

# The Vietnam War. A multidimensional approach<sup>1</sup>

Ioan Dragoş Mateescu\*

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*This article is about a very important geopolitical phenomenon of the Cold War meaning the Vietnam War between the Americans and their allies, and the North Vietnamese and Vietcong. We are going to analyze the causes of the Vietnam War, its progress and its consequences from a military, political and psychological point of view. Furthermore this article is going to analyze the impact of the war on the American culture.*

The importance of the Vietnam War cannot be overstated. The Vietnam War (1963-1975) meant 50.000 American dead, over 100.000 wounded and over one and a half million Vietnamese dead<sup>2</sup>.

The Vietnam War meant a new challenge for the American collective memory. It meant politics, history, war and humanity. The war meant significant changes for the American and Vietnamese society but also for Indochina as a whole. At the psychological and organization level it meant significant changes for the American army and society. The conscription was abolished and a professional army model was adopted.<sup>3</sup>

One question may arise, namely, what position the Vietnam War was occupying on the international scene and during the Cold War. We can say that the Vietnam War was somewhere in the middle, being neither at the centre of the international relations system nor at the periphery. After 1945, the Vietnam War was the largest US military intervention, but at the same time it was not at the centre of the Cold War. Despite the Vietnam War, since 1971, the United States and the People's Republic of China have begun a process of approaching, a process that has changed the Cold War power equation (according to Percy Craddock, the United States and China almost become allies in the 1980's)<sup>4</sup>. The Allies of the Americans in the Vietnam War were besides South Vietnam,

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<sup>1</sup> This is an introductory study for a much broader research regarding the Vietnam wars.

\* Assistant Professor, Faculty of History, University of Bucharest, PhD. in History.

<sup>2</sup> National Archives, *Statistical Information about casualties in the Vietnam war*, <https://www.archives.gov/research/military/vietnam-war/casualty-statistics.html>, accessed on 29.08.2017, Encyclopedia Britannica, *Vietnam War* in <https://www.britannica.com/event/Vietnam-War>, accessed on 29.08.2017.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Halloran, Issue and Debate; Plans for a military draft attract new attention in *New York Times*, 1985 in <http://www.nytimes.com/1985/08/14/us/issue-and-debate-plans-for-a-military-draft-attract-new-attention.html?pagewanted=all&mcubz=0>, accessed on 30.08.2017.

<sup>4</sup> Percy Craddock, *In Pursuit of British Interests, Reflections on Foreign Policy Under Margaret Thatcher and John Major*, London, John Murray Publishing, 1997, p. 27.

New Zealand, Australia, Thailand, none of the NATO members (including Britain) taking part in this war. The Vietnam War was a limited conflict in the area of Indochina, a war whose stake is difficult to analyse even today. We are dealing with the communist pressure in South Vietnam, against which the Americans acted, with nationalist pressure (both South Vietnam and the North Vietnamese against the southern Vietnamese population), with the communist danger in South East Asia, and with the Cold War that was not greatly affected by the Vietnam War.

The main books studied include *Vietnam, The Definitive Oral History, Told From All Sides* written by G. Appy. Appy, through interviews with war participants, Americans and Vietnamese, civilians and combatants, gives us a human perspective on the war.

Antony Best (*International History of the Twentieth Century*) shows a human and political dimension to the war, pointing out that many Vietnamese considered war as an anti-colonial one.

Major James A. Bright (*A Failure in Strategy: America in the Vietnam War 1965-1968*) has a very interesting master thesis on the Vietnam War considering that the big mistake of the United States was that they have not formally declared war on North Vietnam. According to the author, if the United States had declared war, American society could have been much better mobilized against North Vietnam.

Michael C. Howard (*The My Lai Massacre, A Study of the Event, Aftermath, and Implications*) treats the My Lai massacre, a massacre committed by US troops. This unfortunate episode shows that things did not work well for US troops and that the war was a very tough one.

One of the main arguments of the paper is that the Vietnam War was (for Americans) generated by the fear of communism. Fear was not primarily referring the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, but to the emergence of the Communist movements in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos and South East Asia as a whole. Another argument is that the war was a very hard one in many ways – first of all the North Vietnamese were willing to lose a lot of human lives to conquer / unite with South Vietnam. In turn, the Americans have invested heavily human and material in this war.

On the other hand, American leaders viewed the escalation of the war as a process necessary to stop the Communist advancement in Indochina. Everyone was aware that the defeat or the winning of the Cold War against the Soviet Union did not depend on the Vietnam War.

Another argument of the paper is that in the long run war has not been lost by Americans (or more precisely – in the long run – Vietnam's geopolitical situation and Vietnam's interests have been favorable to Americans).

The paper will answer the following questions:

- Why did the United States get involved and why later did they get so much involved in the Vietnam conflict?
- What were the main military and political characteristics of this war?
- Why did the My Lai massacre happen?
- How did the combatants and civilians involved in this conflict saw the war in Vietnam?

### Involvement and degree of US involvement in Vietnam.

In a certain sense the problem was not if America should get involved, but at what degree to get involved. For the American decision makers leaving South Vietnam in the hands of the communists was not acceptable (Indochina and Indonesia could have been as well in danger)<sup>5</sup>. On the other hand they had to decide what would be the number of troops and what kind of war had to be implemented. Northern Vietnam fought against France and through victory gained its independence. In 1964 South Vietnam was infiltrated by troops and influence agents from North Vietnam. The Americans were worried about losing South Vietnam. The problem was how to intervene. First they intervened through military advisers then the leadership of the United States chooses sending a large number of American troops.<sup>6</sup>

The interests were implemented through war. For the North Vietnamese it was a tough guerrilla war. The stake of Vietnam was very important. It meant controlling Indochina or at least the neutrality of this region. For the French it meant an unsuccessful try of keeping a part of the Colonial Empire and for the Americans the interest of stopping communism.<sup>7</sup> The North Vietnamese proved themselves powerful adversaries, very hard to beat. The military strategies, the fighting itself but also the political decisions proved essential for the Vietnam War. Kennedy sent only some thousands of military advisers. The Johnson administration escalated the war sending hundreds of thousands of soldiers<sup>8</sup>, trying to implement a conventional war against the guerrilla strategy of North Vietnam.

With many sacrifices both sides managed to fulfil their interest. North Vietnam kept its communist regime and incorporated South Vietnam, and South East Asia was not conquered by the communists.

In the end Nixon managed to pull out the United States with all the afferent problems, firstly the collapse of South Vietnam. From the military point of view the war was lost by the United States, but politically, on the long term, it was a draw.<sup>9</sup> The war could have been won by the United States but with enormous investments. The interests of the United States were stopping the communist advancement in South East Asia and for the Northern Vietnamese keeping the independence and incorporating South Vietnam. Northern Vietnamese had been through very hard colonial wars, first against Japan, then, France and then the United States who wanted to keep its influence of South East Asia.<sup>10</sup>

According to Clausewitz war is the supreme confrontation between two entities (then states) resembling the confrontation between two men.<sup>11</sup> The hippy generation was

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<sup>5</sup> Ronald E. Powaski, *The Cold War, The United States and the Soviet Union, 1917-1991*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 155.

<sup>6</sup> BBC News, *Vietnam Profile-Timeline* in <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-16568035>, accessed on 30.08.2017.

<sup>7</sup> Antony Best (ed.), *International History Of The Twentieth Century*, London, Routledge, 2004, pp. 288-291.

<sup>8</sup> David White, Why did Lyndon Johnson escalate the War in Vietnam?, in *Open History Society*, in <http://www.openhistorysociety.org/members-articles/1699-2/>, accessed on 29.08.2017.

<sup>9</sup> Nathan Thompson, How United States and Vietnam had become unlike friends, in *CNN Politics*, 2016, in <http://edition.cnn.com/2016/05/22/politics/vietnam-united-states-friends/index.html>, accessed on 31.08.2017.

<sup>10</sup> Antony Best, *op.cit.*, pp. 288-291.

<sup>11</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, Prahova, Antet Publishing, Filipeștii de Târg, p. 9.

perfectly aware of this fact. The question they asked was why the American soldiers had to fight in Vietnam for purposes that did not seem very justifiable.<sup>12</sup>

Although the realists as Hans Morgenthau opposed the war,<sup>13</sup> the truth is that the balance of power from South East Asia was gravely put in danger. Retrospectively if the Americans backed down maybe the communist parties would have been more aggressive.

The war was very hard to be won by the Americans (but the peace was won by them-on long term). Because of the fear of escalation they could not invade North Vietnam which was the source of the insurrection in South Vietnam.<sup>14</sup> In the South they had to fight with the Vietcong, with the North Vietnamese Army and with parts of the civilian population. There were not some great battles that could have been won by the Americans. There were small and numerous battles specific to the guerrilla war led by Vietcong.<sup>15</sup>

### A War of Attrocities - The My Lai Massacre

Uncovering the My Lai massacre (1978) meant recognition of the atrocities committed by some American soldiers (the same can be told for the Vietcong).<sup>16</sup> An American company killed between 100 and 500 Vietnamese civilians committing war crimes (killing and rape).<sup>17</sup> The story of the massacre showed a complicated chain of command, whose members tried to cover up the massacre. But the American bureaucratic apparatus worked and, as a response to numerous letters from an American soldier, an enquiry begun.<sup>18</sup> The enquiry produced a single conviction (although there were many accused), and the man convicted was released after 3 years.<sup>19</sup>

But the American did not approve this massacre. The major problem was that for many American soldiers the Vietnamese (including the civilians) were the enemy. The fighting and the treatment of civilians became very tough anyway.<sup>20</sup> Basically the American soldiers, facing mines and guerrilla attacks, got frustrated and got even with the

<sup>12</sup> The Vietnam War and how it empowered the Hippy movement, in *Groovy History*, in <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-16568035>, accessed on 30.08.2017.

<sup>13</sup> Martin Weil, 1980, Hans Morgenthau, Vietnam War Critic, in *The Washington Post*, in [https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1980/07/21/hans-morgenthau-vietnam-war-critic/94e0555e-8cba-43fd-a661-64847032f3b8/?utm\\_term=.3bf943385d67](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1980/07/21/hans-morgenthau-vietnam-war-critic/94e0555e-8cba-43fd-a661-64847032f3b8/?utm_term=.3bf943385d67), accessed on 30.08.2017.

<sup>14</sup> Major James A. Bright, *A Failure in Strategy: America in the Vietnam War 1965-1968*, Master of Military Studies, in Marine Corps University, Command and Staff College, 2076 South Street, Marine Corps Command Development Command, Quantico Virginia 22134-5068, 2000-2001, p.17 in <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a401184.pdf>, accessed on 30.08.2017.

<sup>15</sup> Ministry of National Defence, *Operations in the US Resistance War, Memoirs of War*, Ha Noi, Vietnam, Vietnam Institute of Military History, Gioi Publishers, 2009.

<sup>16</sup> Michael C. Howard, The My Lai Massacre, A Study of the Event, Aftermath, and Implications, A Senior Thesis in General Studies, in *College of Arts and Sciences, Texas Tech University*, 2001, in <https://ttu-ir.tdl.org/ttu-ir/bitstream/handle/2346/23276/31295017969790.pdf?sequence=2>, accessed on 29.08.2017.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. ii.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem.*, pp. 7-13.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem.*, pp. 18-20.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 24.

civilians. Being a rural guerrilla war, the Vietnamese population could participate but at the same time could be a collateral victim.<sup>21</sup>

This is the problem of this century and of the twentieth century connected with the guerrilla warfare. Basically the enemy (Vietnamese, Afghans, Iraqis) can collaborate (or threaten) the civilian population in the sense of fighting against the enemy (in this case the United States). You cannot know for sure which are your enemies (how many of the civilian population is on your side, neutral or against you).

In Vietnam, for the Americans this was extremely frustrating because along the Vietcong they had to face a part of the civilian population (the Iraqi problem was solved by General Petraeus in the sense of defending and collaborating with the civilian population).

### **Military and political aspects regarding the Vietnam War**

Another frustrating problem for the American army was that the war did not depend on a few major battles (the United States had technical superiority and maybe even a numerical one) through which the war could be won. In the twentieth century, neither the two world wars, neither the Korean War were guerrilla wars. The American leaders decided to bomb North Vietnam in order to obtain a victory in the South. They did not succeed, the North continued to supply massively the Vietcong troops in the South.

On the other hand the American political and military leaders were calculated enough. Firstly, they did not invade North Vietnam, in order not to escalate the conflict.<sup>22</sup> Secondly they sent many troops in Vietnam but they did not pass a certain limit and when they saw that the war could have been won only with even bigger sacrifices, they retreated.

From our point of view, in 1963/1964 the United States had two possibilities, either they could have sent military advisers to help South Vietnam, either they could have escalated the war.<sup>23</sup> They have chosen the second option; the confrontation was defined by a very hard guerrilla war but also characterized by powerful bombarding against North Vietnam.

We cannot know if Kennedy would have escalated the war. Lyndon Johnson and the bureaucrats of Washington feared the communist expansion in South East Asia and chose the escalation of war. From some thousands American soldiers it led to 400,000 American soldiers. It was not a survival war for the United States but it was a war which consumed more and more lives.

On the other hand, the Vietnamese including Ho Chi Minh were toughened by the wars against the Japanese and the French. North Vietnam had a more powerful ideology and organization than South Vietnam. The problem of the South Vietnam was connected

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, pp.30-31.

<sup>22</sup> For example the reaction of Lyndon Johnson towards the American Military leaders in Christian G. Appy, *op.cit.*, pp. 121, 123.

<sup>23</sup> Major James A. Bright, *op.cit.*, pp. 5-7.

with the lack of legitimacy, the corruption and the lack of authority. A fortified and powerful South Vietnam and maybe history would have looked differently.<sup>24</sup> The problem was that in 1956, the leadership of South Vietnam refused the common and free election for Vietnam (as the United States). The South Vietnamese were probably afraid of a communist victory. The issues showed above plus the communist infiltration proved essential for the state's lack of consolidation in South Vietnam.

Another issue of the Vietnam War was the fact that the American strategy passed from containment to massive intervention. But on the long term this was not necessarily wrong. The whole Vietnamese peninsula could have been contained. What would have happened if Vietnam was to be dominated by communist bases, Soviet or Chinese? On the other hand the human costs on both sides (much more for the Vietnamese) were huge and cannot be compensated.

But, on the long term the balance of power played a more important role than the ideology - because of the fear of China, Vietnam and the United States got very close in our days.

An important problem of the Vietnam War was the degree of preparation of the American soldiers. Some are considering that this degree decreased along the pass of time.<sup>25</sup> If we are looking at the development of the war the degree of preparation was good, but some authors consider that the massacre of the My Lai was generated by the lack of preparation of the respective soldiers and officers.<sup>26</sup>

The communist propaganda was very powerful (the Vietnamese propaganda referred many times to the presence of American troops on the Vietnamese territory). In fact this was a big problem, the Vietnamese had fought against the Japanese and the French, and now the Americans could have been seen as a new invader<sup>27</sup>. In fact this was not true, the Americans wanted to maintain the independence of South Vietnam-and that was the only purpose.<sup>28</sup>

What the realists would have wanted from the beginning was an American superpower which conserves itself and does get involved directly only when its security is threatened (as it happened in the Second World War). Many acted like that – Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan in Afghanistan, in a way even George Bush senior in Iraq – but in the 60's we had a full Cold War and the competition between the two ideologies was omnipresent.

In fact the realists wanted an American superpower (a democratic superpower which supports democracy) which through the balance of power to intervene only from time to time and not massively (or massively just when is necessary like in the Second World War).<sup>29</sup> Those who applied these principles are Roosevelt, Eisenhower, Truman,

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>25</sup> Michael C. Howard, *op.cit.*, p.32.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, pp.30-32.

<sup>27</sup> Antony Best, *op.cit.*, pp. 288,289.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 293.

<sup>29</sup> Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations, The Struggle for power and the struggle for peace*, Iași, Polirom, 2013; Stephen M. Walt, *What Would a Realist World Have Looked Like? From Iraq and WMDs to Israel and Palestine to Syria and Russia, how the United States could've avoided some of its biggest mistakes*,

Kennedy, Ford, Carter, Reagan, and Bush senior. But also there were a lot of interventions (Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq). We do not know how the new president Trump will act (we know that during George W. Bush and Barak Obama the United States got very much involved). The escalation in Vietnam happened during the presidency of Lyndon Johnson. From 20.000 soldiers it got to 400.000 American soldiers. According to the realists the escalation should not have happened. North Vietnam did not present an immediate danger, neither loosing South Vietnam.<sup>30</sup>

### The combat experience of the American Soldiers

The battle experience was of course tough. In fact, the war in Vietnam (being the first-televised war) has something surrealistic about it. US soldiers circulated with commercial airplanes, and during the flight they wrote to their friends or parents. Interestingly, many expected the battle experience to be a very hard one.<sup>31</sup> First of all, as we have shown, it was not just a few big battles; we were dealing with a rural guerilla war. At the same time, Indochina's geography was unfavorable to the Americans, and was conducive to guerrilla warfare, as evidenced by North Vietnamese construction of the Ho Shi Minh route through which the Vietcong was supplied.

The book written by Christian G. Appy, *Vietnam, The Definitive Oral History, Told from all Sides*, presents interviews with ex participants to war (leaders, soldiers, Americans, South Vietnamese and North Vietnamese).

We have the story of an adolescent girl which worked for the North Vietnamese, more specifically at the Ho Chi Minh road. This process meant minimum ten hours day work and a permanent risk represented by the American bombing.<sup>32</sup> The character is balanced and does not seem to hate. On the other hand another North Vietnamese woman whose father has been killed by the South Vietnamese was determined to fight well against the Americans. Her stories seem exaggerated especially because the ratio of killing was clearly favorable for the Americans.<sup>33</sup>

The stories of the American soldiers are also interesting. Till the escalation, in 1965, the so called advisers were sent (regular army or Special Forces)<sup>34</sup>. Till then the war was going well for the Americans because the stakes were much lower. Essentially, for the Vietnam War were Diem's assassination, and the hardening of the fight against the communists.<sup>35</sup> In that moment the North started to send regular troops in the South, and we were witnessing the first escalation of war.

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in *Foreign Policy*, 2016, in <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/01/08/what-would-a-realist-world-have-looked-like-iraq-syria-iran-obama-bush-clinton/>, accessed on 12.06.2018.

<sup>30</sup> Logan S. Booth, *The Vietnam and Iraq Wars: The Antithesis of Realism* in Lethbridge Undergraduate Research Journal, vol.4(1), 2009, in <https://lurj.org/issues/volume-4-number-1/iraq>, accessed on 12.06.2018.

<sup>31</sup> Christian G. Appy, *op.cit.*, pp. 106-111.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 105-106, 103,104.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 15-19.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 35-54.

<sup>35</sup> History.Net, *The Assassination of Ngo Dinh Diem* in <http://www.historynet.com/the-assassination-of-ngo-dinh-diem.htm>, accessed on 18.09.2017.

On the other hand, the North Vietnamese had a much clearer objective and were willing to lose millions of people for the conquering/unification with South Vietnam. Giap told McNamara that the Vietnamese had no regrets – they had a purpose and they fulfilled it no matter the costs.<sup>36</sup>

We can state that for the North Vietnamese the purpose was much clearer and they were assuming the loss of millions in order to conquer/unite with Southern Vietnam and to chase away the American soldiers.

For the Americans the purpose seemed simple-maintaining the independence of South Vietnam. But the problems were numerous – What kind of strategy/tactic should have been used? What kind of South Vietnam should have been supported? How could they obtain the alliance with the civilian population? How could they beat an enemy willing to lose an enormous quantity of people and material?

Unofficially, there were signals according to which Lyndon Johnson and McNamara considered that a victory in Vietnam would be very hard to achieve, if it could be achieved at all.<sup>37</sup> But there were unofficial signs. Officially things were going well. That is why even if the Tet offensive was a military victory, psychologically it was a defeat.<sup>38</sup>

### A possible mistake

A possible American mistake was that the United States never declared war to North Vietnam. Legally and theoretically the US were not at war. According to Major James A. Bright, a declaration of war could have mobilized the entire American society around the war efforts. This process did not happen and many did not find about the war immediately. What did happen was that only a part of the American society was mobilized for the war and after a while the antiwar movement became very powerful.<sup>39</sup>

Eisenhower and Kennedy were more prudent than Lyndon Johnson. A solution could have been consisting in sending just some thousands of American soldiers for helping the South Vietnamese army.

But the big problem was that the South Vietnamese state was collapsing (Diem had not succeeded in transforming into allies the Buddhist and the peasants).

After Diem, it was even worse-there were numerous military governments and coups.

The fighting was at many levels:

- Military – against the Vietcong and the North Vietnamese Army;
- Politically – for consolidating South Vietnam;
- Psychologically – for consolidating South Vietnam but also in relation with the antiwar movement.

<sup>36</sup> Christian G. Appy, *op.cit.*, pp. 41, 43.

<sup>37</sup> Joseph A. Califano, Jr, *The Triumph and Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson, The White House Years*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1991, p.18 *apud* Christian G. Appy, *op.cit.*, p.114.

<sup>38</sup> Phillip B. Davidson, *Vietnam at War: The History 1946-1975*.

Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1988, p.475 *apud* Major James A. Bright, *op.cit.*, p. 36, note 74.

<sup>39</sup> Major James A., Bright, *op.cit.*, pp. 29-30.



But Vietnam had a long history in fighting for independence firstly towards China. Starting with the year 50 AD, there were numerous guerrilla wars of Vietnam against the invaders. The war between Vietminh and France was an anticolonial one. From this point of view both wars (against France and against the US), had for the North Vietnamese two components – the communist ideology but also the anticolonial struggle.<sup>40</sup> In here we have the difference – the US fought firstly against communism.

A big problem was that South Vietnam and the United States opposed free elections in Vietnam in 1956.<sup>41</sup> It was a great possibility the communists could have won. But what kind of legitimacy can have those who oppose free elections.

### **The Geopolitics of the Vietnam War**

From a geopolitical perspective, the Vietnam War presents a very problematic case. The disputed place was firstly South Vietnam, but, indirectly, from an American perspective, also Indochina and the South East of Asia. The disputed place meant also winning the hearts and minds of the South Vietnamese. On the other hand the Americans never declared war on North Vietnam which is a problem on itself.

The interest of the United States was defeating communism in South Vietnam, meaning keeping the independence of the South Vietnamese regimes. The interest of North Vietnam and Vietcong was conquering South Vietnam.

The implementation of interest at the military level were:

- for the United States, bombing North Vietnam and the Search and Destroy Strategy in South Vietnam.

- for the North Vietnamese and Vietcong, a powerful guerilla warfare.

As we said at the beginning, the Vietnam War was not a decisive one for the Cold War, but it was a long-lasting warfare. Losing it by the Americans meant the growing in power of the communist ideology in Indochina (at the beginning) but in our days we are dealing with a tide between the United States, Vietnam and China.

### **The psychological impact of the Vietnam War on the American soldiers**

The impact of the Vietnam War on American soldiers was manifested by the so-called post-traumatic stress of battle. This occurs at least six months after the concrete participation in the war. In general, post-traumatic stress can occur within a year or even a few years after returning home, manifested by flashbacks of war experiences and being generated by a strong experience of fear or shame.

The 70's were not good for veterans in Vietnam, they were payed worse than those of Korea or World War II. Furthermore, many times they were not well welcomed

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<sup>40</sup> Antony Best, *op.cit.*, pp.288-289; Edgeworth Osborne, Neil L. Jamieson, William S. Turley, William J. Duiker, Gerald C. Hickey, Joseph Buttinger, Vietnam in *Encyclopedia Britannica* in <https://www.britannica.com/place/Vietnam>, accessed on 13.03.2018.

<sup>41</sup> Antony Best *op.cit.*, p. 290.

by American society. Some of them, together with their families, still think war was useless. We do not agree with this view – the Vietnam War is quite similar to that in Korea from a geopolitical point of view.

Some authors show that Vietnam veterans did not feel understood either by society or by their own families, returning home alone, unlike WW2 soldiers being not able to share their war experiences with their comrades. They arrived home, under the conditions in which part of society despised them, as there were no military parades, as families did not understand them, and where the state did not get much involved in helping them. In the 1980s, their image changed well, many of them reintegrated. At the same time, many were confronted with alcohol and drugs consumption, their reintegration into society being much more difficult.<sup>42</sup>

However, figures are not very encouraging, 18.7% of veterans suffered from post-traumatic stress, presenting a high risk of depression, alcoholism, suicide.<sup>43</sup> All this is generated by the effect of killing, basically a moral denial violated by the military doctrine.<sup>44</sup>

Some features of posttraumatic stress

- practically relive the battle scenes;
- hard to rebuild the ties with your loved ones, and the fear of loss is very present;
- you are confronted with hyper vigilance and the inability to forget.<sup>45</sup>

In addition, there is a very important Vietnam related issue – if, in the Second World War, the average American soldier had two battles a year, in Korea between two and three battles a year, in Vietnam we had on average a battle every three weeks, creating an addiction to alcohol and drugs. We are dealing with very much anger, and the soldiers were being taught to react immediately, not to analyse, to always be on guard and worried.

Basically there are two rules in war:

- people die;
- you cannot change rule number one.<sup>46</sup>

Many US combatants used drugs in Vietnam, such as marijuana, amphetamines, opium, and heroin. The army seemed to accept amphetamines because the soldiers could always be alert.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Josh Hochgesang, Tracye Lawyer, Toby Stevenson *War & Peace: Media and War, The Psychological Effects of the Vietnam War in ethics of development in a global environment* in [https://web.stanford.edu/class/e297c/war\\_peace/media/hpsych.html](https://web.stanford.edu/class/e297c/war_peace/media/hpsych.html), accessed on 24.07.2018.

<sup>43</sup> Dohrenwend BP, Turner JB, Turse NA, *et al.* The psychological risks of Vietnam for US veterans: a revisit with new data and methods. *Science*.2006; 313:979–82, Tanielian TL, Jaycox L. Invisible wounds of war: psychological and cognitive injuries, their consequences, and services to assist recovery in *I. Santa Monica: Rand Corporation*; 2008., *apud.* Alexander C McFarlane, The impact of war on mental health: lest we forget in *World Psychiatry*. 2015 Oct; 14(3): 351–353., notes 5, 6,7, in <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4592659/>, accessed on 24.07.2018.

<sup>44</sup> Maguen S, Lucenko BA, Reger MA, *et al.* The impact of reported direct and indirect killing on mental health symptoms in Iraq war veterans, in *J Trauma Stress*. 2010;23:86–90. (PubMed), *apud* Alexander C McFarlane, *op.cit.*, note 8.

<sup>45</sup> Dudley Stow, 2011, The Effects of the Vietnam War on the Soldiers, *Prezi*, <https://prezi.com/xayhnqqo-bey/the-effects-of-the-vietnam-war-on-the-soldiers/>, accessed on 24.07.2018.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem.*

The Vietnam Post-traumatic stress had a great influence on the American society, 40 years after the war, 271,000 soldiers still suffered from post-traumatic stress, which shows the major importance of the Vietnam War on the American collective and individual mind.<sup>48</sup>

### Conclusion

The consequences of the Vietnam War are hard to measured. It can be said that the US lost the war for 20 years and then won it-given the good relations between the two countries. It can be said that the communist doctrine expanded in Indochina and then lost ground. In reality it was a very bloody remise – 50.000 American dead, 300.000 American wounded, 300.000 South Vietnamese soldiers dead, 900.000 North Vietnamese soldiers and over 1 million Vietnamese civilian dead.<sup>49</sup> (The draw meant the partial expansion of Communism in Indochina but not in Malaya and Indonesia four American presidents adhered to the Domino theory Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson).<sup>50</sup> The draw meant that Vietnam did not become a closed and ultra-totalitarian republic like North Korea.

But this is also because of the leadership of North Vietnam. Probably, Ho Chi Minh really wanted collaboration with the Americans, despite also wanting the implementation of a communist regime. This could not happen given the zero sum logic of the Cold War, the domino theory and the spheres of influence. Moreover, the Vietnam War has clearly influenced American society (directly through veterans' combat experiences) but also through influence on American culture (cinema) and American politics (end of conscription, fear of escalation)<sup>51</sup>.

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<sup>48</sup> Brian Handwerk, 2015, *Over a Quarter-Million Vietnam War Veterans Still Have PTSD*, in <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/over-quarter-million-vietnam-war-veterans-still-have-ptsd-180955997/>, accessed on 24.07.2018.

<sup>49</sup> Nigel Cawthorne, *Vietnam, A War Lost And Won*, London, Arcturus Publishing Limited, 2006, p. 7.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 23,25.

<sup>51</sup> *Weighting the Geopolitics of the Vietnam War*, in <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/weighting-geopolitics-vietnam-war>, accessed on 26.07.2018.

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