

1968
**Vietnam: How to Lose
a War**

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The media did not destroy our Southeast Asia War efforts. (Yes, that would be a more correct description of it.) In case nobody's mentioned it to you, we had troops in Thailand, Cambodia, South Vietnam, Laos and — yes — North Vietnam.

Tony Kern, Former Director of Military History, USAF Academy, wrote, “The Prussian general Carl von Clausewitz, (the most often quoted and least read military theorist in history), says that there is a remarkable trinity of war that is composed of the ❶ will of the people, ❷ the political leadership of the government, and ❸ the chance and probability that plays out on the field of battle, in that order.



I attribute losing the war to several factors:

- ❶ The continual lying by our government and our military
- ❷ The absurd restrictions we placed upon media travel in-country (forcing them to rely upon rumors and the partial fictions we fed them)
- ❸ Our continual manipulation of who would rule South Vietnam and for how long
- ❹ Our military's insistence that officers would serve only 6 months as a platoon leader in battle. (Hell, it took 5 months to begin to understand the war at that level — and that was if you were the lead platoon day-after-day, week-after-week, month-after-month.)
- ❺ A thousand “DUH” decisions at all levels of our government and our military. For me the “post-truth era” began with the Vietnam War.
- ❻ The decision by our Congress to quit funding the Vietnam government after we pulled our troops out. Without pay, soldiers deserted, government officials fled, and policing of the provinces failed. The North invaded into that vacuum and the rest is history.

How about this quote? “The war in Vietnam is going well and will succeed.” Robert McNamara, US Secretary of Defense, 1963. *The People’s Almanac Presents The Complete Idiosyncratic Compendium of the Twentieth Century*, by David Wallechinsky, 1995.

How about this reality? “In the end, we are reminded of the other lesson of Vietnam. The sorry, infuriating, bewildering reality that the best and the brightest can still succeed brilliantly at analysis and fail utterly at understanding.” Ellen Goodman, “Analysis Fails to Encompass Understanding,” *The Tampa Tribune*, Nation/World, May 5, 1995, p. 15

VIETNAM WAR TOLL

- Americans killed: 58,183
- Americans wounded: 153,303
- N. Vietnamese killed: 500,000 — 600,000
- Estimated Vietnamese casualties: 15 million
- Americans who served in the war: 3,403,100
- American cost: \$179 billion

US News & World Report, Feb 14, 1994, p. 20

“In his most recent statement on the matter [Vietnam War] that we’re aware of, a 1996 interview conducted for a CNN series on the Cold War, General Vo Nguyen Giap attributed the Communists’ eventual military victory to their courage, determination, wisdom, tactics, intelligence, and sacrifices, along with Americans’ lack of knowledge about the Vietnamese nation and its people, but he said nothing about a defeated Vietminh preparing to give up the effort before U.S. protesters and news media changed the course of the war.” Snopes.com, 23 Oct 2018

And, if you think those are incredible costs, wait 20 years when we begin to find out the real costs of the wars in Iraq and in Afghanistan.

But that’s another story for another time.