water, but only for a few minutes. After about five minutes you decided that your objective had been fulfilled so you let go of the drowning man and swam back to shore. This man drowned but it wasn't while you were trying to save him. So does that mean that your rescue attempt was a success?

My opponent argues that the Vietnam War was a success because we successfully defended the South Vietnamese while we were there. However this makes no sense in that just two years after we left the North Vietnamese took over. My opponent seems to think that as long as S. Vietnam didn't fall under our watch everything is okay.

4) The atrocities committed after the U.S. left Vietnam

My opponent believes that I have contradicted myself in the last round. However this is simply due to a miscommunication and I will be glad to clarify below. These are the two statements which my opponent believes I have contradicted myself with.

"We are putting ourselves in the shoes of American leaders before they made the decision to go into Vietnam"

"We will not be looking at this event through the eyes of one alive at the time of the war, but we will look back on it using hindsight"

In the first comment I was stating that we would be taking into account the entire history of the Vietnam War and the subsequent fall of South Vietnam after the U.S. withdrew and not be looking at the War with the same information as leaders did before the decision was made to involve ourselves.

In the second comment I was stating that we were looking at the decision to involve ourselves in the same way that leaders did before we involved ourselves. We would be looking at the information to come to an informed decision as to if involvement in Vietnam would be justified.

In the first comment I meant we would be looking at the situation with more information and in the second comment I meant that we would come to our decision in the same way as our leaders did before we involved ourselves (namely utilizing all information available we would conclude whether involving ourselves in Vietnam was justified). I hope I have cleared up this misinterpretation of my previous statements.

My opponent concludes by stating:

"Using hindsight we now know of the multiple atrocities committed against humanity after the U.S. left Vietnam. Millions of Cambodians were massacred, millions more were poverty stricken, thousands of South Vietnamese supporters were sent to concentration camps, hundreds of thousands were forced to evacuate and Vietnam is still oppressive against political, sexual and religious minorities."

I am not disputing that these events occurred. I am disputing that our involvement helped other than to simply delay the North Vietnamese take over and to kill 50,000 American soldiers.
Keep up demand for troops, Congress again used the draft which is a huge violation of individual liberties. Second, though 50,000 soldiers died all that occurred due to our involvement was a delay in the inevitable North Vietnamese takeover, and Third, that the huge number of American casualties was worth the ten extra years that South Vietnam was given before they were eventually taken over by communist North Vietnam.

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