



SMALL WARS JOURNAL

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Protesting War: Comparing Afghanistan to Vietnam

by George M. Reynolds

Since the divisive Vietnam experience, US Presidents have been reluctant to intervene militarily in the affairs of other states fearing a negative American public reaction. US involvement in Beirut and Somalia was cut short once there were military casualties and the use of ground forces in Kosovo was off the table. —As President H.W. Bush concluded in 1991, a ‘Vietnam Syndrome’ had taken hold of the public. Bush explained this problem in greater detail: “I don’t think that [public] support [for the 1991 Gulf War] would last if it were a drawn-out conflagration. I think support would erode, as it did in Vietnam.”¹

Additionally, foreign adversaries have also made calculated, strategic decisions on the belief Americans are unwilling to support protracted, bloody conflicts. This was especially true in Osama Bin Laden’s calculus when he declared war on the US. In fact, in a letter to his chief deputy in Iraq, Al Qaeda’s number two leader, Zawahiri wrote, —The aftermath of the collapse of American power in Vietnam, and how they ran and left their agents, is noteworthy.”² So, given the Afghanistan War is now longer than the Vietnam War, why have Americans not protested to the same degree? By comparing and contrasting George W. Bush and Lyndon Johnson Administrations, this work examines three possible explanations—supporting war rationale, economic sacrifice and personal connection.

Supporting War Rationale

Rationale for war comes in many forms including self-defense, honoring an alliance, or preemptive strike. The conventional wisdom from Vietnam is America will support an administration’s rationale for war as long as it supports a vital US interest, but not indefinitely. President Johnson’s rationale and his escalation of the Vietnam War might best be described by three incremental measures—the US Containment Policy, the Domino Theory, and the Congressional Tonkin Gulf Resolution.

During the Cold War, the US’s dominate geo-political strategy was based on National Security Council Report 68, which advocated a policy of containment towards the Soviet Union specifically, but communism in general. Initially, Vietnam did not play a center role. In fact, when Lyndon Johnson became president in 1963, the US decades-long involvement in Vietnam was limited to military aid and advisors. However, concerns about South Vietnam went further than just containing Soviet aggression.

1 Anthony DiMaggio, —What are the Prospects for a New Antiwar Movement? The Afghanistan Paradox,” Counterpunch, 2 April 2010. <http://www.counterpunch.org/dimaggio04022010.html> (Accessed 15 November 2010).

2 Office of the Director of National Intelligence, —Letter from al-Zawahiri to al-Zarqawi,” (Global Security.Org, 2005), http://www.globalsecurity.org/security/library/report/2005/zawahiri-zarqawi-letter_9jul2005.htm (Accessed 17 November 2010).

Report Documentation Page			Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188		
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.					
1. REPORT DATE 27 OCT 2011		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED 00-00-2011 to 00-00-2011	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Protesting War: Comparing Afghanistan to Vietnam			5a. CONTRACT NUMBER		
			5b. GRANT NUMBER		
			5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER		
6. AUTHOR(S)			5d. PROJECT NUMBER		
			5e. TASK NUMBER		
			5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER		
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Small Wars Foundation,4938 Hampden Ln #560,Bethesda,MD,20814			8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER		
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)			10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)		
			11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)		
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT Same as Report (SAR)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 13	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

Proponents of the burgeoning Domino Theory argued that if one nation fell to communism, then neighboring nations would fall too—like dominos. As such, should Vietnam come under communist rule, then other nations in Southeast Asia would likely follow suit.³ But it was not just the administration and military who believed in the Domino Theory. In a February 1965 Harris poll, an overwhelming majority (78 percent to 10 percent) said they believed that if the United States withdrew from South Vietnam, “the Communists would take over all of Southeast Asia.”⁴

However, by the summer of 1964, the remedies prescribed in NSAM 288 were all proving inadequate.⁵ Following the August 1964 Tonkin Gulf incident, Johnson ordered air strikes against North Vietnamese targets and called for a Congressional resolution. At Johnson's urgent request, Congress passed the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, giving the President the power “to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the US and to prevent further aggression.”⁶ Johnson not only relied on the resolution as legal justification for war but used it as rationale for escalating the conflict.⁷ Most importantly, public opinion rallied behind the President. A Harris survey taken before the Tonkin Gulf incident showed a 42 percent disagreement with Johnson's handling of Vietnam; afterwards, 72 percent approved.⁸

Regardless of how strongly Johnson or his advisors deemed their rationale for war was (Containment, Domino Theory, or repel armed attack against US forces), they had to maintain domestic and international support. However, the strongest criticism of Johnson's handling of Vietnam was his covertness with the public. Consequently, it did not take long for opposition to stir within the US. In the summer of 1965, the New York Times warned of the “lives lost, blood spilt and treasure wasted” and faculty members at prestigious universities staged all-night “teach-ins” on Vietnam.^{9, 10}

So why did Johnson advocate covertness if he had three solid war rationale arguments? Some have claimed Johnson could not choose between his domestic legislation and avoiding Saigon's fall. “But every month of innovative social legislation may have been a gain worth purchasing, in his eyes, even if it later cost him dear in credibility—which means that covertness was a necessity to wring out every month he could before the war caught up with him.”¹¹

³ Richard E. Neustadt, *Americanizing the Vietnam War*, Kennedy School of Government C15-80-271 (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 7.

⁴ Edwin E. Moise, “The Domino Theory – The 1960s: high tide of the domino theory” *Encyclopedia of the New American Nation*, <http://www.americanforeignrelations.com/A-D/The-Domino-Theory-The-1960s-high-tide-of-the-domino-theory.html>, (Accessed 15 November 2010).

⁵ Ibid., 9.

⁶ Ronald J. Cima, “Vietnam: A Country Study,” (Washington, DC: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1987), <http://countrystudies.us/vietnam/28.htm>, (Accessed 15 November 2010).

⁷ Bill Moyers, “Johnson's Escalation of Vietnam: A Timeline,” *Bill Moyers Journal*, 20 November 2009, <http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/11202009/profile.html>, (Accessed 15 November 2010).

⁸ George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*, 3rd ed., (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1996) 137.

⁹ Ibid., 18.

¹⁰ George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*, 3rd ed., (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1996) 147.

¹¹ Richard E. Neustadt, *Americanizing the Vietnam War*, Kennedy School of Government C15-80-271 (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 18.

In contrast, neither national security theory nor an incremental rationale precipitated the Afghanistan War. On 9 September 2001, Al Qaeda conducted a multi-prong attack on the US with lethal results killing 2,819 people from 115 nations.¹² Although the fatal act was executed by a non-state actor, it was an act of war conducted on America soil. Consequently, President Bush's war rationale might best be described by two primary factors—the 9/11 attacks and the broader war on terror.

Following 9/11, many in the US held the opinion the attacks changed the world. As President Bush stated in his post-9/11 speech, “Americans have known wars, but for the past 136 years they have been wars on foreign soil, except for one Sunday in 1941.”¹³ The US's response received overwhelming international approval. In fact, because the attacks were deemed to be within the parameters of its charter, NATO invoked Article 5 enabling its full participation in Afghanistan. Domestically, Bush's leadership and policies received significant support as well. Following the attacks, Bush's job approval rating soared to 90 percent.¹⁴

Beyond the initial attack rationale, Bush expanded the scope of America's response. He linked the perpetrators of the attack, Al Qaeda, to a nation state, Afghanistan and its Taliban regime that “threatened people everywhere by sponsoring and sheltering and supplying terrorists.”¹⁵ He further defined America's new security policy stating, “From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime.”¹⁶

By expanding the initial national security interest beyond Al Qaeda and Afghanistan, Bush defined the context for a broader war on terror. Bush viewed the attacks not as a single event, but a global ideological threat on par with fascism, Nazism, and totalitarianism.¹⁷ In fact, 9/11 underscored Al Qaeda's capacity to plan and execute lethal attacks from safe havens within Afghanistan, as well as linked their previous acts to their larger war efforts against the US.

In contrast to the Domino Theory, the US did not have to wait for enough dominos to fall to directly affect the US. The 9/11 attack connected a string of attacks on the US and its Allies while Al Qaeda continued to pose a threat. Terrorists executed attacks at numerous locations including Istanbul, Madrid, London, and Amman, reminding Americans the threat remained. Moreover, popular support for Afghanistan's war rationale remained high throughout the Bush Presidency. Although Bush's job approval rating declined to 25 percent by 2008, when asked if the US made a mistake in sending military forces to Afghanistan, 70 percent of those surveyed said no.¹⁸

¹² New York Magazine, “9/11 by the Numbers,” <http://nymag.com/news/articles/wtc/1year/numbers.htm>, (Accessed 15 November 2010).

¹³ President George W. Bush (Address to a joint session of Congress on Thursday night, 20 September 2001), <http://157.166.255.31/2001/US/09/20/gen.bush.transcript/>, (Accessed 15 November 2010).

¹⁴ Gallup Service, “Presidential Approval Ratings – George W. Bush”, (Accessed 1 December 2010).

¹⁵ President George W. Bush (Address to a joint session of Congress on Thursday night, 20 September 2001), <http://157.166.255.31/2001/US/09/20/gen.bush.transcript/>, (Accessed 15 November 2010).

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Gallup Service, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/122816/Americans-Say-Afghanistan-Going-Badly-Not-Mistake.aspx>, (Accessed 9 December 2010).

Economic Sacrifice

"During most of America's wars, parochial desires—such as tax breaks for favored groups or generous spending for influential constituencies—have been sacrificed to the greater good. The President and both parties in Congress have come together to cut nonessential spending and increase taxes."¹⁹ Although numerous administrations tried to conduct a war and still support expanding domestic agendas, they all retreated and were forced to reduce their burgeoning domestic programs in favor of more pressing military operations. Vietnam was no exception. Johnson was not only engaged in an increasingly expensive war, but was also initiating an aggressive domestic agenda. Anticipating Congress and America's insistence on choosing either war or domestic reform, he made a calculated decision to do both. He reassured Americans no major tax or spending changes were necessary. But, as troop levels reached 365,000 in 1966—double that of 1965—the war's costs soared and public discontent rose."²⁰

In 1968, Congressional and public pressure forced the Johnson Administration to switch tactics to pay for the war and his domestic agenda. He decided to address the \$28 billion deficit by borrowing, taxing and saving. Specifically, Congress imposed a 10 percent surtax which raised revenue by about 1 percent of GDP.²¹ By war's end the overall total military costs were \$708 billion.²² At its peak in 1968, defense spending accounted for 9 percent of GDP of which war costs equaled 2.3 percent of GDP."^{23,24}

By 1968, war expenditures rose by more than 50 percent.²⁵ Although this caused little economic disruption during the early 1960s, the surge in military purchases triggered inflationary pressures. In 1969, the consumer price index soared to 6 percent, making consumer borrowing more expensive (See Figure 1 for Annual Inflation Rates).²⁶ Although Americans were not initially asked to sacrifice financially nor did they feel the effects from inflation or rising interest rates until the later 1960s, Johnson's policies could not be sustained. Americans were in fact asked to sacrifice via excise taxes, and paid indirect economic costs through inflation. Additionally, by pretending that the war would be relatively inexpensive, Johnson also failed to prepare Americans for the additional tax burdens that eventually would come and heightened their distrust of the administration."²⁷ Johnson's taxing policies eventually led an estimated 200,000 to 500,000 people conducting a tax protest by refusing to pay their telephone excise taxes and another 20,000 resisting to paying all or part of their income taxes."²⁸

19 Robert D. Hormats, *The Price of Liberty, Paying for America's Wars* (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, LLC., 2007), 208.

20 *Ibid.*, 213.

21 Bruce Bartlett, "The Cost of War: Are Americans willing to pay For it?," *Forbes*, 26 Nov 2009, <http://www.forbes.com/2009/11/25/shared-sacrifice-war-taxes-opinions-columnists-bruce-bartlett.html> (Accessed 23 November 2010).

22 Stephen Daggett, *Costs of Major U.S. Wars*, Congressional Research Service 7-5700 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 29 June 2010), <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RS22926.pdf> (Accessed 2 December 2010).

23 *Ibid.*

24 Lori Montgomery, "Why Iraq and Afghanistan Haven't Squeezed the Average American's Wallet", *Washington Post*, 8 May 2007, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/05/07/AR2007050701582.html> (Accessed 20 November 2010).

25 Robert D. Hormats, *The Price of Liberty, Paying for America's Wars* (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, LLC., 2007), 215.

26 *Ibid.*, 215.

27 *Ibid.*, 214.

28 Ed Hedemann, "War Tax Resistance: A Guide To Withholding Your Support from the Military," *War Tax Resistance War Resisters League*, February 2003, <http://www.warresisters.org/wartaxresistance>, (Accessed 20 November 2010)

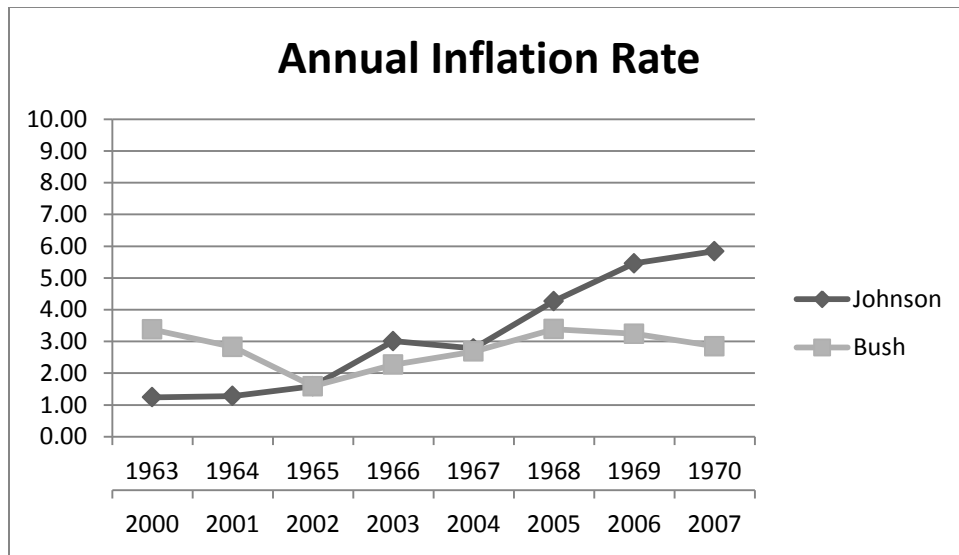


Figure 1: Annual Inflation Rate Data

In contrast, —the approach taken by the Bush Administration and Congress to financing the US role in Afghanistan had been a substantial departure from past practices.”²⁹ —The administration and a Republican Congress increased domestic spending while pursuing their primary goal of cutting taxes—repeatedly—adding more than \$2 trillion to the national debt. Additionally, in 2003, Bush signed legislation to create a Medicare prescription drug benefit, the biggest expansion of the federal health program for the elderly since its creation in 1965.”³⁰ Instead of reducing spending on non-essential priorities and raising taxes to offset the deficit, Congress and the administration increased spending, made large tax cuts and paid for the agenda exclusively through borrowing. Bush’s approach was similar to Johnson’s initial financial policies—to conduct a war and still enact a large domestic agenda without increasing taxes. Yet, Johnson retreated and was forced to reduce his burgeoning programs in favor of more pressing military operations. Remarkably, Bush not only financed two wars, increased homeland security spending, expanded a major social program but also cut taxes. So how was his administration able to accomplish this where Johnson failed?

Part of the answer lies in a world financial system able and willing to lend vast amounts to the US. —In 2006, foreign private investors and governments bought over half of all newly issued Treasury securities, which meant that foreigners financed over half of the US budget deficit.”³¹ For comparison, in 1974 foreign holdings accounted for \$42 billion, but by 2009 this amount ballooned to \$9.6 trillion (in non-inflation adjusted dollars).³² This large and eager foreign capital market provided the administration and Congress an opportunity previous presidents did not possess. —Bsh Administration officials said the 21st-century economy is

29 Robert D. Hormats, *The Price of Liberty, Paying for America’s Wars* (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, LLC., 2007). xviii.

30 Lori Montgomery, —Why Iraq and Afghanistan Haven’t Squeezed the Average American’s Wallet”, *Washington Post*, 8 May 2007, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/05/07/AR2007050701582.html> (Accessed 20 November 2010).

31 Robert D. Hormats, *The Price of Liberty, Paying for America’s Wars* (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, LLC., 2007). xviii.

32 Lori Montgomery, —Why Iraq and Afghanistan Haven’t Squeezed the Average American’s Wallet”, *Washington Post*, 8 May 2007, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/05/07/AR2007050701582.html> (Accessed 20 November 2010).

different from that of the 1960s, when the U.S. government had no easy access to cheap capital. And the low cost of borrowing today [2007] makes a rising debt worth the investment in the safety and security of Americans.”³³ In fact, from 2002 through 2004 the federal funds rate remained at historically low levels (See Figure 2 for Annual Federal Funds Rates).

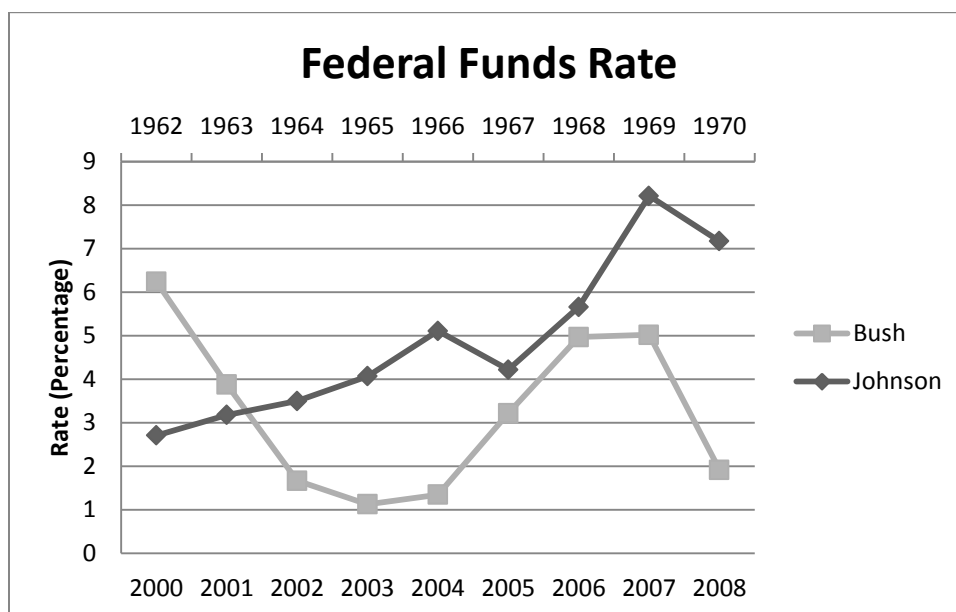


Figure 2: Annual Federal Funds Rate ³⁴

For the average US taxpayer, this reliance on foreign debt meant no taxes to finance the Afghanistan War. Indeed, due to the Bush tax cuts a family of four with an annual household income of \$50,000 saved over \$2,900 per year.³⁵

However, although direct and indirect economic costs are significant and climbing, the total dollars spent has not exceeded the amounts spent during previous conflicts. In 2007, —spending in Afghanistan amounted to less than 1 percent of the total economy—about as much as Americans spent shopping online and less than half what they spent at Wal-Mart, while total defense spending was 4 percent of gross domestic product.”³⁶ The massive growth in the US economy over recent decades accounts for some of the disparity when spending is normalized by GDP. Additionally, as a percentage of the overall federal budget, defense spending has declined to below 50 percent compared to the Vietnam War.³⁷ Furthermore, unlike the Vietnam War, inflation and interest rates remained low throughout the 2000s (See Figures 1 and 2). Where

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ US Federal Reserve Statistic Release, 14 January 2011 (Accessed 14 January 2011). <http://www.federalreserve.gov/releases/h15/data.htm>

³⁵ Associated Press, —Deal or punt decision on Bush tax cuts is Obama’s,” *Associated Press*, 1 November 2010. <http://finance.yahoo.com/news/Deal-or-punt-decision-on-Bush-apf-3182684994.html?x=0>, (Accessed 23 November 2010).

³⁶ Lori Montgomery, —Why Iraq and Afghanistan Haven’t Squeezed the Average American’s Wallet”, *Washington Post*, 8 May 2007, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/05/07/AR2007050701582.html> (Accessed 20 November 2010).

³⁷ Robert D. Hormats, *The Price of Liberty, Paying for America’s Wars* (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, LLC., 2007), 288.

previous administrations worried about the pressures large borrowing placed on inflation and subsequent interest rate adjustments, Bush's approach experience neither.

Personal Connection

There are few clearer acts connecting a person to war than military service. Wars take on a new meaning when an individual engages in combat. The connection is also very strong for those related to or friends with military service members, especially when they serve in hostile environments. It would be challenging to quantify or rank order the strength of these connections due to a person's family tie or friendship since each relationship is unique. However, it would follow that as more people serve, the number of direct relationships increases. According to Veterans Administration, 8.74 million military members (9.7 percent of those of military age) were on active duty during the Vietnam War of which 2.59 million served in the Southeast Asia Theater.^{38, 39} At peak strength there were over 543,000 service members in Southeast Asia Theater.⁴⁰

Year	Troops in Vietnam	Year	Troops in Afghanistan
1963	15,620	2002	5,200
1964	17,280	2003	10,400
1965	129,611	2004	15,200
1966	317,007	2005	19,100
1967	451,752	2006	20,400
1968	537,377	2007	23,700
1969	510,054	2008	30,100
1970	390,278	2009	50,700

Figure 3: US Troops on the Ground^{41,42}

Additionally, over 58,000 service members died, ranking Vietnam fourth on the list of US war fatality totals.⁴³ Of those that died 17,539 were married and 61 percent were under the age of 21.⁴⁴ Moreover, some 150,000 military members required hospital care, giving Vietnam a ratio of 1 death to every 2.6 wounded.⁴⁵ In total, Vietnam's impact was directly felt by millions through military service or direct relationships, especially for those that experienced tragic death and life altering wounds.

38 Note: For this paper, the Vietnam War is defined as 5 Aug 1964 – 28 March 1973.

39 Note: The Southeast Asia Theater included Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, flight crews based in Thailand and sailors in adjacent South China Sea waters.

40 Note: Peak strength occurred on 30 April 1969, Veterans Administration, Vietnam War Statistics, http://www.veteranshour.com/vietnam_war_statistics.htm. (Accessed 3 December 2010).

41 Tim Kane, Global US Troop Deployment, 1950-2003, The Heritage Foundation, (Accessed 12 January 2011). <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2004/10/Global-US-Troop-Deployment-1950-2003>.

42 Amy Belasco, Troop Levels in the Afghan and Iraq Wars, FY2001-FY2012: Cost and Other Potential Issues, Congressional Research Service R40682 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2 July 2009), <http://www.fas.org/sfp/crs/natsec/R40682.pdf>, (Accessed 12 January 2011).

43 Veterans Administration, Vietnam War Statistics, http://www.veteranshour.com/vietnam_war_statistics.htm, (Accessed 3 December 2010).

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

Year	Fatalities in Vietnam	Year	Fatalities in Afghanistan
1963	118	2001	12
1964	206	2002	49
1965	1,863	2003	48
1966	6,143	2004	52
1967	11,153	2005	99
1968	16,592	2006	98
1969	11,616	2007	117
1970	6,081	2008	155

Figure 4: US Fatalities per Year^{46,47}

What may have made Vietnam even more personal was its accessibility via television. It was the first war where media outlets were able to broadcast graphic, unedited battlefield footage to a large viewership providing even those loosely connected a front row seat. Many images were shocking and at times were in stark contrast with the reports given by the White House and Pentagon. Additionally, as the anti-war movement grew, the media covered the dissent and domestic rallies within the US. Although the views of dissidents and protesters were typically excluded from coverage, television provided the anti-war movement an audience.⁴⁸

While this anti-war movement was often motivated by morale and pragmatic arguments, the draft was a major catalyst. Critics argued local draft board's discretion on who to draft or exempt were too broad and not nationally standardized. They also contended deferment rules such as the college deferment, favored those that could afford higher education. Although controversial, the draft did enlist over 648,000 military draftees or 25 percent of the total force in the Southeast Asia Theater who accounted for over 30 percent of the combat deaths.⁴⁹

In contrast, the Afghanistan War involved few Americans directly. In 2001, the total number of military members serving (active, guard and reserve) was 1.55 million personnel or 1.1 percent of Americans of military age.⁵⁰ The number of military members deployed to Afghanistan was also significantly less. During the Bush years, the total number of US troops in Afghanistan never exceeded 36,000.⁵¹ However, unlike Vietnam, America was engaged in another major conflict which competed for resources. Yet, even without the additional

⁴⁶ US National Archives, (Accessed 15 January 2011). <http://www.archives.gov/research/military/vietnam-war/casualty-statistics.html#year>

⁴⁷ Icasualties.org, (Accessed 15 January 2011). <http://icasualties.org/OEF/ByYear.aspx>

⁴⁸ Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 2002).

⁴⁹ Veterans Administration, Vietnam War Statistics, http://www.veteranshour.com/vietnam_war_statistics.htm, (Accessed 3 December 2010).

⁵⁰ Note: 145 million of military age and 1.55 million in military service = 1.1 percent of this pool, Data from CIA World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/us.html>, (Accessed 23 November 2010).

⁵¹ Luis Martinez, "For First Time, More US Troops in Afghanistan than Iraq," ABC News, 24 May 2010, <http://blogs.abcnews.com/politicalpunch/2010/05/for-first-time-more-us-troops-in-afghanistan-than-iraq.html>, (Accessed 3 December 2010).

commitment in Iraq, it is not clear Bush and his military advisors would have pressed for a larger military footprint in Afghanistan. Additionally, the number of hostile deaths and wounded in Afghanistan were less than 650 and 2,650 respectively.⁵² It was the second lowest casualty rate of any major US conflict.⁵³ In fact, due to advances in combat medical care the ratio of deaths to wounded improved to 1 death for every 4.4 wounded.⁵⁴

What is strikingly different about Afghanistan is all military members that served were volunteers. Some have argued the lack of a draft is the single biggest reason Americans are not protesting today as they did during Vietnam. Commentator Brent Green asked, “Given such unfavorable public opinion polls, why does the war in Afghanistan rumble and tumble onward? What single significant variable is different today?”⁵⁵ His response, “Millions of American men today between 18 and 25 do not face involuntary military duty, and this may help explain a lack of resounding and unavoidable public demonstrations against today’s wars.”⁵⁶

Yet, there has been an anti-war movement in the US during the Bush Administration. In 2003, an estimated 150,000 to 250,000 demonstrated in San Francisco and between 200,000 and 500,000 marched in Washington D.C. protesting the lead up to the Iraq War. But in the end, the anti-war movement did not change or influence any major policy changes. In fact, despite the protests, America did go to war in Iraq. Moreover, as the New York Times reported, “The playbook for opposing a war changed markedly since the street-protest ethos of the anti-Vietnam movement. Instead of a freewheeling circus managed from college campuses and coffee houses, the new antiwar movement is a multimillion-dollar operation run by media-savvy professionals.”⁵⁷

Additionally, “the Internet, not the street, not the campus, is the fundamental component of today’s antiwar movement—a force for organizing, raising money and influencing politicians and the media via blogs and e-mail messages.”⁵⁸ Yet, this approach has not produced its intended goal—ending the war. Despite its aims, the anti-war movement did not find those with strong personal connections and/or those who oppose the war in large numbers. Given the small number of Americans serving in the military and Afghanistan specifically, the lack of a draft, and the professionalization of the anti-war movement, few Americans are directly connected to the war in Afghanistan.

Conclusion

So why have Americans not protested to the same degree as they did during Vietnam? One could infer that because Americans have not protested to the same degree, policy makers inoculated the American public against the Vietnam Syndrome—that Americans are now willing

52 Note: totals through 2008: Fatalities: 630, Wounded: 2,631, Data from [icasualties.org](http://icasualties.org/oef/), (Accessed 3 December 2010).

53 Stephen Daggett, Costs of Major U.S. Wars, Congressional Research Service 7-5700 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 29 June 2010), <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RS22926.pdf>, (Accessed 2 December 2010).

54 Ann Leland and Mari-Jana “M-J” Oboroceanu, American War and Military Operations Casualties: Lists and Statistics, Congressional Research Service RL32492 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 26 February 2010), <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RL32492.pdf>, (Accessed 2 December 2010).

55 Brent Green, “To End War in Afghanistan, Reinstate Military Draft?” The Huffington Post, 19 Nov 2009 http://www.huffingtonpost.com/brent-green/to-end-war-in-afghanistan_b_359204.html, (Accessed 2 December 2010).

56 Ibid.

57 Michael Crowley, “Can Lobbyists Stop the War?” New York Times, 9 September 2007, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/09/magazine/09antiwar-t.html?pagewanted=1&_r=3, (Accessed 4 December 2010).

58 Ibid.

to support protracted, bloody conflicts. Yet, this would be an incorrect conclusion. Clearly, we see a stark difference between Vietnam and Afghanistan along war rationale, economic sacrifice, and personal connection explanations (See Figure 5).

	Vietnam	Afghanistan
War Rationale	US Attacked: No Global War: Yes	US Attacked: Yes Global War: Yes
Economic Sacrifice	Taxes Increased: Yes Peak Inflation: 5.84% (₆₉) Peak Fed Funds Rate: 8.21% (₆₉) War Spending % GDP: 2.3% Defense Spending % GDP: 9%	Taxes Increased: No Peak Inflation: 3.39% (₀₅) Peak Fed Funds Rate: 5.02% (₀₇) War Spending % GDP: 1% Defense Spending % GDP: 4%
Personal Connection	Draft: Yes % Draftees in Theater: 25% Died: 58,220 ⁵⁹ Wounded: 153,303 ⁶⁰ % of military age serving: 9.7% Stationed in Theater (Peak): 543k	Draft: No % Draftees in Theater: 0% Died: 630 ⁶¹ Wounded: 3,162 ⁶² % of military age serving: 1.1% Stationed in Theater (Peak): >36k

Figure 5: Comparison between Vietnam and Afghanistan

Instead of curing the Vietnam Syndrome or its symptoms, the Bush Administration insulated the American public from it. It formulated and executed policies that neutralized the nagging problems that Johnson had previously faced. Whether these decisions were made with Vietnam in mind or were implemented due to political ideology (tax breaks for example) can be debated, but the result was an American public largely distanced from the direct, day-to-day effects of a prolonged conflict. Although America was directly attacked, taxpayers did not pay higher taxes (in fact, paid less), young Americans were not subject to a draft, and the country did not experience the loss of a large number of its citizens. Additionally, despite the advantages of information technology and its professionalization, the anti-war movement never rallied or connected with a large audience in a long-term, meaningful way. Though there were individuals with strong personal connections to the on-going conflicts, they did not exist in significant numbers.

These facts are especially striking when compared to Vietnam. By 1967, America had not been attacked by either the Viet Cong or North Vietnamese, Johnson recommended a 10 percent surtax to cover the increasing costs, the draft calls exceeded 30,000 draftees per month, over 13,000 Americans had died, and polls for the first time indicated a majority of Americans

59 Ann Leland and Mari-Jana ~~M-J~~ Oboroceanu, American War and Military Operations Casualties: Lists and Statistics, Congressional Research Service RL32492 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 26 February 2010), <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RL32492.pdf>, (Accessed 2 December 2010).

60 Ibid.

61 Icasualties.org, (Accessed 15 January 2011). <http://icasualties.org/OEF/ByYear.aspx>.

62 Ann Leland and Mari-Jana ~~M-J~~ Oboroceanu, American War and Military Operations Casualties: Lists and Statistics, Congressional Research Service RL32492 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 26 February 2010), <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RL32492.pdf>, (Accessed 2 December 2010).

felt the US erred in intervening in Vietnam.⁶³ Moreover, the Vietnam War united large numbers of Americans and independent movements around a singular cause. It attracted members from college campuses, middle-class suburbs, labor unions, and government institutions, [and] gained national prominence in 1965, peaked in 1968, and remained powerful throughout the duration of the conflict.”⁶⁴

Some may argue that the conflict in Iraq significantly deflected both negative and positive attention away from the Afghanistan conflict. Although this argument is valid, it misses a fundamental point—when policy makers consider future military intervention, they must take into account the factors that eroded America’s support during the Vietnam conflict. While there will be a tendency to compare future wars with the more current Afghanistan conflict as Vietnam’s lessons fade, senior decision makers must consider the strength of their war rationale, the economic sacrifices asked of Americans including increasing the national debt, and the intensity of direct personal connections to an extended war. Despite the fact Americans have not protested to the same degree as they did during 1960s, the primary lesson from Vietnam remains—during protracted, open-ended wars with numerous casualties and significant economic costs, public support is not guaranteed. Future policy makers must not forget this hard lesson.

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