

Outline #12
The End of South Vietnam and the Consequences of the Vietnam Wars, 1973-2009

I. The “Third Vietnam War,” 1973-1975

- A. Break down of cease fire, 1973-1974
- B. North Vietnamese offensive, 1974-1975
- C. Fall of Saigon, April 1975
- D. Vietnam reunited under Communist government in Hanoi

II. Aftermath of the War in Indochina, 1975-1979

A. Vietnam (clip: *Legacies*, 17:21-23:10)

- 1. Economic devastation
- 2. Soviet-style state
- 3. Ho Chi Minh City
- 4. Southern-Northern tensions
- 5. No bloodbath
- 6. Forced resettlement, reeducation centers, refugees (“boat people”)

B. Cambodia (clip: *Legacies*, 23:10-27)

- 1. Pol Pot and Khmer Rouge
- 2. Killing Fields, 1975-1978
- 3. Vietnam's Invasion of Cambodia, 1979
- 4. China's Invasion of Vietnam, 1979

III. Vietnam War as Frame of Reference for Americans

A. 1st Iraq War (Persian Gulf War), 1990-1991

- 1. Conscious effort to avoid “mistakes” of Vietnam War, but U.S. actions in Persian Gulf War greatly influenced by memory of Vietnam War

B. 2nd Iraq War, 2003-

- 1. Is Iraq War analogous to U.S. experience in the Vietnam War? (see attached)

Some Consequences and Legacies of the Vietnam War in Context

Death Toll of American War in Vietnam (1965-1973) and Third Vietnam War (1973-1975)

American:	58,000 deaths
Non-Vietnamese American Allies (Korean, Australian, New Zealander, Thai):	5,200 deaths
South Vietnamese Military:	200,000-223,000 deaths
South Vietnamese Civilian:	1,000,000-2,000,000 deaths
NLF & North Vietnamese Military:	800,000-1,100,000 deaths
North Vietnamese Civilian:	1,000,000-2,000,000 deaths
Total Vietnamese:	3,000,000-5,323,000 deaths

Economic Costs of America's Most Expensive Wars (Amounts adjusted for inflation)

Vietnam War (1965-1973):	\$686 billion
2 nd Iraq War (2003-2009):	\$694 billion
World War II (1941-1945):	\$4.1 trillion

Comparisons and Contrasts: The Vietnam War and the 2nd Iraq War

The following are proposed as meaningful similarities and differences between the Vietnam War of 1965-1973 and the 2nd Iraq War of 2003-. (The 1st Iraq War, or Persian Gulf War, occurred in 1990-1991.) The comparisons/contrasts listed below are not meant to be definitive, but merely intended to be suggestive and to stimulate thought and discussion.

Some Similarities Between Vietnam War and 2nd Iraq War

1. Both conflicts seen as “just cause” – fought in name of “freedom” and “democracy.”
2. Both conflicts seen as part of a broader war – Cold War & War on Terrorism.
3. Intentionally or unintentionally misleading statements made by U.S. officials about the reasons for intervention/escalation of military efforts – Tonkin Gulf Resolution, WMD claims, etc.
4. Initially U.S. leaders underestimated their enemy’s determination and ability.
5. Much skepticism existed among U.S. allies about both wars.
6. Both conflicts involved “nation building” – U.S. sought to shape government and society.

Some Differences Between Vietnam War and 2nd Iraq War

1. U.S. troops levels rose significantly over time in Vietnam – from less than 30,000 in mid-1965 to over 500,000 by 1968. U.S troop levels in Iraq more static – roughly 130,000-160,000 between 2003-2008.
2. In Vietnam, vast majority of U.S. forces were draftees; U.S. forces in Iraq technically all-volunteer.
3. North Vietnam and NLF supported by major nuclear powers outside of Vietnam – Soviet Union and China, which limited U.S. options. Insurgent forces in Iraq lack support from powerful outside states.
4. Elections in Iraq have arguably conferred greater legitimacy on the Iraqi government, while elections in Vietnam failed to provide the South Vietnamese government with a sense of legitimacy among most of the Vietnamese (largely because elections were rigged or at least perceived to have been rigged).
5. Geography of Vietnam greatly hindered U.S. military efforts, especially the use of air power. That has not been the case with Iraq.
6. Number of U.S. deaths in Vietnam much higher than in Iraq – 58,000 in Vietnam vs. 4,500 in Iraq (as of 2009).

Source: Based on analyses by James P. Pfiffner (Professor of Public Policy at George Mason University) and Robert K.C. Johnson (Professor of History at Brooklyn College).