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The Lingering Shadows: An Examination of Collective Memory from Vietnam to the War on Terrorism

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<u>*The Lingering Shadows: An Examination of Collective Memory from Vietnam to the War on*</u>
<u>*Terrorism*</u>

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Introduction

In a 2007 panel discussion with the *New York Times*, journalist Craig Whitney gave a series of remarks related to the distinguishing characteristics between the Vietnam War and the War on Terrorism, particularly the branch of the war that was being fought in Iraq. At the time, Whitney was serving as an assistant managing editor for the *New York Times* and had been a Vietnam correspondent between 1968 and 1973.[1] In his introductory remarks, Whitney made a series of observations about Vietnam and Iraq that raised significant questions about their similarities and dissimilarities, stating:

> The dominos in the rest of Southeast Asia that were supposed to fall to Chinese and Soviet supported communism if we didn't win, or hold the line, in Vietnam, those dominos did not fall. Instead, there was a war between China and Vietnam…it took the United States armed forces twenty years, give or take some, to recover from all of that. So, now, have we made the same kinds of mistakes and miscalculations once again in Iraq? President Bush went in to eliminate weapons of mass destruction and then it turned out Saddam Hussein didn't have them anymore. Saddam is now history, and the Bush Administration changed the mission to establishing democracy in Iraq… instead, after three years we have rising violence and factionalism, even civil war in Iraq, more than three thousand American soldiers dead, and tension and instability all over the Middle East.[2]

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[1] "Comparing Vietnam and Iraq," C-SPAN internet archive, January 6, 2007, https://www.c-span.org/video/?196073-2/comparing-vietnam-iraq
[2] "Comparing Vietnam and Iraq," C-SPAN internet archive, (7:03--8:14).

Whitney's remarks raised a question to the American people that had been asked before, but was gaining more relevance; is the War on Terrorism a repeat of the Vietnam War? [3]

When American involvement in the Vietnam War officially ended in 1975, the United States had entered a period of reluctance to engage in full scale military operations around the world in the same way it had throughout the 1950s and 1960s. For a few months in 1991, the United States briefly returned to full-scale militarization with the liberation of Kuwait but did not engage in other foreign policy missions with the same level of support. The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 perpetrated by Osama bin-Laden's international terrorist network, al-Qaeda, fundamentally changed the landscape of American foreign policy that had been in place since the end of the Vietnam War. President George W. Bush's decisions to invade Afghanistan and Iraq as part of the global War on Terrorism recalibrated the United States' international mission in a way that resembled the policies of earlier decades.[4]

When trying to answer the question of whether or not the War on Terrorism was the Vietnam War in the 21st century, it can be expedient to think of each of these three (Iraq, Afghanistan, Vietnam) wars as three distinct conflicts fought for different reasons. Beyond the practical military comparisons, thinking of the War on Terrorism and the Vietnam War as two separate events does not fully explain the political, cultural, and sociological conversations that made the legacies of the Vietnam War so contentious in a post-9/11 America. In other words, by thinking of the Vietnam War and the War on Terrorism as two points along the same continuum

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[3] "Comparing Vietnam and Iraq," C-SPAN internet archive, January 6, 2007.
[4] Mark Atwood Lawrence, *The Vietnam War: A Concise International History* (Oxford, New York, Auckland, Cape Town, Dar es Salaam, Hong Kong, Karachi, Kuala Lumpur, Madrid, Melbourne, Mexico City, Nairobi, New Delhi, Shanghai, Taipei, Toronto: Oxford University Press, copyright 2008), 166—182.

of American cultural discourse instead of two events separated by a generational fissure, we are able to better understand the ways in which each conflict continued to define the other.[5]

In the 2004 Presidential Election, the Vietnam War became a central point of conversation in relation to the new age of American foreign policy. The Democratic Party's nominee, John Kerry, was a Vietnam veteran himself having served on a gunboat in the Mekong delta.[6] The incumbent, President George W. Bush, had effectively avoided Vietnam altogether by joining the Texas Air National Guard.[7] By November of 2004, the United States had become fully involved in both the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. On election night, the American people were asked to decide whether it would be Kerry or Bush to take the reigns as commander-in-chief in order to lead the United States out of the Middle East. Both candidates narrativized their own meanings and experiences of Vietnam, and they attempted to delegitimize one another by exploiting the other's lack of or illegitimate Vietnam experiences.[8]

However, presidential politics was not the only realm in which the messages and tropes of the Vietnam War resurfaced in the early 21st century. By studying certain war genre movies of both eras, we can begin to analyze how filmmakers also sought to explain, depict, and personalize both conflicts in ways that had the potential to influence collective memory.[9]

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[5] David Kieran, *Forever Vietnam: How a Divisive War Changed American Public Memory* (Amherst, Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2014), 3—13, 235—240, accessed through DePauw University *Jstor* database, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5vk36d.10?seq=4#metadata_info_tab_contents . Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5vk36d.1

[6] The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, "John Kerry," Encyclopædia Britannica, December 7, 2020, https://www.britannica.com/biography/John-Kerry

[7] Jean Edward Smith, *Bush* (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, New Delhi: Simon & Schuster, copyright 2016), 17—20.

[8] "Swift Boat Veterans Political Ad," C-SPAN internet archive, August 15, 2004, https://www.c-span.org/video/?183127-1/swift-boat-veterans-political-ad ; Kirk Semple, "Democratic Party Chief Attacks Bush on Military Record," *The New York Times*, February 1, 2004, https://www.nytimes.com/2004/02/01/politics/campaign/democratic-party-chief-attacks-bush-on-military-record.html

[9] David Kieran, *Forever Vietnam: How a Divisive War Changed American Public Memory*, 235—240.

Answering the question of whether or not the simultaneous wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were a re-manifestation of the Vietnam War in the 21st century can be convoluted. On the one hand, it can be argued that the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq probably would not have happened had the terrorist attacks on 9/11 ever occurred. That sort of causational argument is much more difficult to place when discussing Vietnam especially when one considers the anxieties about the spread of communism that had been an integral part of American foreign policy for at least a decade leading up to American involvement.[10] On the other hand, the wars share striking similarities in terms of their miscalculations and failed outcomes. However, there is a third way of answering this question; that the Vietnam War and the War on Terrorism are not entirely separate events, but rather two intimately related conflicts that are a part of the same American socio-political and popular culture. By studying political and cinematic content from both eras, we can begin to understand the long shadows that the Vietnam War cast over American culture in ways that defined, explained, and built the collective memories associated with each geopolitical crisis.[11]

Comparing the Wars

In a 2004 report published by the Strategic Studies Institute, a U.S. Army institute for national security research, Jeffery Record and W. Andrew Terrill co-authored a piece entitled, *Iraq and Vietnam: Differences, Similarities, and Insights*.[12] At the time of the report's publishing, Record

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[10] Harry S. Truman, "Truman Doctrine: President Harry S. Truman's Address Before a Joint Session of Congress," March 12, 1947, Yale Law School, Lillian Goldman Law Library: The Avalon Project, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/trudoc.asp

[11] David Kieran, *Forever Vietnam: How a Divisive War Changed American Public Memory* (Amherst, Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2014), 235—240.

[12] Jeffery Record and W. Andrew Terrill, "Iraq and Vietnam: Differences, Similarities, and Insights," *Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College* (May 2004), iv, accessed through DePauw University *Jstor* database, https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep11461?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents, stable URL,

was serving as a Visiting Research Professor from the Air Force's Air War College in Montgomery, Alabama. Record had served as an Assistant Province Advisor in the Mekong delta during the Vietnam War, as a Legislative Assistant for National Security Affairs to senators Llyod Bentsen and Sam Nunn, and as a Professional Staff Member of the Senate Armed Services Committee. At the time of the report's publication, Terrill was serving as the Middle East specialist for the Strategic Studies Institute. Terrill had previously served as a professor at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia, and had published numerous articles and journals related to Middle Eastern warfare.[13] The stated intention of Record and Terrill's piece was to address the growing comparisons that were being made between the developing Iraq War and Vietnam on behalf of the American public and lawmakers.[14]

By the summer of 2003, the United States was fully involved in the War on Terrorism which consisted of multiple war theaters in Afghanistan and Iraq. The war in Afghanistan had commenced shortly after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. In Afghanistan, the United States and other coalition forces sought to remove the Taliban regime from power as well as hunt down Osama bin-Laden and other al-Qaeda operatives. The war in Iraq had commenced in 2003 in an effort to remove Saddam Hussein's regime from power.[15] The United States' justification for invading Iraq was based on two premises; the first being that Hussein and Iraqi officials had been lying to inspectors about their weapons of mass destruction (WMD) capabilities and were on the cusp of developing exceptionally dangerous weapons. The second premise was that Hussein and other

https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep11461 ; "Our Mission: About the Strategic Studies Institute," Strategic Studies Institute, accessed January 17, 2021, https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/about/
[13] Jeffery Record and W. Andrew Terrill, *Iraq and Vietnam: Differences, Similarities, and Insights*, iv—v.
[14] Jeffery Record and W. Andrew Terrill, *Iraq and Vietnam: Differences, Similarities, and Insights*, vii.
[15] "Timeline" in *Understanding the U.S. Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan*, ed. Beth Bailey and Richard H. Immerman (New York, London: New York University Press), 333—341.

Iraqi operatives had connections to al-Qaeda terrorists such as bin-Laden and Abu Mussab al-Zarqawi. Allegedly, Hussein had intentions of providing his WMDs to these terrorists.[16]

By May of 2004, the American mission in Iraq had begun taking turns for the worst. Almost one year after President George W. Bush gave his "Mission Accomplished" speech aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln, the prewar intelligence was proving to be gravely misleading. Additionally, a formidable insurgency was threatening to dissolve the national security efforts that military officials had fought hard to establish.[17] On January 28, 2004, former U.S. weapons inspector David Kay testified before the United States Congress stating that the intelligence community had incorrectly asserted that Saddam Hussein was harboring stockpiles of WMDs.[18] On March 31, 2004, an enraged mob of Iraqi dissidents in Falluja killed four Americans in which their corpses were mutilated and hung from a bridge above the Euphrates River.[19] On April 30, 2004, journalist Seymour M. Hersh broke the story of American atrocities committed against Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib.[20] On May 11, 2004, an Islamist website posted a video showing the decapitation of an American named Nicholas Berg. The title of the video read, "'Sheik Abu Musab Zarqawi slaughters an American infidel with his hands and promises Bush more'."[21] Each

[16] "Powell's Address, Presenting 'Deeply Troubling' Evidence on Iraq: Concealment of Weapons: 'An Active and Systemic Effort' Biological Weapons: 'Factories on Wheels and on Rails' Chemical Weapons: Combining 'Illicit and Legitimate Production' Nuclear Weapons: 'Putting in Place the Key Missing Piece' Means of Delivery: 'Saddam Hussein's Intentions Have Never Changed' Links to Terrorism: 'The Nexus of Iraq and Terror is Old,'" *The New York Times*, February 6, 2003, accessed through DePauw University *ProQuest* database, https://search-proquest-com.duproxy.palni.edu/nytimes/docview/92445384/fulltextPDF/DE483CD4CA04426BPQ/6?accountid=10478

[17] Council on Foreign Relations, "The Iraq War: 2003-2011," accessed January 18, 2021 through April 14, 2021, https://www.cfr.org/timeline/iraq-war

[18] "Iraqi Weapons Program," C-SPAN internet archive, January 28, 2004, https://www.c-span.org/video/?180284-1/iraqi-weapons-programs

[19] Jeffrey Gettleman, "Enraged Mob in Falluja Kills 4 American Contractors," *The New York Times*, March 31, 2004, https://www.nytimes.com/2004/03/31/international/worldspecial/enraged-mob-in-falluja-kills-4-american.html

[20] Seymour M. Hersh, "Torture at Abu Ghraib." *The New Yorker*, April 30, 2004, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2004/05/10/torture-at-abu-ghraib

[21] Dexter Filkins, "Iraq Videotape Show the Decapitation of an American," *The New York Times*, May 12, 2004, https://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/12/international/middleeast/iraq-videotape-shows-the-decapitation-of-an.html

of these individual events created an atmosphere for the Iraq War to be considered a foreign

policy quagmire akin to Vietnam.[22] However, Record and Terrill's central argument was that the

differences between the Iraq War and the Vietnam War far outweighed the similarities even if

there were ideological similarities.[23]

The first significant difference described by Record and Terrill that exists between Iraq

and Vietnam had to do with the histories of the two nations. Record and Terrill observed,

"Vietnam in the 1960s was a country with a long national history and powerful national identity

forged by centuries of fierce resistance to foreign rule and domination…In contrast, Iraq is a

relatively young state plagued by ethnic and religious divisions that threaten national unity."[24]

Essentially, Record and Terrill observed that by the late 1960s, Vietnam had been engaged in a

centuries long battle for independence and political sovereignty. While Iraq had been a region

subjugated to western occupation and influence since the early 20th century, Iraq had gained its

total independence in 1958.[25] Therefore, before comparisons between Iraq and Vietnam can be

appropriately made, it is necessary to recognize that the United States' adversaries in both

conflicts were fighting for inherently different reasons.

The second differentiation Record and Terrill made between Iraq and Vietnam was the

nature of the insurgency in relation to the traditional combat adversaries. Record and Terrill

observed that in Vietnam, the war had transitioned from one of insurgency into one of

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[22] Geraint Hughes, "The Insurgencies in Iraq, 2003-2009: Origins, Developments and Prospects," *Defence Studies*, Vol. 10, Nos. 1—2 (March-June 2010): 152, accessed through DePauw University *EBSCOhost* database, http://web.a.ebscohost.com.duproxy.palni.edu/ehost/detail/detail?vid=3&sid=5e708c9b-03d9-411c-89de-280a444fda88%40sdc-v-sessmgr01&bdata=JkF1dGhUeXBlPWlwLHNzbyZzaXRlPWVob3N0LWxpdmUmc2NvcGU9c2l0ZQ%3d%3d#db=mth&AN=51095681. DOI: 10.1080/14702430903497783.
[23] Jeffery Record and W. Andrew Terrill, *Iraq and Vietnam: Differences, Similarities, and Insights*, vii.
[24] Jeffery Record and W. Andrew Terrill, *Iraq and Vietnam: Differences, Similarities, and Insights*, 2.
[25] Courtney Hunt, *The History of Iraq* (Westport, London: Greenwood Press, copyright 2005), 57—77, accessed through DePauw University *ProQuest* database, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/depauw-ebooks/reader.action?docID=497161

convention; meaning that at the beginning of the war, the United States was primarily fighting

against the South Vietnam insurgency known as the National Liberation Front (NLF).[26] After the

Tet Offensive in 1968, the North Vietnamese military began to gradually secure territories south

of the demilitarized zone. In March of 1972, the North Vietnamese launched another series of

offensives that gradually placed them closer to Saigon. After the last American troops left

Vietnam, the North Vietnamese military began to overwhelm what was left of South Vietnamese

defenses. Working in tandem with the NLF, Saigon fell to the communist forces on April 30,

1975.[27]

      Record and Terrill observed that the Iraq War progressed in a directly opposite fashion.

At the beginning of the war, the United States' primary adversary was the Ba'athist Iraqi military

which American forces quickly overwhelmed and defeated. After the United State secured

Baghdad and dissolved the Iraqi military, the enemy combatants became a part of the insurgency.

Furthermore, the insurgents in Iraq were smaller in numbers and less ideologically cohesive. For

example, the Central Intelligence Agency reported in January of 2004 that more than ninety

percent of the insurgents were Ba'ath Party loyalists, and less than ten percent Islamic jihadists.

Since the CIA made this report, the jihadist faction of the insurgency had grown. Therefore,

because the differing factions of insurgents in Iraq were competing for legitimacy against the

same adversary, Record and Terrill observed, "unlike the Vietnamese Communists, the Iraqi

insurgents have no apparent unifying ideology, strategy, or vision of a future Iraq."[28] The NLF

insurgents in Vietnam were all committed to the same objective of unifying the nation, and

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[26] Jeffery Record and W. Andrew Terrill, *Iraq and Vietnam: Differences, Similarities, and Insights*, 2—9.
[27] Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (Revised and Updated), (New York, London, Victoria, Ontario, Auckland: Penguin Books, copyright 1983, 1991), 697—701, accessed through *Internet Archive*, https://archive.org/details/vietnamhistory00karn_0/page/696/mode/2up. Most recently accessed on April 14, 2021.
[28] Jeffery Record and W. Andrew Terrill, *Iraq and Vietnam: Differences, Similarities, and Insights*, 2—17. Quotation appears on page 17.

instilling an anti-western, pro-communist government. In contrast, some Iraqi insurgents were seeking to avenge the fallen Ba'ath Party, and others were seeking to expand the global jihadist movement creating ideological disunity among themselves.[29]

The third differentiation that Record and Terrill made related to the nature of military operations between the two wars. Record and Terrill explained that in Vietnam, the disunity between those in command of American military operations coupled with the enemy's ability to control the scope of the war worked against the United States. In Vietnam, the enemy combatants initiated as many as 80% of the firefights and were able to endure the large scale of American air attacks in an attempt to protract the war. This level of control and resistance effectively created a stalemate that American military leadership was incapable of resolving. Record and Terrill explain that the major branches of the military failed to reach any sort of consensus on the best plans of action to address the protracted stalemate which created a sense of disunity and ineffectiveness amongst military personnel.[30]

While the American military was strategically disunified, the United States used everything short of an atomic weapon to suppress their enemies in Vietnam. In terms of U.S. military personnel, as many as 543,000 troops were sent to Vietnam, 55,750 of whom lost their lives in combat. While this is certainly an astounding number of deployed troops, the Vietnam War was mostly fought by the use of aerial bombs. Between 1962 and 1973, the United States dropped about 8,000,000 tons of bombs across Indochina.[31]

In both Iraq and Afghanistan, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and his deputy, Paul Wolfowitz, were adamant about utilizing as few of ground troops as possible. After the

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[29] Jeffery Record and W. Andrew Terrill, *Iraq and Vietnam: Differences, Similarities, and Insights*.
[30] Jeffery Record and W. Andrew Terrill, *Iraq and Vietnam: Differences, Similarities, and Insights*, 18—22.
[31] Jeffery Record and W. Andrew Terrill, *Iraq and Vietnam: Differences, Similarities, and Insights*, 9—11.

success that the United States air strikes had in quickly dismantling Taliban strongholds in

Afghanistan, few seemed to question Rumsfeld's aerial strategy for the offensive stages in Iraq.[32]

In this way, the strategies for the major combat phases of Iraq and Afghanistan were more

definitive than those of Vietnam. As the Iraq War entered into its counterinsurgency phase, the

United States ultimately responded with an on the ground troop surge that would not be pulled

back until President Barack Obama took office in January of 2009. Barack Obama was more

inclined to support the mission in Afghanistan than in Iraq and agreed to a troop surge in

Afghanistan while simultaneously drawing down troops in Iraq.[33] Each of these distinct

differences in military strategy, atmosphere, tactics, and political circumstances allowed Record

and Terrill to conclude that, at least in these capacities, the War on Terrorism and the Vietnam

War had far more differences than similarities.[34]

       While it is true that the Vietnam War and the War on Terrorism had many differences

from practical standpoints, it is also true that they shared ideological similarities. For example,

both conflicts were fought in the name of spreading western democracy, both conflicts became

more unpopular with the American public as they dragged on, and both conflicts revealed the

shortcomings, insidiousness, and brutality associated with trying to project American idealism.[35]

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[32] Conrad C. Crane, "Military Strategy in Afghanistan and Iraq: Learning and Adapting under Fire at Home and in the Field," in *Understanding the U.S. Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan*, ed. Beth Bailey and Richard H. Immerman (New York, London: New York University Press, copyright 2015), 128—132.

[33] Conrad C. Crane, "Military Strategy in Afghanistan and Iraq: Learning and Adapting under Fire at Home and in the Field," 137—140.

[34] Jeffery Record and W. Andrew Terrill, *Iraq and Vietnam: Differences, Similarities, and Insights,* 55.

[35] Gary C. Jacobson, "A Tale of Two Wars: Public Opinion on the U.S. Military Interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, vol 40, no. 4 (December 2010): 586—590, accessed through DePauw University *Jstor* database, https://www.jstor.org/stable/23044842?seq=6#metadata_info_tab_contents. Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/23044842; William L. Lunch and Peter W. Sperlich, "American Public Opinion and the War in Vietnam," *The Western Political Quarterly*, vol. 32, no. 1 (Mar. 1979): 22—43, accessed through DePauw University *Jstor* database, https://www-jstor-org.duproxy.palni.edu/stable/447561?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents . Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/447561

In the summer of 2003, United States brigadier general Janis Karpinski was put in charge of the Iraqi military prison system including the detention center at Abu Ghraib located just west of Baghdad. Shortly thereafter, Karpinski was relived of her duties and was even placed on suspension by the Army. Senior commander of military operations in Iraq, Lieutenant General Ricardo S. Sanchez authorized an internal investigation into the circumstances behind Karpinski's conduct as manager of the military prison system. What Sanchez's investigation found would forever cast a stain on the American mission in Iraq and the War on Terrorism.[36]

In a report drafted Major General Antonio M. Taguba, he describes episodes of human abuse perpetrated by American military officials against Iraqi detainees at Abu Ghraib. The report was submitted in February of 2004 but was not leaked to the American press until April.[37] Citing eyewitness testimony as well as pictorial evidence, Taguba listed all of the ways in which American military forces brutalized Iraqi detainees:

> Breaking chemical lights and pouring the phosphoric liquid on detainees; pouring cold water on naked detainees; beating detainees with a broom handle and a chair; threatening male detainees with rape; allowing a military police guard to stitch the wound of a detainee who was injured after being slammed against the wall in his cell; sodomizing a detainee with a chemical light and perhaps a broom stick, and using military working dogs to frighten and intimidate detainees with threats of attack, and in one instance actually biting a detainee.[38]

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[36] Seymour M. Hersh, "Torture at Abu Ghraib."
[37] Seymour M. Hersh, "Torture at Abu Ghraib."
[38] Seymour M. Hersh, "Torture at Abu Ghraib."

Taguba went on to describe in his report detailed episodes in which detainees were forced to commit humiliating sexual acts against their will. Further images cited by Taguba included a deceased prisoner that had his face mutilated and an image of a prison cell completely stained with blood.[39] In a report for an independent investigation conducted by the International Committee of the Red Cross, other abuses were documented including sleep deprivation, and forcing detainees to be handcuffed to upper bars of bed structures for hours on end.[40]

As a result of these investigations, only a handful of soldiers at Abu Ghraib faced prison time. The "ringleader" of the abuses, Charles Graner, was convicted of multiple war crime charges, and was sentenced to ten years in prison beginning in 2005. Garner only served seven years because of good behavior and was released in August of 2012. Others who were found to have committed wrongdoing at Abu Ghraib faced much less severe penalties including fines or being released from duty. Since the initial reports of torture at Abu Ghraib came to light in 2004, only some of the perhaps hundreds of other instances of American brutality towards Iraqis have been revealed. For example, in 2010, WikiLeaks released classified documents referred to as the "Iraq War Logs." In these logs were details of instances of American military personal raping, murdering, and systemically torturing enemy combatants at prisons and detention centers across Iraq. To this day, many of the details and images of systemic torture at prisons like Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay remain classified. When President Barack Obama was sworn into office in January of 2009, he and his administration made a policy of concealing the crimes of the past administration and chose not to prosecute top-level officials who authorized these abuses.[41]

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[39] Seymour M. Hersh, "Torture at Abu Ghraib."

[40] Aloysia Brooks, "Torture at Abu Ghraib: Non-disclosure and Impunity," in *The Legacy of Iraq: From 2003 War to the 'Islamic State'*, ed. Benjamin Isakhan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 51—52, accessed through DePauw University *Jstor* database, https://www-jstor-org.duproxy.palni.edu/stable/10.3366/j.ctt16r0j1w.8?refreqid=excelsior%3A7a94cb6b5ac5014d0ea96be1590728d2&seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents. Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt16r0j1w.8

[41] Aloyisia Brooks, "Torture at Abu Ghraib: Non-disclosure and Impunity," 53—54.

For the American public, the atrocities of Abu Ghraib reminded them of March 16, 1968

in the Vietnam village of My Lai.[42] On that day, United States' Charlie Company received orders

to attack the My Lai village, as intelligence suggested that it was a Vietcong stronghold. Charlie

Company was also told they would be met with resistance once they went into the village.

However, when Charlie Company made their way into My Lai, they were met with no resistance.

When villagers saw the American soldiers approaching, many retreated into bunkers or their own

homes to avoid any sort of contact. Under the leadership of Lieutenant William Calley,

American soldiers were ordered to execute all Vietnamese villagers. When some of his men

refused, Calley himself rounded villagers into groups, and using a fully automatic rifle, viciously

murdered dozens of civillians at a time. Other military personnel threw hand grenades into

houses and bunkers, threw elderly villagers down wells followed by hand grenades, set fire to

houses and shot victims as they tried to escape the flames, killed the village livestock, and raped

women and children.[43]

Like Abu Ghraib, there was substantial pictorial evidence to supplement individual

testimony of the massacre. Army sergeant Ron Haeberle photographed horrifying images of

mutilated bodies, burned houses, and of women and children crying moments before their

deaths.[44] Haeberle recalled one killing in which he described the indiscrimination by which

American soldiers were murdering both adults and children, stating, "'There was a little boy

walking toward us in a daze. He'd been shot in the arm and leg. He wasn't crying or making any

[42] Andrew J. Bacevich, "Military Must Squarely Face New 'My Lai'," *Los Angeles Times*, August 31, 2004, https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2004-aug-31-oe-bacevich31-story.html ; Claude Cookman, "An American Atrocity: The My Lai Massacre Concretized in a Victim's Face," *The Journal of American History*, vol 94, no. 1 (June 2007): 154, accessed through DePauw University *Jstor* database, https://www-jstor-org.duproxy.palni.edu/stable/25094784?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents. Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/25094784
[43] Claude Cookman, "An American Atrocity: The My Lai Massacre Concretized in a Victim's Face," 155—156.
[44] Claude Cookman, "An American Atrocity: The My Lai Massacre Concretized in a Victim's Face," 154—158.

noise.'" As Haeberle knelt down to take a picture of the boy, an American soldier, "'…fired three shots into the child…The first shot knocked him back, the second shot lifted him into the air. The third shot put him down and the body fluids came out. The GI just simply got up and walked away.'"[45]

Despite minimal internal investigations in the years that followed, the story of My Lai was propelled into the public realm when Haeberle's images were published in *Life* and *Time* magazine at the end of 1969. Eventually, four officers and nine soldiers were charged with crimes related to the My Lai massacre. Others involved did not end up facing any charges because after leaving the military, they were no longer subject to court-martials or military prosecutions. Additionally, twelve other officers were charged for attempting to cover up the events at My Lai. In total, twenty-five men were charged with crimes, but only five were tried and four were acquitted. The only person to be convicted of any sort of wrongdoing was the leader of Charlie Company, Lieutenant William Calley. In March of 1971, Calley was convicted of premeditated murder of Vietnamese civilians, and was sentenced to life in prison. Like Charles Graner, Calley did not fully serve the mandated sentence for his wrongdoing. At the direction of President Richard Nixon, Calley was fully pardoned by the secretary of the army in 1974.[46]

As Jeffery Record and Andrew Terrill pointed out in their 2004 report for the Strategic Studies Institute, the Vietnam War and the War on Terrorism shared few practical similarities. However, there were compelling similarities. As demonstrated by the examples of My Lai and Abu Ghraib, these two conflicts invoked the same sorts of reactions and egregious behaviors when soldiers and a nation at large were caught in conflicts that failed to recognize the humanity

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[45] Claude Cookman, "An American Atrocity: The My Lai Massacre Concretized in a Victim's Face," 156.
[46] Claude Cookman, "An American Atrocity: The My Lai Massacre Concretized in a Victim's Face," 154—161.

of their adversaries. In this way, the War on Terrorism was an opportunity for artists,

filmmakers, politicians, and even the American public to recycle the lessons they took from

Vietnam in order to understand the new global war.[47]

Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan on Film

Alison Landsberg, a scholar on historical memory in popular culture, has argued that cinematic

productions have the ability to influence one's perception of the past, stating, "'The cinema, in

particular, as an institution which makes available images for mass consumption, has long been

aware of its ability to generate experiences and to install memories of them – memories which

become experiences that film consumers both possess and feel possessed by.'"[48] Furthermore,

according to Landsberg, this innate power of influence held within any given cinematic

production has the ability to affect an individual, "'so significantly that the images actually

become part of their own personal archive of experience.'"[49] In other words, movies have the

overwhelming ability to influence an audiences memories by altering the individual and

collective narratives by which they previously understood a historical event or era.[50]

In the years that followed the conclusion of the Vietnam War and the years that followed

the commencement of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, popular movies sought to reconcile with

those conflicts in numerous and sometimes contradicting ways. Here, I will be analyzing the

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[47] Jeffery Record and W. Andrew Terrill, *Iraq and Vietnam: Differences, Similarities, and Insights*; Aloysia Brooks, "Torture at Abu Ghraib: Non-disclosure and Impunity."; Seymour M. Hersh, "Torture at Abu Ghraib."; Claude Cookman, "An American Atrocity: The My Lai Massacre Concretized in a Victim's Face."; David Kieran, *Forever Vietnam: How a Divisive War Changed American Public Memory*, 235—240.

[48] Alison Landsberg quoted in John Storey, "The articulation of memory and desire: from Vietnam to the war in the Persian Gulf," in *Memory and Popular Film*, ed. by Paul Grainge (Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, copyright 2003), 102—103, quote appears on 103, accessed through DePauw University *ProQuest* database, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/depauw-ebooks/reader.action?docID=242656

[49] John Storey, "The articulation of memory and desire: from Vietnam to the war in the Persian Gulf," 103.

[50] John Storey, "The articulation of memory and desire: from Vietnam to the war in the Persian Gulf," 102—103.

connecting themes, influences, and sociological statements that are made about the respective

military conflicts in some of the most popular war genre films from both eras including *The Deer*

Hunter (1978), *Apocalypse Now* (1979), *First Blood* (1982), *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985),

Platoon (1986), *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989), *The Hurt Locker* (2009), *Zero Dark Thirty*

(2012), *Lone Survivor* (2014), *American Sniper* (2015), and *Thank You for Your Service* (2017).

Each of these films operate through the narratives of individuals or small groups of people.

Furthermore, each of these films reflect themes of trauma, revenge, chaos, survival, and

companionship in ways that make their own statements on the realities of the Vietnam War or

the War on Terrorism. In other words, each of these films defines the meanings attached to the

Vietnam War and the War on Terrorism in ways that are individual, and allowed the respective

conflicts to have fluctuating or interchangeable meanings as each successive film was released.[51]

Hollywood war films evolved to become representative of the sociological attitudes that

surrounded the conflicts they portrayed. Popular World War II films such as *Destination Tokyo*

(1943) and *Air Force* (1943) predicated themselves on rhetoric that advocated for the American

military mission in a manner that teetered on the brink of propaganda.[52] At the beginning of the

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[51] Michael Cimino, dir. *The Deer Hunter* (Universal Pictures, released 1978) accessed digitally through Apple-TV store on January 24, 2021; Francis Ford Coppola, dir. *Apocalypse Now* (American Zoetrope, released 1979) accessed digitally through Apple-TV store on January 20, 2021; Ted Kotcheff, dir. *First Blood* (Anabasis N.V., released 1982) accessed digitally through Apple-TV store on January 21, 2021; George P. Cosmatos, dir. *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (Anabasis N.V., released 1985) accessed digitally through Apple-TV store on January 22, 2021; Oliver Stone, dir. *Platoon* (Metro Goldwyn Mayer, 1986), accessed through Netflix streaming services from January 2021 through April 12, 2021, (https://www.netflix.com/search?q=pl&jbv=860591); Oliver Stone, dir. *Born on the Fourth of July* (Ixtlan Corporation, released 1989), accessed digitally through Apple-TV store on January 27, 2021; Kathryn Bigelow, dir. *The Hurt Locker* (First Light Production, released 2009) originally accessed through Hulu streaming services and Amazon Prime streaming services in January and February of 2021, but most recently accessed through Apple-TV store on April 13, 2021; Kathryn Bigelow, dir. *Zero Dark Thirty* (Annapurna Pictures, released 2012) accessed digitally through Apple-TV store on February 2, 2021; Peter Berg, dir. *Lone Survivor* (Film 44, released 2014) accessed digitally through Apple-TV store on January 28, 2021; Clint Eastwood, dir. *American Sniper* (Mad Chance, released 2015) accessed digitally through Apple-TV store on January 23, 2021; Jason Hall, dir. *Thank You for Your Service* (DreamWorks Pictures, released 2017) accessed through Apple-TV store on January 26, 2021.
[52] Robert Eberwein, *The Hollywood War Film*, (West Sussex, Malden, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, copyright 2010) 76—86, accessed through DePauw University *ProQuest* database, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/depauw-ebooks/reader.action?docID=700597

1940s, United States involvement in World War II was gaining traction as a popular public

sentiment. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December of 1941, as many as 91% of

Americans believed that the United States needed to totally engage itself in the war effort.[53]

Since the American war effort was so popular, and especially since the United States emerged

victorious in World War II, American war films depicted the war and the veterans who fought in

it with few challenges and little complexity. The United States had simultaneously defeated the

evils of European fascism and Japanese imperialism with the support of the American people.

War films of the era attempted to capture that enthusiasm.[54]

The Vietnam War did not generate nearly as strong of a positive portrayal of United

States involvement as did the cinematic productions of the World War II era. As demonstrated

by *The Deer Hunter*, *Apocalypse Now*, *First Blood*, *Rambo: First Blood Part II*, *Platoon*, and

Born on the Fourth of July, American filmmakers had different perspectives in which they

voiced objections to certain components of the war. Whether that was the abandonment of

American veterans upon returning home or abandonment of the POWs supposedly left behind,

highlighting the long ignored psychological effects the war had on its veterans, or directly

attacking those who represented a hawkish foreign policy outlook in the domestic political

establishment, Vietnam War movies did not inspire audiences in the same capacity that World

War II films had. This can be explained in part because the American mission in Vietnam only

became more unpopular over time. In other words, as Americans began to reconcile with the

aftermath and lasting realities that were created by the devastating Vietnam War, American

[53] United States Memorial Holocaust Museum, "How did Public Opinion About Entering World War II Change Between 1939 and 1941?" accessed February 22, 2021 through April 14, 2021, https://exhibitions.ushmm.org/americans-and-the-holocaust/us-public-opinion-world-war-II-1939-1941#:~:text=After%20President%20Franklin%20Roosevelt%20vowed,signed%20the%20act%20into%20law.
[54] Robert Eberwein, *The Hollywood War Film*, 76—86.

filmmakers attempted to reflect that sentiment in their films. Furthermore, these sorts of artistic discontents were driven from a political atmosphere that included crises beyond Vietnam such as the Watergate affair, the OPEC oil embargo, and the Iran Hostage Crisis, further casting sentiment that reflected institutional disdain.[55]

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Michael Cimino's 1978 film, *The Deer Hunter*, was one of Hollywood's first attempts to tell a Vietnam story after the war. Within the beginning of the film, we meet a group of young men whose lives do not extend far outside of their remote and industrial home city of Clairton, Pennsylvania. Of this group of men, Michael (Robert De Niro), Nick (Christopher Walken), and Steven (John Savage) are only days away from being deployed to serve their country in Vietnam as members of the United States Army.[56]

For almost the entire first half of the film, we are able to study the personalities and values that define these three men as well as those with whom they associate with in their community. One of the first sequences we see in the movie is that of Steven's wedding. Steven and his bride host a traditional orthodox wedding in a beautiful cathedral located in the heart of Clairton with both Michael and Nick at his side during the ceremony. Steven's reception serves the dual purpose of being both a celebration of his marriage, but also as a patriotic farewell party

[55] William L. Lunch and Peter W. Sperlich, "American Public Opinion and the War in Vietnam," *The Western Political Quarterly*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (Mar. 1979): 43; Michael Cimino, dir. *The Deer Hunter* (Universal Pictures, released 1978); Francis Ford Coppola, dir. *Apocalypse Now* (American Zoetrope, released 1979); Ted Kotcheff, dir. *First Blood* (Anabasis N.V., released 1982); George P. Cosmatos, dir. *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (Anabasis N.V., released 1985); Oliver Stone, dir. *Platoon* (Metro Goldwyn Mayer, released 1986); Oliver Stone, dir. *Born on the Fourth of July* (Ixtlan Corporation, released 1989); Meg Jacobs, "The Conservative Struggle and the Energy Crisis," in *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*, ed. Bruce J. Schulman & Julian E. Zelizer (Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, copyright 2008), 197—209; Julian E. Zelizer, "Conservatives, Carter, and the Politics of National Security," in *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*, ed. Bruce J. Schulman & Julian E. Zelizer (Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, copyright 2008), 267—282; Robert Eberwein, *The Hollywood War Film*, 76—86.
[56] Michael Cimino, dir. *The Deer Hunter* (Universal Pictures, released 1978).

for Steven, Nick, and Michael as they prepare to leave for Vietnam. At the reception, Steven, Michael, and Nick indulge themselves with the company of their friends; enjoying a celebration full of songs, dance, and Rolling Rock beers.[57]

The wedding sequence in *The Deer Hunter* portrays an intimate and detailed image of the lives and personalities of Steven, Michael, and Nick before their time in Vietnam. Each of the three men are fairly unconcerned about what the horrors of war could be. This sort of confidence and feeling of invincibility represents a firm belief that Nick, Michael, and Steven are not just envisioning themselves as valiant warriors, but as patriotic Americans who are euphoric about the opportunity to participate in the Vietnam War on behalf of their country.[58]

While in Vietnam, Michael, Steven, and Nick are captured by enemy combatants and are forced to play Russian Roulette against one another. For the three friends, their experience in this sadistic game comes to symbolize their overall experiences of the war. All three men eventually escape, but each of them is damaged in their own unique ways. For Nick, his emotional struggles with his war experience permanently damage his psychological well-being, and the confident and arrogant man we met at the wedding totally vanishes. For Steven, he loses both of his legs falling out of a rescue helicopter. While Michael does not suffer any physical injuries, he becomes socially distant from his friends upon returning to Clairton.[59]

In one of the final sequences of the movie, Michael returns to Saigon in order to find Nick, who never returned to the United States after his time in combat. Michael finds Nick at an underground Russian Roulette gambling ring in which Nick competes in order to earn money. After Michael attempts to save Nick from his psychological trauma by reminding him of the life

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[57] Michael Cimino, dir. *The Deer Hunter* (Universal Pictures, released 1978).
[58] Michael Cimino, dir. *The Deer Hunter* (Universal Pictures, released 1978).
[59] Michael Cimino, dir. *The Deer Hunter* (Universal Pictures, released 1978).

they had in Clairton, Nick commits suicide by shooting himself in the head. The movie

concludes with Nick's funeral in Clairton at the same cathedral where Steven was married.[60]

The Deer Hunter established itself as a captivating film because of how little it dealt with

the transgression of the Vietnam War itself. In other words, very little of The Deer Hunter

actually takes place in Vietnam. This is because the movie is intended to articulate the personal

experience of Vietnam and its tragic effects on individuals rather than attempt to dramatize or

document how the war was fought.[61]

In his 1979 film, Apocalypse Now, Francis Ford Coppola attempted to combine notions

of psychological disorientation with the actual experience of Vietnam. In Apocalypse Now, we

follow a United States military captain named Willard (Martin Sheen) on his mission to

assassinate a rogue colonel named Walter Kurtz (Marlon Brando).[62]

As we follow Willard on his mission, we are presented with an unusual combination of

both personal and political messages related to the Vietnam War. We first meet Willard at his

residence in Saigon, where Willard is transfixed in a self-destructive state that resembles Nick's

behavior in The Deer Hunter.[63] Essentially, we can tell right away that Willard harbors deep

psychological struggles related to his extensive experiences in Vietnam. Willard is then

summoned by his commanding officers to be briefed on his mission to kill Colonel Kurtz.

During the briefing, there is a recognition from Willard and his commanding officers that the

overall mission in Vietnam is convoluted at best; the officer who gives Willard his mission to go

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[60] Michael Cimino, dir. The Deer Hunter (Universal Pictures, released 1978).

[61] Michael Cimino, dir. The Deer Hunter (Universal Pictures, released 1978).

[62] Francis Ford Coppola, dir. Apocalypse Now (American Zoetrope, released 1979). Cast members given on Apple-TV information page.

[63] Michael Cimino, dir. The Deer Hunter (Universal Pictures, released 1978); Francis Ford Coppola, dir. Apocalypse Now (American Zoetrope, released 1979).

after Kurtz remarks, "In this war, things get confused out there. Power, ideals, morality, and practical military necessity."[64]

  As Willard makes his way to Kurtz who is hiding out in Cambodia, Willard meets up with an American squad leader named Bill Kilgore who is supposed to escort Willard closer to his destination. While in route to Cambodia, Willard tags along with Kilgore and his men on an aerial raid over a Vietnamese hamlet. In perhaps one of the most notorious sequences of the film, Kilgore's men unleash the full arsenal of American firepower on their target. The barrage of helicopter fire and napalm strikes remind the audience that the United States used just about everything except an atomic weapon in their effort to win the Vietnam War. Kilgore is a character that represents this sort of American power and arrogance particularly after the attack on the hamlet has ended in the Americans' favor. Kilgore's admiration and belief in the notion that American military superiority will win the war in Vietnam is validated when he remarks to Willard, "I love the smell of napalm in the morning…someday, this war is going to end," as if devastating napalm strikes that unleash unimaginable suffering on their targets are the key to American success; a kind of suffering in this case, that Kilgore takes pleasure in.[65]

  Willard eventually arrives at Kurtz's outpost in Cambodia which is a remote community of natives and deserted Americans who all hail Kurtz to be a divine figure. Kurtz knows that Willard was sent to kill him and confesses to Willard that he has gone rogue because of the abandonment he felt from his military commanders when he fought the war in the manner in which he thought to be most productive. Despite Willard being subjected to an attempt to

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[64] Francis Ford Coppola, dir. *Apocalypse Now* (American Zoetrope, released 1979). Quotation found at (16:00—16:12).
[65] Francis Ford Coppola, dir. *Apocalypse Now* (American Zoetrope, released 1979). Kilgore quotation found at (49:31—50:04).

brainwash him into the community, Willard fulfills his mission and kills Kurtz. *Apocalypse Now*

concludes with Willard leaving the Cambodian village on the boat in which he arrived.[66]

      While *The Deer Hunter* and *Apocalypse Now* differ from one another in terms of

character developments, driving conflicts, and settings, both films cast the Vietnam War and the

veterans who fought in it in relatively similar terms. Both films depict the Vietnam War as one of

chaos and brutality. Furthermore, both films depict the disillusionment and trauma that the

Vietnam War imposed on its American veterans. It can be said that these films attempted to

expose the emotional and physical costs that the Vietnam War imposed on those who lived

through it and asked their audiences to consider if the price paid was worth the cost.[67]

      At the 1980 Republican National Convention in Detroit, Michigan, Ronald Reagan had

formally secured his party's nomination for President of the United States. Reagan delivered his

acceptance address on July 17. In his address, Reagan articulated a vision of America that would

be free from the economic and geo-political burdens of the previous decade. Furthermore,

Reagan claimed he would renew an unapologetic sense of American patriotism that would allow

the nation to reclaim its global hegemony despite the social and political shadow the Vietnam

War had recently cast.[68] Reagan famously stated at the convention, "I will not stand by and

watch this great country destroy itself under mediocre leadership that drifts from one crisis to the

next, eroding our national will and purpose."[69]

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[66] Francis Ford Coppola, dir. *Apocalypse Now* (American Zoetrope, released 1979).

[67] Michael Cimino, dir. *The Deer Hunter* (Universal Pictures, released 1978); Francis Ford Coppola, dir. *Apocalypse Now* (American Zoetrope, released 1979).

[68] Ronald Reagan, "1980 Republican National Convention Acceptance Address," delivered July 17, 1980, Detroit, Michigan, American Rhetoric: Online Speech Bank, https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/ronaldreagan1980rnc.htm

[69] Ronald Reagan, "1980 Republican National Convention Acceptance Address."

In order to revive that sense of national will and purpose, Reagan attempted to rewrite the belief that the Vietnam War was a geopolitical mistake of dramatic proportions. In his address at the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Convention held in Chicago, Illinois in the summer of 1980, Reagan described the Vietnam war as a "noble cause", and that the central reason Americans lost in Vietnam was due to a lack of commitment on behalf of America's policy makers.[70] Reagan would not be the only popular figure to rearticulate the Vietnam era. *First Blood,* and its sequel, *Rambo: First Blood Part II,* are two demonstrations of Ronald Reagan's Vietnam narrative making its way into Hollywood film.[71]

In *First Blood* and *Rambo: First Blood Part II*, the protagonist is a highly decorated and elite Vietnam War veteran named John Rambo (Sylvester Stallone). In *First Blood*, we meet Rambo straggling through a remote town in the American Pacific Northwest in search of a fellow veteran whom he had served with. While walking along the highway into town, Rambo is stopped by a local police official who accuses Rambo of being a worthless drifter and an unwanted visitor to the community. Rambo is eventually taken into police custody after disobeying the order to leave town from sheriff Will Teasle (Brian Dennehy). Rambo escapes police custody and flees into the dense surrounding forests, instigating a manhunt in which Teasle goes to dramatic lengths in order catch the deranged warrior.[72]

Rambo is able to elude police capture by utilizing his expertise in guerilla warfare tactics. In one sequence of the film, Rambo creates a series of booby traps throughout the forest that severely injure the men pursuing him. The climax of the movie occurs when Rambo returns to

[70] Ronald Reagan, "Address to the Veterans of Foreign Wars Convention in Chicago," August 18, 1980, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-the-veterans-foreign-wars-convention-chicago

[71] Ted Kotcheff, dir. *First Blood* (Anabasis N.V., released 1982); George P. Cosmatos, dir. *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (Anabasis N.V., released 1985).

[72] Ted Kotcheff, dir. *First Blood* (Anabasis N.V., released 1982); George P. Cosmatos, dir. *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (Anabasis N.V., released 1985).

the town police station in order to hijack heavy military equipment and have a final standoff with

Teasle. Rambo destroys the police station, but is confronted by his former commanding officer,

Colonel Trautman (Richard Crenna).[73] Trautman attempts to diffuse Rambo's rage, in which

Rambo responds with a scathing indictment on all those whom he feels were responsible for the

American loss in Vietnam including the United States government and the anti-war community

exclaiming, "It wasn't my war! You asked me, I didn't ask you; and I did what I had to do to

win, but somebody wouldn't let us win! And I come back to the world, and I see all those

maggots at the airport, protesting me, spitting, calling me 'baby killer' and all kinds of vile crap!

Who are they to protest me, huh?... Unless they been me or been there and know what the hell

they're yelling about!"[74]

First Blood was reflective of Ronald Reagan's Vietnam rhetoric in that it served as a

revenge story against the forces that had held back the veterans of Vietnam from completing

their mission. The people of the Pacific Northwest town that reject Rambo are representative of

the American populace who rejected Vietnam veterans as they returned home from combat.

Sheriff Teasle and the law enforcement officers who pursue Rambo are representative of the

government that betrayed the veterans of a foreign war. In this regard, Rambo is actively defying

each of those forces and subsequently portraying the Vietnam veteran as someone who fought a

valiant mission with one hand tied behind their back.[75]

John Rambo made his return to the big screen in 1985 with the release of *Rambo: First*

Blood Part II. *Rambo: First Blood Part II* carried over many of the same themes and messages

of disdain for government policy makers and anti-war protestors from the original film but added

[73] Ted Kotcheff, dir. *First Blood* (Anabasis N.V., released 1982).
[74] Ted Kotcheff, dir. *First Blood* (Anabasis N.V., released 1982). Quotation found at (1:25:33—1:25:56).
[75] Ted Kotcheff, dir. *First Blood* (Anabasis N.V., released 1982).

a new component to the re-narrativization of the Vietnam War; the POW/MIA (Prisoner of War/ Missing in Action) movement.[76]

In September of 1992, former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger testified before the Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs. The Senate Committee was tasked with investigating the matter of whether or not the United States government had left American prisoners of war behind in Vietnam at the time of the peace agreements between the warring nations. The day before Kissinger testified, former Nixon officials testified that the United States knew North Vietnam had been holding American POWs, but that the United States lacked sufficient bargaining power to negotiate their release.[77] In his opening statement, Kissinger adamantly rejected those claims stating they were, "the most dishonorable accusation(s) that can be made."[78] Kissinger challenged the committee and even the POW/MIA movement's intentions stating:

> What has happened to this country that a congressional committee could be asked to
> inquire whether any American official of whatever administration would fail to move
> heaven and earth to fight for the release of American POWs and for an accounting of the
> missing? Can anyone seriously believe that any honorable public official would neglect
> America's servicemen, and especially those who had suffered so much for their country,
> or, even worse, arrange for a conspiracy to obscure the fate of the prisoners left behind?[79]

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[76] Ted Kotcheff, dir. *First Blood* (Anabasis N.V., released 1982); George P. Cosmatos, dir. *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (Anabasis N.V., released 1985).

[77] "Paris Peace Accords AM Session Day Two," C-SPAN internet archive, September 22, 1992, https://www.c-span.org/video/?32656-1/paris-peace-accords-session-day; Michael J. Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home: POWs, MIAs, and the Unending Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, copyright 2009), 1—2, accessed through DePauw University *ProQuest* database, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/depauw-ebooks/reader.action?docID=475164

[78] "Paris Peace Accords AM Session Day Two," C-SPAN archive, September 22, 1992, (23:17—23:21).

[79] "Paris Peace Accords AM Session Day Two," C-SPAN archive, September 22, 1992, (40:19—41:06).

In a 1991 *Wall Street Journal*/NBC News poll, almost seventy percent of American citizens believed that American servicemen were, "being held against their will in Indochina," and over half believed the United States government, "was doing too little to rescue them."[80] This widespread belief was irrational and for the most part unwarranted in that the missing soldiers from the Vietnam War paled in comparison to the missing soldiers of America's previous conflicts. Roughly 2,500 United States servicemen failed to return from Vietnam which was significantly less than the 170,000 Union troops who were unidentified or missing in action during the Civil War, and significantly less than the unidentified or unrecovered soldiers in both World War II and Korea. Furthermore, the suspicion on behalf of the American public that the United States government had not done enough to return its missing servicemen persisted despite the hundreds of millions of dollars the government had been pouring into the recovery effort since Vietnam's conclusion.[81] *Rambo First Blood: Part II* undoubtedly helped perpetuate this spiraling and unsubstantiated conspiracy theory.[82]

  Rambo First Blood: Part II takes place after the events of *First Blood*. In the opening sequence we find Rambo working in a labor prison, having been convicted for his rebellious actions in the previous film. While pounding away at rocks with a hammer, Rambo is paid a visit by Colonel Trautman. Trautman offers Rambo an opportunity to have his prison sentence commuted if he completes a reconnaissance mission in Vietnam. Rambo would be given the task of rescuing abandoned American prisoners of war. Rambo reluctantly accepts the mission, not because he is enthused about serving his government or leaving prison, but because he feels an overwhelming sense of duty and obligation to those whom he served on the front lines with.[83] As

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[80] Micahel J. Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home: POWs, MIAs, and the Unending Vietnam War*, 2.
[81] Micahel J. Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home: POWs, MIAs, and the Unending Vietnam War*, 2.
[82] George P. Cosmatos, dir. *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (Anabasis N.V., released 1985).
[83] George P. Cosmatos, dir. *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (Anabasis N.V., released 1985).

Trautman turns to walk away, Rambo asks Trautman, "Do we get to win this time?", reiterating the notion that veterans of the Vietnam War were betrayed by their inept government.[84]

Upon arriving at a United States compound in Southeast Asia, Rambo meets Marshall Murdock (Charles Napier), a bureaucrat from Washington who claims to be in charge of the special operations mission Rambo has agreed to participate in. After Rambo is given his mission instructions, he is sent off to the jungles of Vietnam in order to locate the American soldiers who were left behind.[85]

As much as Rambo's mission and personal philosophies are a representation of a revenge story against the forces that lost the Vietnam War, Rambo's appearance and fighting style in both *First Blood* and *Rambo First Blood: Part II* produce subtle messages about the American veteran. For one, Rambo is an expert guerilla fighter who prefers to fight with only the most primitive of tactics. Rambo is able to effectively take on hundreds of adversaries through the use of booby traps, bows and arrows, and a superior physical condition. Each of the characteristics portray the American warrior as a survivor who fought against all odds with a seemingly superhuman sense of will power and determination. Additionally, Rambo is not modest about displaying his beautiful body. Throughout *First Blood* and *Rambo First Blood: Part II*, Rambo is usually wearing a minimal amount of clothing putting his toned and muscular physic on full display. He also rarely wears any headgear in order to show-off his long, rich, and wavy black hair. In other words, Rambo's preferred method of fighting style and physical construction portray the American warrior as a hyper-masculine superhuman.[86]

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[84] George P. Cosmatos, dir. *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (Anabasis N.V., released 1985). Quotation found at (3:22—3:27).
[85] George P. Cosmatos, dir. *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (Anabasis N.V., released 1985).
[86] Ted Kotcheff, dir. *First Blood* (Anabasis N.V., released 1982); George P. Cosmatos, dir. *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (Anabasis N.V., released 1985).

After Rambo is able to successfully locate and extract one of the American POWs, Rambo is betrayed by Murdock in that Murdock refuses to rescue Rambo when he reaches the evacuation point. In a heated exchange between Murdock and Trautman, Murdock admits that he knows there are possibly dozens of American POWs left in Vietnam, but Murdock is reluctant to save them because of the possible political repercussions back in Washington. This confession by Murdock undoubtedly perpetuated in the minds of the film's audience the growing claims in the American public that the United States government did not do all it could have done to rescue the POWs at the conclusion of the war, and that there was possibly still some American servicemembers remaining in Vietnamese prison systems. This sequence fed right into Reagan's rhetoric of the United States government being a problem creator not a problem solver.[87] Because Murdock refuses to assist Rambo is his escape from his enemy pursuant, Rambo is captured and placed in a prison camp of his own.[88]

Rambo makes a harrowing escape from the prison camp by helicopter along with the American POWs as he battles both Vietnamese and Russian military combatants. The presence of Russian military forces in the film is a reminder to the audience that Rambo is committed to fighting communism, even if his government is not. Rambo eventually returns to the compound from which he left at the beginning of his mission. Rambo violently confronts Murdock, demanding that he continue the search for the remaining POWs. The movie concludes with Rambo walking off into the distance with Trautman by his side in which Rambo articulates a monologue similar in tone and message that he recited at the conclusion of *First Blood*.[89] When

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[87] Ronald Reagan, "First Inaugural Address of Ronald Reagan," Tuesday, January 20, 1981, Yale Law School, Lillian Goldman Law Library: The Avalon Project, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/reagan1.asp; George P. Cosmatos, dir. *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (Anabasis N.V., released 1985).

[88] George P. Cosmatos, dir. *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (Anabasis N.V., released 1985).

[89] Ted Kotcheff, dir. *First Blood* (Anabasis N.V., released 1982); George P. Cosmatos, dir. *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (Anabasis N.V., released 1985).

Trautman states that Rambo should still love his country even if he feels betrayed by it, Rambo states, "I'd die for it…I want what they (the rescued POWs) want, and every other guy who came over here and spilled his guts and gave everything he had wants; for our country to love us, as much as we love it."[90]

While *The Deer Hunter* and *Apocalypse Now* can be studied as critical indictments on the Vietnam War as a mission that was not worth the sacrifices it required, both *First Blood* and *Rambo First Blood: Part II* can be studied as indictments on the war's policy makers and demonstrators. The character of John Rambo as a betrayed veteran who seeks vengeance against the bureaucrats and protestors that supposedly lost the war is representative of the conservative rearticulation of the Vietnam War and a turning point related to the ways in which the United States was beginning to reimagine itself as a force in geopolitics. In essence, the new lesson of the Vietnam War as demonstrated by John Rambo was that when the United States decides to enter into a war, they should do so completely and unequivocally with a precise mission.[91]

While *First Blood* and *Rambo First Blood: Part II* attempted to re-write the focus of the Vietnam War to be about the betrayed veteran fighting a worthy cause, Oliver Stone's two Vietnam films *Platoon* and *Born on the Fourth of July* produced narratives that were more aligned in tone and message with *The Deer Hunter* and *Apocalypse Now*. This is because Stone's films depicted the veteran as a victim of flawed policy rather than having been betrayed by their own governments.[92]

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[90] George P. Cosmatos, dir. *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (Anabasis N.V., released 1985). Quotation found at (1:31:45—1:32:18).

[91] Michael Cimino, dir. *The Deer Hunter* (Universal Pictures, released 1978); Francis Ford Coppola, dir. *Apocalypse Now* (American Zoetrope, released 1979); Ted Kotcheff, dir. *First Blood* (Anabasis N.V., released 1982); George P. Cosmatos, dir. *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (Anabasis N.V., released 1985); Ronald Reagan, "Address to the Veterans of Foreign Wars Convention in Chicago."

[92] Ted Kotcheff, dir. *First Blood* (Anabasis N.V., released 1982); George P. Cosmatos, dir. *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (Anabasis N.V., released 1985); Oliver Stone, dir. *Platoon* (Metro Goldwyn Mayer, released 1986); Oliver Stone, dir. *Born on the Fourth of July* (Ixtlan Corporation, released 1989); Michael Cimino, dir. *The Deer Hunter*

Platoon chronicles the first tour of duty of a volunteer Vietnam G.I. named Chris Taylor (Charlie Sheen). We first meet Chris as he is seen walking off a passenger plane on an airstrip in southeast Asia surrounded by body bags. It is September of 1967, and the audience is told that Taylor is somewhere near the Cambodian border. Taylor is a soldier in the 25th infantry of Bravo Company which is intensely divided between two ideologically separate groups of servicemen. On the one hand, Taylor encounters Sargent Barnes (Tom Berenger) who is a brutal and relentless soldier. Barnes has amassed a following within the platoon that consists of likeminded soldiers. The other ideological leader within the platoon is Sargent Elias (Willem Dafoe), who executes his duties as a solider and a leader with more empathy and compassion. Elias and his followers within the platoon are also likeminded in their temperaments and behaviors. Taylor soon finds out that Elias and his followers enjoy drinking beer, smoking marijuana, listening to Motown music, and escaping the realities of Vietnam by whatever means necessary. Taylor finds himself to be accepted within Elias's section of the platoon.[93]

One of the most revealing sequences of *Platoon* that demonstrates the devastating consequences of the war for both American soldiers and Vietnamese civilians is when the platoon enters a village hamlet. While the platoon is marching upriver to a hamlet that they have been led to believe could be an enemy stronghold, they find the corpse of a fellow American soldier who has been pinned to a tree and nearly decapitated. This discovery invokes an overwhelming sense of need for retribution for some members of the platoon, and they plan on taking it out on those they will find in the hamlet. Once the platoon reaches the hamlet, they instantly kill the community's livestock and burn their huts. Taylor, who has also become

(Universal Pictures, released 1978); Francis Ford Coppola, dir. *Apocalypse Now* (American Zoetrope, released 1979).
[93] Oliver Stone, dir. *Platoon* (Metro Goldwyn Mayer, released 1986).

overwhelmed with rage, torments a visibly handicapped male civilian by firing his automatic weapon at the civilian's feet. After his fit of rage, Taylor is able to calm himself down only to witness another one of his platoon members, "Bunny", bash in the face of the handicapped civilian with the tail end of his rifle. After Taylor walks away from the murder committed by Bunny, he discovers a few of the platoon soldiers raping a young civilian girl.[94]

Platoon portrays this intense sequence in a way that is poorly reflective of the American soldier and innocently reflective of the Vietnamese civilian. Unlike *The Deer Hunter*, *First Blood*, or *Rambo First Blood: Part II*, *Platoon* creates an image of the American soldier that is more willing to commit indiscriminate violence and creates an image of the Vietnamese civilian as perhaps the most substantial victim of the Vietnam War. *Platoon* effectively forces the audience to think beyond the American soldier as the only victim of the Vietnam War but to also incorporate those who were caught in the crossfire of an unsubstantiated geopolitical conflict. Consequently, by spending a significant portion of the film reflecting on the tragedies endured by the civilians of the Vietnam War, *Platoon* harbors the same sort of ideological critiques of the war as do both *The Deer Hunter* and *Apocalypse Now*. In all three of these films, we are forced to ask ourselves if the stated mission of the Vietnam War was worth the price for which it was paid.[95]

Oliver Stone's second Vietnam film, *Born on the Fourth of July*, chronicles the true story of Ron Kovic (portrayed by Tom Cruise) and his transgression from being an unquestioning patriot to a staunch anti-war activist. Kovic is raised in the Long Island town of Massapequa,

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[94] Oliver Stone, dir. *Platoon* (Metro Goldwyn Mayer, released 1986).
[95] Michael Cimino, dir. *The Deer Hunter* (Universal Pictures, released 1978); Francis Ford Coppola, dir. *Apocalypse Now* (American Zoetrope, released 1979); Ted Kotcheff, dir. *First Blood* (Anabasis N.V., released 1982); George P. Cosmatos, *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (Anabasis N.V., released 1985); Oliver Stone, dir. *Platoon* (Metro Goldwyn Mayer, released 1986).

New York in the late 1950s where he is brought up in a socially conservative family and community. Kovic's upbringing includes being a star on his high school's wrestling team and being with a group of friends that are inseparable. From a young age, it is evident that Kovic harbors a deep desire to serve his country in the same way his father served in World War II.[96] Kovic is enamored by President John F. Kennedy when he watches his inaugural address as a young boy. In his inaugural address, Kennedy stated that the United States would "bear any burden" in order to preserve ideals of western liberty around the globe.[97] Kovic is especially inspired by Kennedy's request that the American people, "ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country."[98] After a United States Marines recruiter visits Kovic's high school, Kovic becomes convinced that joining the Marines is his opportunity to answer President Kennedy's call to action. As if his own convictions were not enough, Kovic receives the full support of his family and friends as he sets forth with his military ambitions.[99]

When we encounter Kovic in Vietnam, it is October of 1967 near the Cua Viet River. At this point, Kovic has already completed one full tour of duty. While protecting his fellow soldiers from approaching enemy combatants, Kovic's squadron commits an accidental discharge against a civilian hut with heavy artillery machine guns, killing the innocent Vietnamese inside. When Kovic and his men enter the hut to try and save any possible survivors, they are ambushed and forced to flee back to the river in order to receive cover. In the chaos of

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[96] Oliver Stone, dir. *Born on the Fourth of July* (Ixtlan Corporation, released 1989).
[97] John F. Kennedy, "Inaugural Address of John F. Kennedy," Friday, January 20, 1961, Yale Law School, Lillian Goldman Law Library: The Avalon Project, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/kennedy.asp; Oliver Stone, dir. *Born on the Fourth of July* (Ixtlan Corporation, released 1989).
[98] John F. Kennedy, "Inaugural Address of John F. Kennedy."; Oliver Stone, dir. *Born on the Fourth of July* (Ixtlan Corporation, released 1989).
[99] Oliver Stone, dir. *Born on the Fourth of July* (Ixtlan Corporation, released 1989).

the retreat, Kovic unintentionally kills one of his own men with rifle fire. By the end of the

mission, Kovic has been responsible for both civilian and friendly casualties.[100]

A few months later, in January of 1968, Kovic is on what seems to be a routine patrol

mission near a Vietnamese hamlet. Kovic and his men are suddenly ambushed for a second time.

The situation immediately takes a turn for the worst when one of the American patrol helicopters

is shot down. Without any support, and being heavily outnumbered, Kovic and his men are left

to fend for themselves against the onslaught of Vietnamese combatants. In the ensuing firefight,

Kovic suffers multiple gunshot wounds to the feet and chest. Kovic survives long enough to

receive a medical evacuation and leaves Vietnam to receive treatment at the Bronx Veterans

Hospital in New York City.[101]

Upon returning to the United States, Kovic witnesses the anti-war movement in full force

as he watches the events of the 1968 Democratic National Convention from a television set in the

hospital. Kovic, who has become permanently paralyzed from the chest down, immediately

voices his disdain for the anti-war protesters at the convention and across the country describing

them as unpatriotic and ungrateful citizens. In this sequence, Kovic is defining American

military patriotism to be within the traditional purview of unwavering support for the cause and

the soldiers who sacrifice for it; the same sort of admiration and patriotism he was raised upon

growing up in Massapequa in the late 1950s.[102]

Kovic's attitudes about Vietnam and his original definition of patriotism begin to change

after he re-engages with his high school love interest, Donna (Kyra Sedgwick). After Kovic gets

released from the veteran's hospital, he goes to visit Donna in Syracuse, New York where she is

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[100] Oliver Stone, dir. *Born on the Fourth of July* (Ixtlan Corporation, released 1989).
[101] Oliver Stone, dir. *Born on the Fourth of July* (Ixtlan Corporation, released 1989).
[102] Oliver Stone, dir. *Born on the Fourth of July* (Ixtlan Corporation, released 1989).

working as an anti-war organizer on college campuses. Kovic attends an anti-war protest being

held at Syracuse University, a protest in which Donna requested Kovic to attend. The protest

turns violent when police forces deem it an unlawful assembly. Kovic is caught in the middle of

the escalating confrontation and is struck multiple times by police.[103]

When Kovic returns to Massapequa form Syracuse, he engages in a heated argument with

his mother one evening about how much he blames her for enticing him to enter into the armed

forces. In an emotional tirade, Kovic expresses his growing anti-war feelings, describing the

atrocities he felt he was forced to commit while in Vietnam and the agony they have caused him.

Furthermore, Kovic questions whether or not the mission in Vietnam was worth the permanent

sacrifice of his body. Kovic then travels to a remote location in Mexico to escape the

unwelcomeness he felt in Massapequa.[104]

Kovic returns from Mexico with a plan to protest against the ongoing Vietnam War as a

member of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) organization. Kovic, and a rag-tag

group of hundreds of other Vietnam veterans, march on the 1972 Republican National

Convention in Miami, Florida. When interviewed by a television reporter as to what exactly

Kovic was advocating for, he articulates a new form of patriotism that dismantles unequivocal

support for any given military conflict and that is defined by dissention. Essentially, Kovic states

that he is protesting at the convention because he feels the most unpatriotic thing to do would be

to continue the war in Vietnam at this stage of the conflict and allow more men to die for what is

a lost cause. This scene demonstrates how far Kovic has come from his firm and adamant beliefs

in the mission before the war. Kovic's actions and visibility propels him into the national

spotlight as one of the most popular Vietnam veterans advocating against the war. *Born on the*

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[103] Oliver Stone, dir. *Born on the Fourth of July* (Ixtlan Corporation, released 1989).
[104] Oliver Stone, dir. *Born on the Fourth of July* (Ixtlan Corporation, released 1989).

Fourth of July concludes with Kovic preparing to take the stage to deliver an address at the 1976 Democratic National Convention in New York City.[105]

While *Born on the Fourth of July* stands out from *The Deer Hunter, Apocalypse Now, First Blood, Rambo First Blood: Part II,* and *Platoon* as a story based on a true historical figure, each of these movies actively criticize or draw negative attention to some component of the Vietnam War. *The Deer Hunter* acknowledges the devastating effects that the Vietnam War had on those who fought it and the communities those veterans hailed from. *Apocalypse Now* demonstrates the chaos of the Vietnam War while also exploring the psychological boundaries of sanity and insanity in such a situation. *First Blood* serves as a revenge story against the government that supposedly abandoned the warrior upon his return to the United States, and *Rambo First Blood: Part II* is a revenge story against the government for not doing all they could for the veterans who were left behind. *Platoon* is able to attach a forgotten level of humanity to the Vietnamese people, as well as demonstrate the corruption and immorality that persisted within American leadership throughout the war. Finally, *Born on the Fourth of July* criticizes the traditional notions of what constitutes American patriotism and redefines patriotism as one in which dissent is essential. In conclusion, each of these films examined the Vietnam War in unique ways that redefined the traditional concepts of a war film. They also served distinct functions in negatively highlighting some component of the realities of those who fought the Vietnam War, and in the cases of *First Blood, Rambo First Blood: Part II* and *Born on the Fourth of July*, articulate revenge stories that conquer the forces that lost the war.[106]

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[105]Oliver Stone, dir. *Born on the Fourth of July* (Ixtlan Corporation, released 1989).
[106] Michael Cimino, dir. *The Deer Hunter* (Universal Pictures, released 1978); Francis Ford Coppola, dir. *Apocalypse Now* (American Zoetrope, released 1979); Ted Kotcheff, dir. *First Blood* (Anabasis N.V., released 1982); George P. Cosmatos, dir. *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (Anabasis N.V., released 1985); Oliver Stone, dir. *Platoon* (Metro Goldwyn Mayer, released 1986); Oliver Stone, dir. *Born on the Fourth of July* (Ixtlan Corporation, released 1989); Robert Eberwein, *The Hollywood War Film*, (West Sussex, Malden, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, copyright 2010) 76—86.

A perpetual theme that ties each of these films together is how they portray the veteran as a victim and a survivor. In *The Deer Hunter*, Michael is a survivor of his psychological traumas even as his community in Clairton crumbles around him. In *Apocalypse Now*, Captain Willard is a survivor of not just the Vietnam War but also the insidious wrath of Colonel Walter Kurtz. In *First Blood*, John Rambo is a survivor on a much more literal level. Throughout the film, Rambo is surviving the terrain of a dense forest and a police pursuit with nothing more than his bowie knife. In *Rambo First Blood: Part II,* Rambo is a survivor of a Vietnamese prison camp while also surviving the conspiracy Murdock plotted against him. In *Platoon*, each of the soldiers in Taylor's platoon constantly talk about how much they are looking forward to leaving Vietnam. In this regard, they are each battling to survive a war that they feel they are being forced to fight. In *Born on the Fourth of July,* Ron Kovic is not just the survivor of the war that paralyzed half his body, but he survived and conquered his own narrowmindedness about the spirt of service and American patriotism.[107]

By April of 1975, the United States had ended its military involvement in Vietnam and Saigon had completely fallen to the communist forces. The War in Vietnam had been a failure on behalf of American foreign policy makers and the United States Congress sought to reel in the executive branch by passing the War Powers Act which prevented the President from having the flexibility to deploy soldiers in the way Lyndon Johnson had.[108] The loss in Vietnam in conjunction with Watergate, the OPEC oil embargo, the unprecedented economic phenomena of stagflation, the Iran hostage crisis, and the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan set the United

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[107] Michael Cimino, dir. *The Deer Hunter* (Universal Pictures, released 1978); Francis Ford Coppola, dir. *Apocalypse Now* (American Zoetrope, released 1979); Ted Kotcheff, dir. *First Blood* (Anabasis N.V., released 1982); George P. Cosmatos, dir. *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (Anabasis N.V., released 1985); Oliver Stone, dir. *Platoon* (Metro Goldwyn Mayer, released 1986); Oliver Stone, dir. *Born on the Fourth of July* (Ixtlan Corporation, released 1989).
[108] Mark Atwood Lawrence, *The Vietnam War: A Concise International History*, 159—168.

States on a trajectory that allowed anti-government conservatives like Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush to control the presidency for twelve consecutive years.[109]

The Iran hostage crisis, and the United States' material support of the Mujahideen in Afghanistan served as the genesis of America's relationship with Islamic fundamentalism. As historian David Farber has argued, despite these interactions, United States foreign policy makers did not see Islamic fundamentalism for what it was. By propping up the extremely unpopular Shah for decades, and aiding jihadists in Afghanistan, the United States chose to view these two events as conflicts within the framework and logic of the Cold War instead of choosing to understand Islamic fundamentalism as its own growing geopolitical force.[110]

Between the Iran hostage crisis and the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the United States had asserted its military and economic influence in the Middle East but was yet to take the growing jihadist movement seriously. For the United States, all that mattered was limiting Iran's influence in the region and asserting their own. As a result, when Saddam Hussein went to war with Iran, the United States openly supported Iraq by selling weapons and providing military intelligence to Hussein's forces. However, American support for Iraq only lasted as long as it was advantageous. Therefore, when Saddam Hussein threatened the United States' oil partner, Saudi Arabia, by invading Kuwait in August of 1990, the United States led the retaliation and drove Iraq from Kuwait in January of 1991.[111] All the while, Osama bin-Laden's organization, al-Qaeda, grew into an international terrorist threat that had been connected to attacks around the globe including the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, the 1996 truck

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[109] Meg Jacobs, "The Conservative Struggle and the Energy Crisis," 197—209; Julian E. Zelizer, "Conservatives, Carter, and the Politics of National Security," 267—282.
[110] David Farber, *The Iran Hostage Crisis and America's First Encounter with Radical Islam: Taken Hostage* (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, copyright 2005), 187—190.
[111] Michael A. Reynolds, "The Wars' Entangled Roots: Regional Realities and Washington's Vision," in *Understanding the U.S. Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan*, ed. Beth Baily and Richard H. Immerman (New York, London: New York University Press, copyright 2015), 30—35.

bombing of American soldiers in Khobar, Saudi Arabia, the 1998 truck bombing of United States embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, and the 2000 attack on the USS Cole warship.[112] President Bill Clinton acknowledged bin-Laden was a threat to the United States during his presidency, but Clinton never committed to allowing the Central Intelligence Agency to assassinate bin-Laden.[113]

After the attacks on September 11, 2001, the United States had finally seen Islamic extremism for what it was; a force that could use airplanes as weapons to inflict thousands of casualties on the American homeland. While the Cold War had ended almost a decade before, the United States was now forced to address a newer, bolder, and more elusive adversary. --

One of the first popular films that dealt with the War on Terrorism was Kathryn Bigelow's 2008 movie, *The Hurt Locker*. *The Hurt Locker* portrays the story of a three-man tactical bomb squad over the course of their deployment to Baghdad, Iraq in 2004. After the traumatic death of their squad leader, Sergeant Matt Thompson (Guy Pearce), Specialist Owen Eldridge (Brian Geraghty) and Sergeant JT Sanborn (Anthony Mackie) are assigned a new squad leader who has recently been transferred from Afghanistan by the name of Staff Sergeant William James (Jeremy Renner). As the team goes on more and more bomb squad missions, the stakes and dangers of each mission are dramatically heightened, portraying a picture of Iraq that is both physically and psychologically dangerous.[114]

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[112] "TIMELINE- Major Attacks by al-Qaeda," *Reuters*, May 2, 2011, https://www.reuters.com/article/idINIndia-56711920110502

[113] Glenn Kessler, "Bill Clinton and the missed opportunities to kill Osama bin Laden," *The Washington Post* (Blogs), February 16, 2016, accessed through DePauw University ProQuest database, https://search-proquest-com.duproxy.palni.edu/washingtonpost/docview/1765510442/8FBDE0AF38184EBEPQ/2?accountid=10478

[114] Kathryn Bigelow, dir. *The Hurt Locker* (First Light Production, released 2009).

Over the course of the film, Eldridge, Sanborn, and James bond closer to one another. Each near-death experience allows them to trust and rely on one another. In one sequence of the film, the three men are caught in a standoff with Iraqi snipers that lasts for hours. Eldridge is visibly the most anxious, and James risks his tactical position to do what he can to calm Eldridge. The three men prevail from the standoff after having worked with one another with a level of trust that could only have been achieved by their previous experiences together. This sequence clearly portrays the American soldier as one that is committed to the men he serves with even if he is not necessarily committed to the mission itself.[115]

In one of the final sequences of the film, we are able to clearly see the ways in which *The Hurt Locker* connects themes of survival to soldiers' experience in warfare. In what can be considered the climax of the film, the bomb squad is sent to assist a man who has an explosive device attached to his torso. The man claims that he was forced to put it on and begs the Americans to help him remove it. Sanborn adamantly objects to James's proposition that the team should move in and help the man asserting that in all likelihood he has a detonator on him or a timer that will ignite the explosion automatically. James dismisses Sanborn's objection and moves in to do what he can to save the man with the explosive device. When James reaches the man, he learns that he only has a few minutes to do what he can or else the device will explode, possibly killing James and the man wearing the device. After attempting to pry the vest off the man with a massive set of pliers, James realizes there is nothing he can do to save the man with the amount time left before his vest detonates. James is able to escape the blast range with only seconds to spare.[116]

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[115] Kathryn Bigelow, dir. *The Hurt Locker* (First Light Production, released 2009).
[116] Kathryn Bigelow, dir. *The Hurt Locker* (First Light Production, released 2009).

As the team is riding back to base in their Humvee, both James and Sanborn are terribly disturbed by the series of events that had just transpired. Sanborn opens up to James in a way that had not been visible before. Sanborn, who had defined himself as a masculine soldier who refused to allow emotions influence his productivity, breaks down and cries in front of James. Sanborn relays to James how badly he wants to live, how badly he wants to have a son, how much he hates Iraq and how nobody will remember him if he dies there. Sanborn then tells James that this tour of duty will be his last, and that he never wants to ever have to come back to Iraq again.[117]

This last sequence between James and Sanborn defines the central message of the movie; the American mission in Iraq carries a devastating toll on the physical and psychological well-being of those who fight it. This theme of enduring trauma from experience in warfare resembles the same sort of message that can be derived from *The Deer Hunter*. In the words of *Los Angeles Times* movie critic, Kenneth Turan, *The Hurt Locker* taken as a whole, "asks difficult questions about heroism's costs and demands, about what war does to soldiers, and about damage that may be impossible to rectify or repair."[118]

In addition to the complex realities of Iraq, *The Hurt Locker* portrays the American adversaries (in this case the Iraqis) as characters of personal, emotional, and ideological complexity. In the film, some of the Iraqis are depicted as enemy combatants willing to go to great lengths to kill the American soldiers, but there are also depictions of Iraqis who are interested in appeasing, befriending, and sympathizing with the Americans. For example, in one

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[117] Kathryn Bigelow, dir. *The Hurt Locker* (First Light Production, released 2009).
[118] Kenneth Turan, "MOVIE REVIEW; Deep into the kill zone; Like the explosives they defuse, 'Hurt Locker's' soldiers hit with potent force," *Los Angeles Times*, June 26, 2009, accessed through DePauw University *ProQuest* database, https://search-proquest-com.duproxy.palni.edu/latimes/docview/422285584/C60253DCCD214F7DPQ/17?accountid=10478; Kathryn Bigelow, dir. *The Hurt Locker* (First Light Production, released 2009); Michael Cimino, dir. *The Deer Hunter* (Universal Pictures, released 1978).

of the early sequences of the film, James befriends an Iraqi boy named Beckham who sells

DVDs to soldiers on the American military base. James and Beckham develop a personal

friendship, as James supports the boy financially by purchasing DVDs as well as plays soccer

with him. Later, when James believes that Beckham was killed by Iraqi militants, James violates

military protocols and leaves his base in the middle of the night in order to try and single-

handedly seek retribution for Beckham's death. A deranged James breaks into an Iraqi

professor's house and points his gun at an innocent man whom James believes had something to

do with Beckham's death. James leaves to return to base ashamed of his actions. In short,

Beckham is portrayed as a witty and playful child who is interested in befriending an older

American soldier. James values this relationship so much that he goes to great lengths to seek

justice for Beckham's supposed death. In this way, Iraqis are not just depicted as enemy

combatants but as individuals some of whom want nothing to do with the war.[119]

Additionally, some Iraqis are portrayed as victims of other Iraqi combatants. This

character depiction is best represented in one of the final sequences of the film, where an Iraqi

man has an explosive vest attached to him and is begging the American soldiers to help him take

it off. It is unclear if this man had put on this vest willingly and then had a change of heart, or if

this vest was forced upon him. Either way, the fact that he believes the Americans are the only

people who have the ability to save his life suggests that some Iraqi civilians have fallen victim

to the violent actions and decisions taken by other Iraqis.[120]

Both of these depictions of Iraqi peoples in *The Hurt Locker* differ dramatically from the

depictions of the Vietnamese peoples in the films previously analyzed related to the Vietnam

War. In almost every film except for *Platoon*, Vietnamese combatants and civilians are portrayed

[119] Kathryn Bigelow, dir. *The Hurt Locker* (First Light Production, released 2009).
[120] Kathryn Bigelow, dir. *The Hurt Locker* (First Light Production, released 2009).

as insidious, violent, unrelenting, and hyper-sexualized characters with little complexity. In contrast, *The Hurt Locker* at least attempts to insert the struggles, conflicts, and personalities within certain Iraqi characters that ultimately serve the American-oriented storyline.[121]

In May of 2011, Osama bin-Laden was killed by American military forces in Pakistan.[122] Bin-Laden's death sent an instant surge of relief, closure, patriotism, and validation to Americans at a time in which the War on Terrorism was appearing to be a scarring political mistake.[123] In the time approaching bin-Laden's death, it had been almost a decade since 9/11 with little to no justice yet to be served to its main perpetrators, Afghanistan had grown so unstable that a massive troop surge had become necessary, and United States forces were preparing to leave Iraq in much less stable condition than when they entered.[124] In other words, the news that Osama bin-Laden had been killed by the bullet of an American made for an inspiring revenge story that came at a time when the War on Terrorism did not seem to be producing any productive results.

Kathryn Bigelow adapted this self-made revenge story into a Hollywood picture for her 2012 film *Zero Dark Thirty*. *Zero Dark Thirty* centers around a woman who goes by the name of "Maya" (Jessica Chastain) and her decade long mission to track down Osama bin-Laden in the wake of 9/11. The character of Maya is a CIA agent and is based on an actual person. Since this

[121] Kathryn Bigelow, dir. *The Hurt Locker* (First Light Production, released 2009); Michael Cimino, dir. *The Deer Hunter* (Universal Pictures, released 1978); Francis Ford Coppola, dir. *Apocalypse Now* (American Zoetrope, released 1979); Ted Kotcheff, dir. *First Blood* (Anabasis N.V., released 1982); George P. Cosmatos, dir. *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (Anabasis N.V., released 1985); Oliver Stone, dir. *Platoon* (Metro Goldwyn Mayer, released 1986); Oliver Stone, dir. *Born on the Fourth of July* (Ixtlan Corporation, released 1989).

[122] Peter Baker, Helene Cooper, and Mark Mazzetti, "Bin Laden is Dead, Obama Says," *The New York Times*, May 1, 2011, https://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/02/world/asia/osama-bin-laden-is-killed.html

[123] Alessandra Stanley, "As Word Spread About Bin Landen's Death, It Became a TV Moment," *The New York Times*, May 3, 2011, https://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/03/arts/television/bin-ladens-death-how-it-played.html

[124] Council on Foreign Relations, "The U.S. War in Afghanistan: 1999-2021," accessed February 24, 2021, https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-war-afghanistan ; Council on Foreign Relations, "The Iraq War: 2003-2011."

movie dramatized and depicted events that are highly classified government secrets, none of the characters who are based off of real figures go by their actual names.[125]

  Zero Dark Thirty begins with the tragic events of 9/11 and chronicles the incredible ups and downs endured by the United States intelligence community in their effort to track down bin-Laden. Maya as a character is an incredibly resilient person who is willing to break the rules (and sometimes international law) in order to find the man she is looking for. One of the first sequences of the movie is an interrogation scene in which Maya observes her intelligence colleagues torture a Pakistani combatant. While Maya is visibly disturbed by these interrogation tactics, she is willing to look past them if her colleagues succeed in extracting the information she wants. This early sequence of the film depicts this particular detainee endure waterboarding, acts of sexual humiliation, sleep deprivation, and being forcibly confined to a small wooden box. As the film progresses, more scenes of American intelligence officers torturing their prisoners are presented. While *Zero Dark Thirty* does not go as far as to necessarily glorify or endorse methods of torture, their constant presence throughout film does depict these methods as an integral part in the intelligence gathering process in the search for Osama bin-Laden.[126]

  The most satisfying component of *Zero Dark Thirty* as a revenge story is the resilience Maya demonstrates in the face of incredible setbacks. While it takes Maya almost ten years to locate bin-Laden, she is racing against the clock to find bin-Laden before he executes the next major international terrorist attack. At four critical points throughout the film, it appears that bin-Laden and al-Qaeda are winning this dueling manhunt. *Zero Dark Thirty* graphically portrays four terrorist attacks that occurred between 2001 and 2011 which serve to enhance the urgency of Maya's mission. The first of such depicted attacks is the 2004 shooting of a hotel in Khobar,

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[125] Kathryn Bigelow, dir. *Zero Dark Thirty* (Annapurna Pictures, released 2012).
[126] Kathryn Bigelow, dir. *Zero Dark Thirty* (Annapurna Pictures, released 2012).

Saudi Arabia in which the gunman was exclusively hunting non-Muslims and westerners.[127] The second of such depicted attacks is the 2005 bombing of a double-decker bus and three subway trains in London that killed thirty-seven people.[128] The third of such depicted attacks is the 2008 bombing of the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad, Pakistan that killed at least forty people.[129] Finally, the fourth of such depicted attacks is the 2009 suicide bombing in Khost, Afghanistan that killed multiple C.I.A. operatives.[130]

Through an incredible demonstration of persistence, intellect, and courage, Maya is able to piece together Osama bin-Laden's whereabouts to a large compound in Pakistan. The climax of the film is a lengthy depiction of the military operation conducted on bin-Laden's compound that ultimately led to his death. In the final scene of the movie, after it is confirmed that bin-Laden has been killed, Maya is seen breaking down into tears as if the death of bin-Laden has been a validation of her life's work and full retribution has finally been achieved.[131]

While *Zero Dark Thirty* was intended to be a film based on true events, it is a revenge story framed in a way that both comforts and unsettles its audience. *Zero Dark Thirty* is comforting in that the audience achieves the resolution it hopes for, that being the death of Osama bin-Laden. On the other hand, *Zero Dark Thirty* unsettles the audience because it forces them to witness the incredibly vile acts of torture and inhumane tactics employed by the United

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[127] Kathryn Bigelow, dir. *Zero Dark Thirty* (Annapurna Pictures, released 2012); Neil MacFarquhar, "Saudi Commandos Free Hostages, Ending Standoff With Militants," *The New York Times*, May 30, 2004, https://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/30/international/middleeast/saudi-commandos-free-hostages-ending-standoff-with.html

[128] Kathryn Bigelow, dir. *Zero Dark Thirty* (Annapurna Pictures, released 2012); Alan Cowell, "Subway and Bus Blasts in London Kill at Least 37," *The New York Times*, July 8, 2005, https://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/08/world/europe/subway-and-bus-blasts-in-london-kill-at-least-37.html

[129] Kathryn Bigelow, dir. *Zero Dark Thirty* (Annapurna Pictures, released 2012); Carlotta Gall, "Bombing at Hotel in Pakistan Kills at Least 40," *The New York Times*, September 20, 2008, https://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/21/world/asia/21islamabad.html

[130] Kathryn Bigelow, dir. *Zero Dark Thirty* (Annapurna Pictures, released 2012); Alissa J. Rubin and Mark Mazzetti, "Suicide Bomber Killed C.I.A. Operatives," *The New York Times*, December 30, 2009, https://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/31/world/asia/31khost.html

[131] Kathryn Bigelow, dir. *Zero Dark Thirty* (Annapurna Pictures, released 2012).

States intelligence community in order to find Osama bin-Laden. In other words, the movie has a satisfying ending that produces closure, but the audience is also forced to ask itself whether the ends justified the means. This complex construction of a revenge film taking place in the context of a broader military conflict is far more nuanced and complicated than the plot structures of *First Blood* and *Rambo First Blood: Part II*. In *First Blood* and *Rambo First Blood: Part II*, John Rambo was the unequivocal protagonist; every decision he made to retaliate against the forces that sought to capture or eliminate him were justified. On the other hand, Maya and the United States intelligence community are certainly the protagonists in *Zero Dark Thirty*, but they are far more complex characters with visible flaws and insidious personas.[132] Three days after 9/11, President George W. Bush claimed at the gathering of the National Day of Prayer & Remembrance Service that the United States' unequivocal mission was to rid the world of evil, and fight terrorist networks with the hand of righteous justice. President Bush stated, "Just three days removed from these events, Americans do not yet have the distance of history, but our responsibility to history is already clear: to answer these attacks and rid the world of evil."[133] However, President Bush's definition of fighting a "good" war was one that had to occur on his own terms, considering how quick he and his administration were to dismiss international laws in order to advance their own foreign policy goals.[134] Considering this, *Zero Dark Thirty*'s outspoken and productive depictions of torture as an intelligence mechanism present the audience with a portrayal of the War on Terrorism that was not as clear as President Bush

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[132] Kathryn Bigelow, dir. *Zero Dark Thirty* (Annapurna Pictures, released 2012); Ted Kotcheff, dir. *First Blood* (Anabasis N.V., released 1982); George P. Cosmatos, dir. *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (Anabasis N.V., released 1985).

[133] George W. Bush, "Remarks at the National Day of Prayer & Remembrance Service," delivered September 14, 2001 at the Episcopal National Cathedral, American Rhetoric: Rhetoric of 9-11, last updated September 10, 2017, https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/gwbush911prayer&memorialaddress.htm ; Jean Edward Smith, *Bush,* 226—227.

[134] Jean Edward Smith, *Bush*, 224—227.

claimed it was; the War on Terrorism needed to be fought with evil tactics in order to rid the world of evildoers.[135]

While *The Hurt Locker* and *Zero Dark Thirty* presented the War on Terrorism to be a complex arena in which the boundaries between righteousness and evil are blurred, certain films that were later released attempted to define the War on Terrorism in much clearer terms. Both Peter Berg's 2014 film *Lone Survivor,* and Clint Eastwood's 2015 film *American Sniper* chronicled the stories of individual American soldiers and their enduring battles against the perpetual enemies within the War on Terrorism.[136]

Lone Survivor depicts the true story of "Operation Red Wings", a 2005 special operations mission intended to kill or capture a Taliban leader named Ahmad Shah in the mountains of Afghanistan. The four-man team that is assigned the task of locating Shah in a nearby village consists of four highly specialized Navy SEALs named Marcus Luttrell (Mark Wahlberg), Michael Murphey (Taylor Kitsch), Danny Dietz (Emile Hirsch), and Matt Axelson (Ben Foster).[137]

When the four-man SEAL team is able to reach their vantage point on a hill above the suspected village to look for evidence of Shah's whereabouts, the mission is immediately compromised when local shepherds inadvertently stumble upon the SEALs. The SEAL's immediately restrain the shepherds and are left with the decision of whether or not to kill them and face the prospects of a court-martial or release them and risk the shepherds acting as

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[135] Kathryn Bigelow, dir. *Zero Dark Thirty* (Annapurna Pictures, released 2012); George W. Bush, "Remarks at the National Day of Prayer & Remembrance Service."

[136] Kathryn Bigelow, dir. *The Hurt Locker* (First Light Production, released 2009); Kathryn Bigelow, dir. *Zero Dark Thirty* (Annapurna Pictures, released 2012); Peter Berg, dir. *Lone Survivor* (Film 44, released 2014); Clint Eastwood, dir. *American Sniper* (Mad Chance, released 2015).

[137] Spec Ops Magazine, "Operation Red Wings: The darkest day in history of Navy SEALs," most recently accessed on April 13-18, 2021, https://special-ops.org/operation-red-wings-darkest-day-navy-seals/ ; Peter Berg, dir. *Lone Survivor* (Film 44, released 2014).

informants to the hundreds of Taliban fighters in the village below. In this moral dilemma, the SEALs decide to release the shepherds and abort the mission. However, with a very inconsistent radio connection, it is unlikely that an evacuation team will make it to their location anytime soon.[138]

As the SEAL team awaits a response from their base, they realize that the shepherds they released had done exactly what the SEALs hoped they would not; inform the Taliban fighters in the village of their presence. In a matter of minutes, the four-man SEAL team is surrounded by hundreds of Taliban fighters from all sides and get pinned down by a barrage of gunfire. As the fighting ensues, the SEALs are required to make a series of movements in order to create as much distance between them and the growing Taliban force. With seemingly little regard for the health of their limbs, the SEALs jump off a series of cliffs into the valley below resulting in broken bones and gashing wounds. Eventually, the Taliban forces prove to be too much to handle, and Murphey, Dietz, and Axelson are all viciously killed in the firefight. Luttrell is the only one who survives the firefight and is forced to flee into the dense Afghanistan wilderness with no weapon and a seemingly endless number of injuries. Luttrell is rescued by a group of local villagers who resist the Taliban. Luttrell, reluctant to put his life in the hands of Afghan villagers, realizes that he is left with no other option but to accept their assistance. The local Afghans take Luttrell to their village where they nurse him back to health.[139]

In one of the final sequences of the film, the Taliban militants enter the village in search of Luttrell with plans to publicly execute him. In a harrowing gesture of compassion and resistance, the villagers take up arms and defend Luttrell against the invading Taliban fighters.

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[138] Peter Berg, dir. *Lone Survivor* (Film 44, released 2014).
[139] Peter Berg, dir. *Lone Survivor* (Film 44, released 2014).

Luttrell joins the battle with the villagers, and they are able to force the Taliban militants to retreat back into the mountains.[140]

One of the central relationships in *Lone Survivor* is the compassionate and cooperative relationship between the American soldiers and the Afghan villagers who resist the Taliban. While it is true that alliances of local fighters contributed to the American war effort, it is also true that American soldiers had the potential to be just as violent against civilians in Afghanistan as they were in Vietnam. It is worth noting that *Lone Survivor* was released around the same time as the high-profile case of Staff Sargent Robert Bales. In 2012, Bales mercilessly slaughtered 16 innocent Afghan civilians including men, women, and children. Bales was convicted in a court of law and sentenced to life in prison for his single-handed massacre. *Lone Survivor* easily glosses over the fact that American soldiers have the potential to kill righteous civilians for their own pleasure in Afghanistan despite the high-profile case of Bales.[141]

Lone Survivor stands in contrast to *Zero Dark Thirty* and *The Hurt Locker* in that it portrays the War on Terrorism to be a clearly defined battle between good and evil. In *Lone Survivor*, the Taliban militants are depicted as a ruthless and bloodthirsty band of monsters who will go to whatever lengths in order to eliminate all western presence from Afghanistan and even torture Afghan civilians who choose to resist their influence. In sharp contrast, the American soldiers in the film are portrayed as warriors of righteousness as demonstrated by the scene in which the SEALs choose to release the shepherds at the risk of getting themselves caught. Furthermore, *Lone Survivor* portrays the factions of anti-Taliban Afghans to not just be actively

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[140] Peter Berg, dir. *Lone Survivor* (Film 44, released 2014).
[141] "Soldier Sentenced to Life Without Parole for Killing 16 Afghans," *The New York Times (Online)*, August 23, 2013. Accessed through DePauw University *ProQuest* database, https://search.proquest.com/nytimes/docview/2214843509/205AE66F93644ADDPQ/21?accountid=10478 ; Peter Berg, dir. *Lone Survivor* (Film 44, released 2014).

resistant to the Taliban but are also capable of recognizing that the United States operatives are the force that stands on the side of their interests.[142]

Clint Eastwood's 2015 film *American Sniper* similarly portrays the War on Terrorism as a clear battle between good and evil. *American Sniper* depicts the life of an American Navy SEAL named Chris Kyle (Bradley Cooper).[143] Kyle is portrayed as a humble and simpleminded man from Texas who grows up with dreams of becoming a bull-riding cowboy. Kyle's ambitions and life purpose begin to change when he sees the shocking images of the 1998 United States embassy bombings in Tanzania and Kenya.[144] Shortly thereafter, Kyle decides to go through the Navy SEAL training program in order to fulfill what he describes to be an obligation of service. After Kyle is certified as a Navy SEAL, he receives specialized training in utilizing a sniper rifle.[145]

Kyle is eventually sent to Fallujah, Iraq with his SEAL team in order to destabilize the growing insurgency. On one of his first missions as an overwatch sniper, Kyle makes his first kill in which he shoots a young boy in the chest who was supposedly carrying a grenade. After killing the child, Kyle then kills a young woman who attempted to recover the grenade the boy dropped. Kyle is deeply disturbed by the realty of not just the fact that he took the life of a child, but that his duty as an overwatch sniper may require him to make more intensely difficult decisions in the future.[146]

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[142] Kathryn Bigelow, dir. *The Hurt Locker* (First Light Production, released 2009); Kathryn Bigelow, dir. *Zero Dark Thirty* (Annapurna Pictures, released 2012); Peter Berg, dir. *Lone Survivor* (Film 44, released 2014).
[143] Clint Eastwood, dir. *American Sniper* (Mad Chance, released 2015).
[144] Clint Eastwood, dir. *American Sniper* (Mad Chance, released 2015); "East African Embassy Bombings," FBI: History, accessed February 16, 2021 through April 15, 2021, https://www.fbi.gov/history/famous-cases/east-african-embassy-bombings
[145] Clint Eastwood, dir. *American Sniper* (Mad Chance, released 2015).
[146] Clint Eastwood, dir. *American Sniper* (Mad Chance, released 2015).

As Kyle begins to go on more missions as on overwatch sniper, he develops a popular

reputation amongst his fellow soldiers as well as the Iraqi insurgents. To the Americans, Kyle is

known as "the legend" for the record-breaking number of confirmed kills he adds to his name.

To the Iraqi insurgents, Kyle is their worst nightmare. The insurgents go so far as to offer large

sums of rewards for anyone who can kill Kyle.[147]

Kyle ultimately serves four tours of duty in Iraq, and one particular scene in *American

Sniper* that takes place during the fourth tour portrays Kyle in ways that bear striking

resemblances to the ethos of the John Rambo character. In the sequence, Kyle and his SEAL

team are on a rooftop providing covering fire for ground forces below. The ground team begins

receiving enemy sniper fire in which Kyle is able to locate the sniper at a distance of two

thousand one hundred meters from his location. In a remarkable demonstration of almost

superhuman marksmanship, Kyle is able kill the enemy sniper with one bullet. Shortly after Kyle

eliminates the sniper, him and his SEAL team are ambushed by hundreds of enemy combatants

from all sides of the building in which they are situated. Kyle and his team are able to narrowly

evade death by engaging in an intense firefight as they wait for an evacuation team. This

sequence resembles the actions of John Rambo in that it highlights the abilities of one man to

perform at exceptionally productive and dramatic levels in the face of immediate combat.[148]

When Kyle completes his last tour of duty, he returns home to his wife and children.

However, Kyle is unable to shake the trauma he endured after four tours of combat duty. Kyle is

distant from his family, consumes alcohol at unhealthy levels, has several breakdowns, and

exhibits violent behavior. Kyle's wife, Taya (Sienna Miller), convinces him to seek help at a

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[147] Clint Eastwood, dir. *American Sniper* (Mad Chance, releeased 2015); Eliana Dockterman, "The True Story Behind *American Sniper*," *TIME*, January 16, 2015, https://time.com/3672295/american-sniper-fact-check/
[148] Clint Eastwood, dir. *American Sniper* (Mad Chance, released 2015); Ted Kotcheff, dir. *First Blood* (Anabasis N.V., released 1982); George P. Cosmatos, dir. *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (Anabasis N.V., released 1985).

veteran's hospital. Kyle slowly begins to learn how to cope with his PTSD, and finds comfort in

assisting other veterans who are also suffering with mental injures. Kyle begins to return to his

old self when he is suddenly murdered by a deranged veteran in February of 2013.[149]

While Chris Kyle is a character that is deeply challenged by the realities of warfare and

occasionally lashes out at others because of the pressures brought by those challenges, Kyle is

clearly portrayed in *American Sniper* as not just a righteous person but also as an American

inspiration. Kyle's depicted ability to discern between right and wrong establishes him as a

soldier of justice within the War on Terrorism. Furthermore, Kyle's elite soldier skills give him a

sort of "god-like" persona that is recognized by the audience and the other characters in the film.

Kyle's masculinity, assertiveness, and ferocity bear striking resemblance to John Rambo creating

a through line between the two films that recognizes the individual warrior as the true victim of

convoluted wars.[150]

Jason Hall's 2017 film *Thank You for Your Service* elaborates on the enduring theme of

Hollywood war films that depict the warrior as the true victim of warfare. *Thank You for Your*

Service focuses on the psychological distress endured by veterans upon completion of their

service. In this regard, *Thank You for Your Service* is very similar to *The Deer Hunter* in that the

experiences within warfare serve as a secondary theme to the personal grievances that the

characters endure as a result of their warfare experiences.[151]

Thank You for Your Service centers on the story of Adam Schumann (Miles Teller) a

veteran who has recently returned to his home in rural Kansas from Iraq. Schumann returns

[149] Clint Eastwood, dir. *American Sniper* (Mad Chance, released 2015).
[150] Clint Eastwood, dir. *American Sniper* (Mad Chance, released 2015); Ted Kotcheff, dir. *First Blood* (Anabasis N.V., released 1982); George P. Cosmatos, dir. *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (Anabasis N.V., released 1985).
[151] Jason Hall, dir. *Thank You for Your Service* (DreamWorks Pictures, released 2017); Michael Cimino, dir. *The Deer Hunter* (Universal Pictures, released 1978).

home with two of his military friends Tausolo Aieti (Beulah Koale) and Billy Waller (Joe Cole).

It does not take long for the three men to experience devastating symptoms of PTSD. A few days

after returning to their homes in Kansas, Waller commits suicide and Aieti begins using narcotic

substances. At one point, Schumann drives his truck out to a remote parking lot and places the

barrel of a shotgun in his mouth but at the last moment decides not to pull the trigger. Aieti and

Schumann make a pact that they will seek treatment together. However, both men learn that

patients needing psychological treatment are not highly prioritized at the veteran's hospital. For

Aeiti and Schumann, their rejection of treatment is shown as a failure of leadership and a sense

of betrayal on behalf of the very same leaders who asked them to go to war in the first place.[152]

Portraying the government as the institution that betrayed Aieti and Schumann in their

efforts to seek psychological treatment upon returning home from Iraq perpetuates themes that

connect war films of the Vietnam era to films of the War on Terrorism in that the veteran is in

one way or another the true victim of poor leadership decisions. By placing the veteran as the

victim, Hollywood films of both eras are able to give artistic substance to anti-war arguments. In

other words, after watching these films, audiences might wonder to themselves that it might be

true there are evils in the world, but are those evils worth addressing if veterans are going to be

carrying physical and psychological scars that have the potential to ruin their lives?[153]

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[152] Jason Hall, dir. *Thank You for Your Service* (DreamWorks Pictures, released 2017).

[153] Michael Cimino, dir. *The Deer Hunter* (Universal Pictures, released 1978); Francis Ford Coppola, dir. *Apocalypse Now* (American Zoetrope, released 1979); Ted Kotcheff, dir. *First Blood* (Anabasis N.V., released 1982); George P. Cosmatos, dir. *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (Anabasis N.V., released 1985); Oliver Stone, dir. *Platoon* (Metro Goldwyn Mayer, released 1986); Oliver Stone, dir. *Born on the Fourth of July* (Ixtlan Corporation, released 1989); Kathryn Bigelow, dir. *The Hurt Locker* (First Light Production, released 2009); Kathryn Bigelow, dir. *Zero Dark Thirty* (Annapurna Pictures, released 2012); Peter Berg, dir. *Lone Survivor* (Film 44, released 2014); Clint Eastwood, dir. *American Sniper* (Mad Chance, released 2015); Jason Hall, dir. *Thank You for Your Service* (DreamWorks Pictures, released 2017).

The Hollywood genre of "war films," have evolved in significant ways in relation to their cinematography and individual messaging since their inception. *Los Angeles Times* film critic Patrick Goldstein has explained, "In John Wayne's day…war movies served as an inspiration, both for the men in battle as well as the folks rooting them on back home. It was a simpler time, when it wasn't so hard to separate the right cause from the wrong one," adding, "…when today's Hollywood takes a shot at capturing war on screen, the moral lines are less distinct. Audiences see, up close and personal, the brutality of conflict. In every film, the mood is pretty much the same - even when it's time to sing 'God Bless America,' despite the prideful lyrics, it is a serenade full of sorrow."[154]

The themes and messages that were evident in Vietnam War movies recycled themselves into films that dealt with The War on Terrorism, placing a strong emphasis on the individual veteran. As demonstrated by *The Hurt Locker*, *Zero Dark Thirty*, *Lone Survivor*, *American Sniper*, and *Thank You for Your Service*, arguments and depictions of trauma, revenge, and survival built onto the broader political statements of betrayal and ignorance that were established in the films of the previous generation. Like the Vietnam War, the American missions in Iraq and Afghanistan progressively became more unpopular as they dragged on.[155] Films related to the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan seemed to harness these public notions of

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[154] Patrick Goldstein, "THE BIG PICTURE; Battle worthy; 'The Hurt Locker' is in the tradition of war films that took the top Oscar," *Los Angeles Times*, March 2, 2010, accessed through DePauw University *ProQuest* database, https://search.proquest.com/latimes/docview/422296447/fulltext/EC806D6056A441D7PQ/1?accountid=10478

[155] William L. Lunch and Peter W. Sperlich, "American Public Opinion and the War in Vietnam," 43; Gary C. Jacobson, "A Tale of Two Wars: Public Opinion on the U.S. Military Interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq," 590; Michael Cimino, dir. *The Deer Hunter* (Universal Pictures, released 1978); Francis Ford Coppola, dir. *Apocalypse Now* (American Zoetrope, released 1979); Ted Kotcheff, dir. *First Blood* (Anabasis N.V., released 1982); George P. Cosmatos, dir. *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (Anabasis N.V., released 1985); Oliver Stone, dir. *Platoon* (Metro Goldwyn Mayer, released 1986); Oliver Stone, dir. *Born on the Fourth of July* (Ixtlan Corporation, released 1989); Kathryn Bigelow, dir. *The Hurt Locker* (First Light Production, released 2009); Kathryn Bigelow, dir. *Zero Dark Thirty* (Annapurna Pictures, released 2012); Peter Berg, dir. *Lone Survivor* (Film 44, 2014); Clint Eastwood, dir. *American Sniper* (Mad Chance, 2015); Jason Hall, dir. *Thank You for Your Service* (DreamWorks Pictures, released 2017).

the war and either separated the individual veteran from them or re-narrativized the war in ways that suggested the ends justified elongated means. As is evident with the war films of both eras, the connecting themes, messages, and depictions show that in the realm of Hollywood film, the Vietnam War and the War on Terrorism can be thought of as continuations of one another. Of course, not all the stories are the same, but these films show that film directors of both eras were able to approach the conflicts in ways that presented a continuation of diverse and sometimes conflicting perspectives.[156]

Sociologist Maurice Halbwachs has observed that memories themselves are not individual but a part of a collective sociological synthesis, stating, "All memories, however personal they may be and even if witnessed by only one person…are linked to ideas we share with many others, to people, groups, places, dates, words and linguistic forms, theories and ideas, that is, with the whole material and moral framework of the society of which we are part…These references enable us to determine with increasing precision the contours of a previously isolated past event."[157] Films are a part of our collective experience and therefore part of our collective memories. How we choose to remember the Vietnam War and the War on Terrorism can be strongly influenced by the narratives, protagonists, antagonists, dialogues and images that we see on the big screen. It does not necessarily matter how accurate or inaccurate

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[156] Michael Cimino, dir. *The Deer Hunter* (Universal Pictures, released 1978); Francis Ford Coppola, dir. *Apocalypse Now* (American Zoetrope, released 1979); Ted Kotcheff, dir. *First Blood* (Anabasis N.V., released 1982); George P. Cosmatos, dir. *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (Anabasis N.V., released 1985); Oliver Stone, dir. *Platoon* (Metro Goldwyn Mayer, released 1986); Oliver Stone, dir. *Born on the Fourth of July* (Ixtlan Corporation, released 1989); Kathryn Bigelow, dir. *The Hurt Locker* (First Light Production, released 2009; Kathryn Bigelow, dir. *Zero Dark Thirty* (Annapurna Pictures, released 2012); Peter Berg, dir. *Lone Survivor* (Film 44, released 2014); Clint Eastwood, dir. *American Sniper* (Mad Chance, released 2015); Jason Hall, dir. *Thank You for Your Service* (DreamWorks Pictures, released 2017); David Kieran, *Forever Vietnam: How a Divisive War Changed American Public Memory*, 3—13, 235—240.
[157] Maurice Halbwachs quoted in Erika Apfelbaum, "Halbwachs and the Social Properties of Memory," in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, ed. Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 77—86 (quote appears on 86), accessed through DePauw University *JStor*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1c999bq.9?refreqid=excelsior%3A294225549df49d4d924a11028d4fe298&seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents , stable URL, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1c999bq.9

any given film may be, but rather how much we choose to believe in its accuracy is what creates our conceptions of collective memory. These conceptions have a symbiotic relationship with our politics and have the ability to be reinforced or challenged by messages relayed by those in positions of power. In the first presidential election after the beginning of the War on Terrorism, memories of Vietnam had little consensus but massive importance.[158]

Reexplaining Vietnam in American National Politics

On August 25, 2003, Senator John Kerry of Massachusetts gave a keynote address at the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) National Convention in San Antonio, Texas. Kerry, a member of the VFW, was soon to formally announce his candidacy for the Democratic Party's nomination for the office of President of the United States in order challenge the incumbent, George W. Bush.[159] While there were certainly a range of issues the 2004 campaign would come to include, foreign policy would be one of the central focuses.

When Kerry was giving his remarks to the VFW in August of 2003, the War on Terrorism seemed to be going well in the eyes of the American public and the war's policy makers. In December of 2001, Afghan factions signed the Bonn Agreement which installed Hamid Karzai as the interim government leader, as well as established an international peacekeeping force to maintain security in the capital city of Kabul. After a series of successful missions by coalition forces to uproot the Taliban, United States Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld declared that all major combat missions in Afghanistan had concluded.[160]

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[158] David Kieran, *Forever Vietnam: How a Divisive War Changed American Public Memory*, 3—13, 235—240.
[159] John Kerry, "Global War on Terrorism," C-SPAN internet archive, August 25, 2003, https://www.c-span.org/video/?177897-3/global-war-terrorism ; "Senator John Kerry Presidential Campaign Announcement," C-Span internet archive, September 2, 2003, https://www.c-span.org/video/?177972-1/senator-john-kerry-presidential-campaign-announcement
[160] Council on Foreign Relations. "The U.S. War in Afghanistan: 1999-2021."

Furthermore, in May of 2003, almost two months after the beginning of combat operations in Iraq, President Bush addressed the world aboard the *USS Abraham Lincoln* off the coast of San Diego, California declaring that the mission to liberate Iraq had been achieved.[161] These early success in both Iraq and Afghanistan translated into high public approval ratings of the wars on behalf of the American public.[162] Therefore, at this moment in the summer of 2003, Kerry was presented with the difficult task of articulating a way to challenge President Bush's foreign policy in the face of two relatively favorable wars.

Kerry attempted to thread this needle by separating veterans from the battles in which they fought. In other words, Kerry's mission in his emerging presidential campaign would be based on criticizing the Bush administration's foreign policy while simultaneously praising the soldiers and veterans who participated in the War on Terrorism.[163] Kerry began his remarks at the VFW Convention by claiming its members, "represent our highest values of citizenship and service to our nation," as demonstrated by their advocacy of veteran's issues including the G.I. Bill, establishment of the national cemetery system, and commitment to the POW/MIA movement after Vietnam.[164] As previously mentioned, the POW/MIA movement as a substantial political issue was heavily contested. Kerry undoubtedly was aware of this considering his role in the early 1990s as a member of the Senate committee that investigated accusations of whether the United States government deliberately left prisoners of war behind in Vietnam when negotiating for peace.[165] Therefore, Kerry's political strategy in this speech was to bridge the gap

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[161] "(President George W. Bush) May 2003: Remarks by the President from Speech on the *USS Abraham Lincoln* on the Cessation of Combat Operations in Iraq, At Sea Off the Coast of San Diego, California, May 1, 2003," in *"We Will Prevail": President George W. Bush on War, Terrorism, and Freedom*, ed. National Review (New York, London: Continuum, 2003), 259.

[162] Gary C. Jacobson, "A Tale of Two Wars: Public Opinion on the U.S. Military Interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq," 590.

[163] John Kerry, "Global War on Terrorism," C-SPAN internet archive.

[164] John Kerry, "Global War on Terrorism," C-SPAN internet archive, (4:01—4:42).

[165] "Paris Peace Accords AM Session Day Two," C-SPAN internet archive, September 22, 1992.

between himself as a liberal Senator and what could be a more socially conservative leaning audience.[166]

Kerry went on to acknowledge the connection he had with many of those in the audience in that they had a shared combat experience in Vietnam.[167] After Kerry graduated from Yale University in 1966, he enlisted in the United States Navy and served in Vietnam. By the time his service was complete, Kerry earned the rank of lieutenant and was awarded a Silver Star, Bronze Star, and three Purple Hearts.[168] Kerry stated:

> In the last thirty years, those of us who were in Vietnam have grown older, and hopefully wiser. But we have not forgotten, nor will we ever forget, the bonds of combat. We came back from the war to a country where so many never said thank you. We banded together to press for government recognition of some of our urgent concerns like the effects of agent orange and PTSD. And what we have learned all points to one central truth that came to us first in the heat and the jungle half-way around the world; and that truth is we are all responsible for each other.[169]

Kerry's remarks showed his deliberate effort to establish a bond with fellow Vietnam veterans. By describing their grievances and misfortunes since the war, Kerry was trying to share in their suffering. In a moment when Kerry was preparing to launch his candidacy for President of the United States amidst two wars, Kerry was establishing himself as a candidate who knew the cost of war by speaking from his own experiences.[170]

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[166] John Kerry, "Global War on Terrorism," C-SPAN internet archive.
[167] John Kerry, "Global War on Terrorism," C-SPAN internet archive.
[168] The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, "John Kerry."
[169] John Kerry, "Global War on Terrorism," C-SPAN internet archive, (6:11—7:01).
[170] John Kerry, "Global War on Terrorism," C-SPAN internet archive; "Senator John Kerry Presidential Campaign Announcement," C-Span internet archive.

Kerry went on to explain what other sorts of lessons could be taken from serving in Vietnam, stating:

> Another lesson that we learned in Vietnam is that sometimes politics gets in the way of decisions that are best for the troops. We must never let that happen again.… We know that sometimes abstract ideology doesn't take account of the life of a grunt, the peril of a sailor in a patrol boat, or an airman in the belly of a plane; all trying to do right for their country…[171]

By defending the honor of those who served yet criticizing the policies that put American lives in harm's way, Kerry was attempting to thread the needle between establishing himself as an oppositional figure to the direction of George Bush's foreign policy while simultaneously celebrating the sacrifice all soldiers made when entering into war. In this regard, Kerry was attempting to separate the warrior from the politician.[172]

Advocating for veterans in the face of divided foreign policy politics was nothing new for John Kerry. Kerry's public life began on April 22, 1971 when he testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Donning his Navy uniform and military decorations, he criticized the leadership of not just military leaders in Vietnam, but also foreign policy makers in Washington. In his testimony, Kerry spoke to the horrors and atrocities his fellow veterans witnessed and, in some cases, participated in.[173] Kerry's address attempted to enlighten the committee members about the experience of Vietnam from the veteran's perspective, stating:

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[171] John Kerry, "Global War on Terrorism," C-SPAN internet archive (7:02—7:41).
[172] John Kerry, "Global War on Terrorism," C-SPAN internet archive.
[173] John Kerry, "Statement Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee," delivered April 22, 1971, Washington D.C, American Rhetoric, https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/johnkerrysenateforeignrelationsvietnamwar.htm

…we were ashamed of and hated what we were called to do in Southeast Asia. In our

opinion, and from our experience, there is nothing in South Vietnam, nothing which

could happen that realistically threatens the United States of America. And to attempt to

justify the loss of one American life in Vietnam, Cambodia, or Laos by linking such loss

to the preservation of freedom… is to us the height of criminal hypocrisy, and it's that

kind of hypocrisy which we feel has torn this country apart.[174]

Kerry's testimony in 1971 in many ways resembled his approach to how he would challenge

George W. Bush more than thirty years later; separate the soldier from the policy maker.[175]

In keeping with this political strategy, Kerry made his criticisms of George W. Bush to be

about Iraq and Afghanistan exit strategies in which he compared them to post-combat strategies

in Vietnam. In his San Antonio VFW address, Kerry stated, "In Iraq, even more than in

Afghanistan, our postwar planning has failed to do the job, and in the process, we have

overextended our troops and our reserves…there are many lessons from Vietnam and that

period; one of the important lessons is that when you decide to go to war, the only exit strategy is

called victory. Mission fully accomplished."[176] By subtly comparing Bush's war policies to those

of Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon, Kerry was attempting to portray Bush as someone with a

fear of loss and an overburdening sense of pride; the same pride that both Johnson and Nixon

possessed that told them to defeat communism wherever it existed. Kerry elaborated on this

point by recalling the ethos of his testimony in 1971, stating:

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[174] John Kerry, "Statement Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee," delivered April 22, 1971.
[175] John Kerry, "Statement Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee," delivered April 22, 1971; John Kerry, "Global War on Terrorism," C-SPAN internet archive; "Senator John Kerry Presidential Campaign Announcement," C-Span internet archive.
[176] John Kerry, "Global War on Terrorism," C-SPAN internet archive, (8:38—9:21).

But another important lesson of Vietnam, and of surviving, is the obligation that veterans feel to tell the truth when it matters the most, when the life and the safety of the troops depends on it. Above all, we learned that the interests of the grunts on the ground come before all politics and all ideology…what we urgently need now is to protect our young men and women in uniform and America's role in the world with decisions that are based on professional military judgements and strategic vision, not politics and not pride… There are too many names on the Vietnam Wall in Washington because of the rationalizations and the willfulness of arm-chair strategists.[177]

By directly invoking not just the failed policies of Vietnam strategists, but the memories of those who died in Indochina, Kerry was presenting the Bush Doctrine as something that had the potential to result in the meaningless deaths of tens of thousands of Americans.[178]

Kerry concluded his remarks by idealizing the value of serving one's nation along with how those values were instilled in him during his time in Vietnam.[179] Kerry challenged the competency of President Bush in this capacity, stating, "… if one day I have an opportunity to make those decisions as a commander-in-chief, I will not just bring to that profound responsibility the prospective of sitting in a situation room. I will bring the perspective of someone whose fought on the front lines."[180] John Kerry's impending candidacy would hinge on the premise that he was more equipped than Bush to lead the nation out of Iraq and Afghanistan because he had experienced the devastating realities of warfare.[181] Even with both wars receiving

[177] John Kerry, "Global War on Terrorism," C-SPAN internet archive, (9:56—11:06).
[178] John Kerry, "Global War on Terrorism," C-SPAN internet archive.
[179] John Kerry, "Global War on Terrorism," C-SPAN internet archive.
[180] John Kerry, "Global War on Terrorism," C-SPAN internet archive, (30:55—31:12).
[181] John Kerry, "Global War on Terrorism," C-SPAN internet archive; "Senator John Kerry Presidential Campaign Announcement," C-SPAN internet archive.

relatively high public approval ratings in the summer of 2003, Kerry's argument for Bush's incompetence was somewhat compelling considering that neither George Bush nor Vice President Dick Cheney had ever seen a second of warfare in their lives. Bush received preferential treatment and was placed in the Texas Air National Guard after graduating from Yale in 1968, and Cheney received five draft deferments throughout the 1960s.[182]

On September 2, 2003, John Kerry formally announced his candidacy for President of the United States in Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina. Kerry's announcement ceremony was predicated on visible tropes of service, patriotism, and character. Before Kerry took the stage to give his own remarks, he was introduced and joined on stage by several highly regarded military and political officials including Marine General Steve Cheney and former Georgia Senator Max Cleland. Kerry was also joined on the stage by the members of his swift boat crew in the Mekong delta, and was introduced by his boat's gunner, David Alston. It was no secret that Kerry was proud of his and others service in Vietnam despite his personal history of advocating against the conflict.[183]

Throughout Kerry's remarks, he claimed that the time he spent in Vietnam along with the time he spent advocating against the war at the conclusion of his service was the time period in which he was most exposed to what he considered to be true American values.[184] For Kerry, patriotism as an American value was something more than just blindly following orders in service to one's country, stating, "I saw courage both in the Vietnam War and in the struggle to

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[182] Gary C. Jacobson, "A Tale of Two Wars: Public Opinion on the U.S. Military Interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq," 590; Jean Edward Smith, *Bush*, 16—20; Katharine Q. Seelye, "THE 2004 CAMPAIGN: MILITARY SERVICE; Cheney's Five Draft Deferments During the Vietnam Era Emerge as a Campaign Issue," *The New York Times*, May 1, 2004, https://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/01/us/2004-campaign-military-service-cheney-s-five-draft-deferments-during-vietnam-era.html

[183] "Senator John Kerry Presidential Campaign Announcement," C-SPAN internet archive.

[184] "Senator John Kerry Presidential Campaign Announcement," C-SPAN internet archive.

stop it. I learned that patriotism includes protest, not just military service."[185] With these two sentences, Kerry tapped into a new definition of patriotism defined by his own experiences of anti-war advocacy. In other words, Kerry was attempting to bind the two competing narratives of his Vietnam service and activism. By stating that fighting against the war was just as patriotic as fighting in it, Kerry was embracing both sides of his Vietnam experience and painting the veteran as the true victim of an irrational foreign conflict that required veterans to take a stand against.[186] Kerry went so far in criticizing President Bush as to suggest that if his foreign policy initiatives particularly in Iraq were to continue, then there could be as many American casualties in the War on Terrorism as there were in Vietnam, stating:

> Pride is no substitute for protecting our young men and women in uniform. Half the names on the Vietnam Memorial are there because of pride; because of a President who refused to admit we're on the wrong road, that we might be wrong.[187]

By accusing Bush of being a prideful commander-in-chief in the likes of Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon, Kerry was setting the stage for what would be a bitter and divisive campaign that would become centered on who really had America's best interests in mind at home and abroad.[188]

John Kerry's VFW speech as well as his address from South Carolina were predicated on an attempt to portray the American soldier as someone who fell victim to the miscalculations of American policy makers. While it is not appropriate to assert that popular culture and American film were responsible for articulating John Kerry's positions heading into his 2004 presidential

[185] "Senator John Kerry Presidential Campaign Announcement," C-SPAN internet archive, (38:00—38:14).
[186] "Senator John Kerry Presidential Campaign Announcement," C-SPAN internet archive.
[187] "Senator John Kerry Presidential Campaign Announcement," C-SPAN internet archive (43:34—43:52).
[188] Jean Edward Smith, *Bush*, 402—415.

campaign, there is no doubt that messages used to portray Vietnam veterans in post-war films as victims and survivors of flawed policy had been a part of a broader cultural narrative that had planted itself in the minds of the American public for decades thereafter. In other words, these two speeches given by John Kerry in the summer of 2003 prove that the relationship between political messaging and popular culture messaging are continuous and symbiotic. When examining the politics of Kerry's two addresses, it only makes sense that he would employ broad and popular components of collective memory to appeal to a national audience. However, the 2004 presidential race was not the only arena where decisions of what about the Vietnam War was worth remembering in the face of a geopolitical crisis.[189]

On January 11, 2007, Minnesota's fifth congressional district House representative Keith Ellison addressed the House chamber. Ellison, a critic of the Bush administration's Iraq polices, rose to articulate the need for removing American forces from Iraq. In doing so, Ellison invoked the language, imagery, and activism of one of the Vietnam War's most high-profile critics; Martin Luther King Jr.[190] Ellison began his address stating:

> I rise today, really in the mindset of this coming weekend which is Martin Luther King's birthday celebration. Martin Luther King, who we all know, was a valiant defender of human and civil rights, also stood up strongly for the poor; but, at this time and on this day, must be recognized as one of the clearest voices for peace that this country has ever known… on April 4th, 1967, one year before his death, he said that we've got to get out of Vietnam.[191]

[189] John Kerry, "Global War on Terrorism," C-SPAN internet archive; "Senator John Kerry Presidential Campaign Announcement," C-SPAN internet archive; David Kieran, *Forever Vietnam: How a Divisive War Changed American Public Memory*, 3—13, 235—240.

[190] "House Session," C-SPAN internet archive, January 11, 2007, https://www.c-span.org/video/?196060-1/house-session

[191] "House Session," C-SPAN internet archive, January 11, 2007, (7:49:08—7:50:36).

Ellison was referring to a speech King gave on April 4, 1967 at the Riverside Church on the Upper West Side of New York City. King's denunciation of American foreign and domestic policy on this occasion was so powerful, civil rights leader and Georgia congressman John Lewis hailed it as the best public address King ever delivered. In 1967, King's decision to give such a damning speech of Vietnam policy was incredibly risky; King needed a working relationship with President Lyndon Johnson in order to continue the Civil Rights cause, and a speech against Vietnam was in essence an attack on Johnson himself. Nevertheless, King's Riverside speech cemented his legacy as anti-war activist on top of his record as a civil rights icon.[192]

Keith Ellison regurgitated King's anti-war logic to the present debate the nation was beginning to have over whether or not to escalate armed forces in Iraq.[193] Ellison made his position adamantly clear in the same House address, stating:

> We need to say yes, no escalation, get out of Iraq now, but America needs to adopt at its' guiding principle, America needs to say that the thing that guides us the most is peace; is not living in superiority to the…nations of the world, but living in brotherhood and sisterhood with the nations of the world…we are going to stand up with courage just like Martin Luther King did…[194]

By invoking and incorporating the stature and language of Martin Luther King within the argument for de-escalating Iraq, Ellison was trying to cast moral judgement as a consequence of

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[192] Benjamin Hedin, "Martin Luther King, JR.'s Searing Antiwar Speech, Fifty Years Later," *The New Yorker*, April 3, 2017, https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/martin-luther-king-jr-s-searing-antiwar-speech-fifty-years-later
[193] "House Session," C-SPAN internet archive, January 11, 2007.
[194] "House Session," C-SPAN internet archive, January 11, 2007, (7:51:08—7:51:52).

the decision, as well as re-examine the anti-war narrative of the Vietnam era. In other words, by choosing to remember the arguments of Martin Luther King's anti-war activism without remembering the thousands of rioters and demonstrators that protested against Vietnam, Ellison was trying to build the anti-Iraq argument as one that was sophisticated, moral, and rational as opposed to chaotic and disruptive.[195]

Democrats and Bush critics were not the only ones who articulated a revisionist history of the Vietnam era in order to explain an Iraq strategy. On August 22, 2007, President Bush himself spoke at the VFW conference in Kansas City, Missouri. Throughout the speech, Bush sought to explain his desire for a military surge in Iraq by directly invoking the shock of 9/11 and the lessons of the Vietnam War.[196] After explaining that the mission in Iraq was intended to liberate the people of the Middle East, Bush claimed that the war in Vietnam was one that was also fought on the premise of liberating its people which should motivate Americans to support the Iraq war effort, stating:

> …the communists in Korea and Vietnam were driven by a merciless vision for the proper ordering of humanity. They killed Americans because we stood in the way of their attempt to force their ideology on others. Today, the names and places have changed but the fundamental character of the struggle has not changed. Like our enemies of the past the terrorists who wage war in Iraq and Afghanistan and other places seek to spread a political vision of their own.[197]

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[195] "House Session," C-SPAN internet archive, January 11, 2007; David Kieran, *Forever Vietnam: How a Divisive War Changed American Public Memory*, 206—209.
[196] David Kieran, *Forever Vietnam: How a Divisive War Changed American Public Memory*, 209—211; George Bush, "Veterans of Foreign Wars Convention," (President George W. Bush), C-SPAN internet archive, August 22, 2007, https://www.c-span.org/video/?200620-2/veterans-foreign-wars-convention
[197] George Bush, "Veterans of Foreign Wars Convention," (President George W. Bush), C-SPAN internet archive archive, (13:26—13:59).

By re-narrativizing the war in Vietnam as one fought in the defense of American values, Bush was attempting to re-classify Vietnam as something that was worth the American sacrifice it required. For Bush, comparing Iraq to Vietnam did not have to be a political insult if one thought of Vietnam as a noble mission even if it did not achieve a desirable outcome.[198] Bush acknowledged that Vietnam was, "a complex and painful subject for many Americans," but defended the premise of the conflict, stating:

> …many argued that if we pulled out, there would be no consequences for the Vietnamese people…The world would learn just how costly these misimpressions would be. In Cambodia, the Kamer Rouge began a murderous rule in which hundreds of thousands of Cambodians died by starvation and torture and execution. In Vietnam, former allies of the United States and government workers and intellectuals and businessmen were sent off to prison camps, where tens of thousands perished…there is no debate in my mind that the veterans from Vietnam deserve the high praise of the United States of America. Whatever your position is on that debate, one unmistakable legacy of Vietnam is that the price of America's withdrawal was paid by millions of innocent citizens…[199]

By casting Vietnam as a conflict that was lost only because there was not enough support for it back home, Bush was able to use Vietnam as a reason to continue the support for military intervention in Iraq. In essence, Bush was arguing that in order for Iraq and Afghanistan to not become quagmires, or humanitarian disasters, then a continued troop presence was necessary. If

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[198] George Bush, "Veterans of Foreign Wars Convention," (President George W. Bush), C-SPAN internet archive.
[199] "Veterans of Foreign Wars Convention," (President George W. Bush), C-SPAN archive, (25:57—29:30).

no such troop surge occurred, then the chaotic fallout that was Vietnam would also manifest itself in Iraq.[200]

By reminding Americans of the miscalculated ways in which the Vietnam exit strategy was executed, Bush was building his argument for why a continued troop presence was necessary in Iraq stating:

> To withdraw, without getting the job done, would be devastating. If we were to abandon the Iraqi people, the terrorists would be emboldened! They would use their victory to gain new recruits…unlike in Vietnam, if we were to withdraw before the job was done, this enemy would follow us home.[201]

Bush's effort to re-narrativize Vietnam within the framework of the War on Terrorism created a compelling argument that synthesized the mistakes of Vietnam with the deadliest terrorist attack in American history. In other words, by claiming that if the United States prematurely leaves Iraq as the nation did in Vietnam, then an attack like 9/11 could have the potential to happen again from the same perpetrators. In this way, Bush was re-narrativizing Vietnam to serve as a warning for his fellow Americans about the possible consequences of leaving Iraq in its current condition.[202]

In the days that followed Bush's address, the President received intense criticism for the comparisons he made and the history lessons he attempted to articulate. On August 23, one day after Bush's VFW speech, John Kerry blasted Bush saying, "'Invoking the tragedy of Vietnam to

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[200] "Veterans of Foreign Wars Convention," (President George W. Bush), C-SPAN archive; David Kieran, *Forever Vietnam: How a Divisive War Changed American Public Memory*, 209—211.

[201] "Veterans of Foreign Wars Convention," (President George W. Bush) C-SPAN internet archive (31:40—32:29).

[202] David Kieran, *Forever Vietnam: How a Divisive War Changed American Public Memory*, 209—211; George Bush, "Veterans of Foreign Wars Convention," (President George W. Bush) C-SPAN internet archive.

defend the failed policy in Iraq is as irresponsible as it is ignorant of the realities of both of those wars.'"[203] A *New York Times* editorial piece stated, "Bush has invoked Vietnam to argue against leaving Iraq. That argument is specious, but there is a chilling similarity between the two U.S. foreign policy disasters. In Vietnam, as in Iraq, American presidents and military leaders went to great lengths to pretend that victory was at hand when nothing could be farther from the truth."[204]

Since both the Vietnam War and the War on Terrorism were initiated by political leaders, it is essential study the memories and experiences of those who fought in them in order to articulate a complete understanding of both wars. By studying some of the recalled experiences of the American combatants from Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq, we can begin to understand the ways in which all three wars continuously informed and resembled one another.

Perhaps the biggest difference in terms of military personnel between Vietnam and the War on Terrorism was that the wars of the twenty-first century consisted of an all-volunteer force. While the majority of American troops in Vietnam were not drafted, the Nixon Administration ended conscription in 1973 as a political tactic to gain support against an exceedingly unpopular war.[205] In January of 2003, Democratic congressman Charles B. Rangel

[203] Michael A. Fletcher, "Bush Compares Iraq to Vietnam; He Says Pullout Would Be Disastrous," *The Washington Post*, August 23, 2007, https://search-proquest-com.duproxy.palni.edu/washingtonpost/docview/410172484/585939BF34264C75PQ/7?accountid=10478; David Kieran, *Forever Vietnam: How a Divisive War Changed American Public Memory*, 210—211.
[204] "More realism, less spin," *New York Times* (Online), August 31, 2007, https://search-proquest-com.duproxy.palni.edu/nytimes/docview/2223037504/6E8991283184106PQ/54?accountid=10478 ; David Kieran, *Forever Vietnam: How a Divisive War Changed American Public Memory*, 210—211.
[205] David Vergun, "First Peacetime Draft Enacted Just Before World War II," U.S. Department of Defense, April 7, 2020, https://www.defense.gov/Explore/Features/story/Article/2140942/first-peacetime-draft-enacted-just-before-world-war-ii/#:~:text=On%20July%201%2C%201973%2C%20the,in%20the%20nation's%20armed%20forces ; Stanley Karnow, (Revised and Updated), *Vietnam: A History*, 31—32; Susan A. Brewer, *Why America Fights: Patriotism and War Propaganda From the Philippines to Iraq* (Oxford, New York, Auckland, Cape Town, Dar es Salaam, Hong Kong, Karachi, Kuala Lumpur, Madrid, Melbourne, Mexico City, Nairobi, New Delhi, Shanghai, Taipei, Toronto: Oxford University Press, copyright 2009), 220—222, accessed through DePauw University *ProQuest* database, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/depauw-ebooks/reader.action?docID=453588 ; "Featured

purposed federal legislation that sought to re-institute the draft.[206] However, fellow lawmakers

and Defense officials adamantly rejected such a proposition. In July of 2004, the Selective

Service System quelled any sort rumors of a draft reinstatement by posting a notice on their

website that read, "'both the president and secretary of defense have stated on more than one

occasion that there is no need for a draft for the war on terrorism or any likely contingency, such

as Iraq.'"[207] While the move to abolish the draft in 1973 had been conducted for primarily

political purposes, re-instituting the draft was not a popular concept in the American psyche.[208]

Another compelling difference between the experiences of Vietnam veterans and War on

Terror veterans were the reasons for why they decided to join the United States military. Karl

Marlantes, who served in Vietnam, described his motivations for wanting to serve his country at

a 2019 forum hosted by Chapman University in California. Marlantes explained that his allure to

service was initiated by the competitive relationship he had with his father, who was a World

War II veteran.[209] Marlantes stated, "My father, you know, was in World War II, and he had

medals, and he never would talk about it. So, there was a lot of mystery to the medals…I was

sort of like, 'well I wonder if I could do that.'"[210] Marlantes believed that since his father was a

distinguished veteran of World War II, his father commanded a particular social status. In other

words, Marlantes believed that because his father was recognized for his service and bravery, he

Topics: The Draft," Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, accessed April 8-15, 2021,
https://www.vvmf.org/topics/The-Draft/

[206] Clyde Haberman, "Draft Talk, But Source Is Antiwar," *The New York Times*, January 3, 2003, accessed through DePauw University *ProQuest* database,
https://search.proquest.com/nytimes/docview/432314021/fulltext/F088519A75F449F4PQ/7?accountid=10478

[207] Carl Hulse, "Military Draft? Official Denials Leave Skeptics," *The New York Times*, July 3, 2004, accessed through DePauw University *ProQuest* database,
https://search.proquest.com/nytimes/docview/432824360/fulltext/7CC13995BC1F46DEPQ/40?accountid=10478

[208] Stanley Karnow, (Revised and Updated), *Vietnam: A History*, 31—32; Clyde Haberman, "Draft Talk, But Source Is Antiwar," *The New York Times*; Carl Hulse, "Military Draft? Official Denials Leave Skeptics," *The New York Times*.

[209] "Iraq, Afghanistan and Vietnam War Veterans," C-Span archive, September 19, 2019, https://www.c-span.org/video/?463917-1/iraq-afghanistan-vietnam-war-veterans

[210] "Iraq, Afghanistan and Vietnam War Veterans," C-Span internet archive (7:04—7:14).

belonged to a social class in which a young Marlantes wanted to someday be a part of as well.

Marlantes recalls that while serving in Vietnam, there were times where he thought to himself

how nice it would be to receive recognition for an act of valor. Marlantes elaborated on this point

by describing an episode in which one of his fellow men was, "trapped underneath a machine

gun," and that, "I didn't have to go get him, but I thought, well if I go get him, maybe someone

will write me up for a medal…when I… turned to my platoon sergeant and I said… 'If I go get

him, are you gonna [sic] write me up for a medal?'"[211]

For Marlantes, his motivation to serve was driven by the prospect of achieving a

particular social status that would place him on the same level as the veterans of World War II.

For Marlantes and thousands of other young men around the nation who grew up in the 1960s,

the romanticized successes of their parent's generation compelled them to believe that service to

their nation and defending the ideals that had toppled the axis powers would be an act of social

admiration and personal duty.[212] This romanticism of the prosperities and liberties secured by the

World War II generation would establish the principles for which President John F. Kennedy

would outline in his inaugural address that were necessary for all Americans to defend.[213] Being

called into action by President Kennedy, coupled with the visible honor of their elders, a new

generation of patriots was being molded to combat communism.[214]

While President Kennedy's assassination was certainly a moment of national trauma, it

did not initiate the Vietnam War in the same way 9/11 initiated the wars in Afghanistan and

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[211] "Iraq, Afghanistan and Vietnam War Veterans," C-Span internet archive, (10:53—11:14)
[212] "Iraq, Afghanistan and Vietnam War Veterans," C-Span internet archive; Richard Stacewicz, *Winter Soldiers: An Oral History of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War* (New York: Twayne Publishers, copyright 1997 [London, Mexico City, New Delhi, Singapore, Sydney, Toronto: Prentice Hall International]), 29—56, accessed through *Internet Archive*, https://archive.org/details/wintersoldiersor00stac/mode/2up
[213] John F. Kennedy, "Inaugural Address of John F. Kennedy."
[214] Richard Stacewicz, *Winter Soldiers: An Oral History of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War*, 29—56.

Iraq.[215] Between Kennedy's inauguration in January of 1961 and his death in November of 1963, Vice-President Lyndon Johnson had visited South Vietnam, Kennedy had approved of the dramatic increase of U.S. military advisors to South Vietnam, and United States military officials had participated in a successful coup that resulted in the overthrow and murder of prime minister Ngo Dinh Diem.[216] In other words, by the time Lyndon Johnson had been sworn in as President, the United States had already been conducting extensive military operations in South Vietnam. While President Johnson escalated the Vietnam War, it is entirely possible that Kennedy may have done the same.[217]

Unlike the cultivated servicemen who volunteered to go to Vietnam, civilians like Marjorie K. Eastman were compelled to serve their nation because of the events of September 11, 2001.[218] In a 2019 interview, Eastman explained, "I joined the military… after 9/11, because of 9/11… I saw what happened on that day, and no one does that to our country. No one does that to our country…I needed to do something, and I didn't want to sit on the bench."[219] Despite Eastman's motivation for joining the military in order to seek retribution against 9/11's perpetrators, she was caught in a familial conflict. Eastman explained that her mother was very reluctant to allow Marjorie to join the military telling her, "You have a college degree, you shouldn't have to go."[220] Marjorie explained that this statement by her mother was one defined

[215] Paul B. Sheatsley, Jacob J. Feldman, "The Assassination of President Kennedy: A Preliminary Report On Public Reactions and Behavior," *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 2 (1964): 189—215, accessed through DePauw University *Jstor* database. https://www-jstor-org.duproxy.palni.edu/stable/2746986?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents. Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/2746986.

[216] Stanley Karnow, (Revised and Updated), *Vietnam: A History*, 692—694.

[217] Stanley Karnow, (Revised and Updated), *Vietnam: A History*, 692—694; Fredrik Logevall, "Lyndon Johnson and Vietnam," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, vol. 34, no.1, Going to War (March 2004): 100—112, accessed through DePauw University *Jstor*. https://www-jstor-org.duproxy.palni.edu/stable/27552566?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents. Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/27552566.

[218] "Iraq, Afghanistan and Vietnam War Veterans," C-Span internet archive,

[219] "Iraq, Afghanistan and Vietnam War Veterans," C-Span internet archive, (14:57—15:16).

[220] "Iraq, Afghanistan and Vietnam War Veterans," C-Span internet archive, (14:09—14:11).

by the stereotypes of servicemen in the aftermath of the Vietnam war stating, "She was from the Vietnam generation…my mom and my dad… were born and raised in part of big mid-west…farm families. And, at one point in time, my mom had four of her brothers serving in Vietnam, so it was very difficult for her…."[221] Marjorie K. Eastman was inspired to serve her country in the wake of one of the deadliest attacks in American history, but her mother pleaded her not to. Marjorie's mother was all too familiar with the personal and sociological burdens that warfare can place on an individual having been associated with the Vietnam era.[222]

It is within the stories of Karl Marlantes and Marjorie K. Eastman that we can begin to see the differences in motivations for which the two generations of veterans were compelled to serve. For Marlantes, he was attracted to the prospective status that came with being a military veteran. By the time Eastman had to decide whether or not she would volunteer for the military, the notion that serving one's country was a socially prestigious endeavor had somewhat eroded. Ultimately, Eastman was motivated by a desire to seek retribution for 9/11 rather than earning any sort of public recognition. Eastman's decision to join the military occurred at the same time in which many other Americans had also decided to serve their nation; in the aftermath of 9/11. However, this call to action and sense of patriotism was by no means widespread or perpetual, as less than one percent of the American population would be deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan between 2001 and 2011 to fight the War on Terrorism.[223]

Much had transpired in the geo-political atmosphere between the end of the Vietnam War and 9/11 that could have been used by political and military leaders to remind their own citizens

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[221] "Iraq, Afghanistan and Vietnam War Veterans," C-Span internet archive, (14:14—14:38).
[222] "Iraq, Afghanistan and Vietnam War Veterans," C-Span internet archive.
[223] "Iraq, Afghanistan and Vietnam War Veterans," C-Span internet archive; James Dao, "They Signed Up to Fight," *The New York Times*, September 6, 2011, https://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/06/us/sept-11-reckoning/troops.html

about the valor of military service. The Persian Gulf War and the collapse of the Soviet Union serve as two examples.

On August 2, 1990, Iraq's dictator Saddam Hussein commanded his forces to invade Kuwait. Later that year, the United Nations Security Council authorized the use of coalition forces to combat Hussein's aggression in the Persian Gulf. Under the direction of President George H.W. Bush, the United States led the international coalition, making up 540,000 of the 700,000 total military personnel. In January of 1991, the coalition forces began attacks on Hussein's forces and drove Iraq out of Kuwait by the end of February.[224]

The prompt defeat of Iraq on behalf of the United States led coalition eliminated the so called, "Vietnam syndrome". Since the end of the Vietnam War, United States foreign policy makers had become apprehensive about sending American forces into foreign territories to secure their interests which created a sense of disconnect and apprehension between the American people and the commander-in-chief.[225] The United States victory in the Persian Gulf War mended that disconnect, as explained by journalist E.J. Dionne Jr.,

> A nation that had lost faith in government's ability to accomplish anything -- especially through armed intervention abroad -- saw political and military leaders conceive, plan and carry out a brilliantly successful military venture…what had been a deeply pessimistic national mood was swept away in a wave of optimism.[226]

[224] The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, "Persian Gulf War," Encyclopædia Britannica, January 9, 2021, https://www.britannica.com/event/Persian-Gulf-War
[225] E.J. Dionne Jr. "KICKING THE 'VIETNAM SYNDROME'," *The Washington Post*, March 4, 1991, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1991/03/04/kicking-the-vietnam-syndrome/b6180288-4b9e-4d5f-b303-befa2275524d/ .
[226] E.J. Dionne Jr. "KICKING THE 'VIETNAM SYNDROME'," *The Washington Post*.

In a speech to the American Legislative Exchange Council shortly after the victory in Kuwait, President Bush exclaimed, "By God, we've kicked Vietnam syndrome once and for all."[227] For the most part, the American people seemed to buy into the notion that the United States had regained its footing on the international stage and credited the Bush administration for doing so. In the weeks after the successful defense of Kuwait, President Bush enjoyed approval ratings as high as eighty-seven percent.[228]

Another key event that reignited faith in American foreign policy was the collapse of the Soviet Union. In December of 1991, President Mikhail Gorbachev resigned his leadership position, and called for the Union's dissolution into independent states.[229] In his address to the nation on the day of Gorbachev's resignation, President George H.W. Bush described the dissolution of the Soviet Union as a, "historic and revolutionary transformation of a totalitarian dictatorship."[230] President Bush framed the dissolution of America's Cold War adversary as the culmination of nearly half a century of valuable struggle, stating:

> For over forty years, the United States led the West in the struggle against communism
> and the threat it posed to our most precious values. This struggle shaped the lives of all
> Americans…This is a victory for democracy and freedom. It's a victory for the moral
> force of our values. Every American can take pride in this victory; from the millions of

[227] George H.W. Bush, "Speech to State Lawmakers," C-SPAN internet archive, March 1, 1991, (9:30—9:33) https://www.c-span.org/video/?16874-1/speech-state-lawmakers

[228] Maureen Dowd (Special to the New York Times), "AFTER THE WAR: White House Memo; War Introduces a Tougher Bush to Nation," *The New York Times*, March 2, 1991, https://www.nytimes.com/1991/03/02/world/after-the-war-white-house-memo-war-introduces-a-tougher-bush-to-nation.html

[229] Francis X. Clines, "END OF THE SOVIET UNION; GORBACHEV, LAST SOVIET LEADER, RESIGNS; U.S. RECOGNIZES REPUBLICS' INDEPENDENCE," *The New York Times*, December 26, 1991, https://www.nytimes.com/1991/12/26/world/end-soviet-union-gorbachev-last-soviet-leader-resigns-us-recognizes-republics.html

[230] George H.W. Bush, "Address on Gorbachev Resignation," C-SPAN internet archive, December 25, 1991, (0:18—0:23) https://www.c-span.org/video/?23549-1/address-gorbachev-resignation

men and women who've served our country in uniform, to millions of Americans who supported their country and a strong defense under nine Presidents.[231]

By praising what he perceived to be American resolve for nearly fifty years, President Bush was re-framing the narratives of past conflicts, especially Vietnam. In other words, Bush was attempting to articulate the collapse of the Soviet Union as the victory never achieved in Vietnam or Korea. Those veterans who sacrificed everything for what seemed to be pointless missions had finally earned the victory their sacrifice called for. Furthermore, by choosing to only acknowledge the patriotism demonstrated by the supporters of America's Cold War ventures, Bush was disregarding the revised patriotism of Vietnam dissenters like John Kerry. These tropes were being used in a way to revive the sense of admiration and patriotism that people like Karl Marlantes felt when contemplating whether or not to put on a military uniform.[232]

Bush went on to speak to the future significance that the dissolution of the Soviet Union would bring to American morale and patriotism, stating:

We stand tonight before a new world of hope and possibilities for our children; a world we could not have contemplated a few years ago…We will only succeed in this inter-connected world by continuing to lead the fight for free people and free and fair trade… This is a day of great hope for all Americans.[233]

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[231] George H.W. Bush, "Address on Gorbachev Resignation," C-SPAN ineternet archive, December 25, 1991, (0:39—1:31).

[232] George H.W. Bush, "Address on Gorbachev Resignation," C-SPAN internet archive; "Iraq, Afghanistan and Vietnam War Veterans," C-Span internet archive; John Kerry, "Global War on Terrorism," C-SPAN internet archive; "Senator John Kerry Presidential Campaign Announcement," C-SPAN internet archive.

[233] George H.W. Bush, "Address on Gorbachev Resignation," C-SPAN internet archive, (3:17—6:25).

By describing the armed and diplomatic struggles of the Cold War to have been worth the price that was paid, President Bush was attempting to inspire the next generation of Americans to contribute to the service of their nation in the name of prideful patriotism. The loss in Vietnam was undoubtedly a major setback for the United States military in terms of establishing a steady network of prospective soldiers. In January of 1973, Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird officially ended conscription and commanded that the United States military would from then on only consist of volunteer fighters.[234] Therefore, in order to build a military that was attractive for citizens to join, it became essential for people like President George H.W. Bush to romanticize not just the value of service, but to also lopsidedly describe American triumphs as the result of civil sacrifice on behalf of those who served their country.[235]

Marjorie Eastman and Karl Marlantas are two examples of individuals who joined the ranks of the United States military for different reasons and in different eras. Their personal stories highlight how memories of the previous generation informed their ultimate decisions to participate in the Vietnam War and the War on Terrorism. For Marlantas, he was in awe of his father's achievements in World War II. Marlantas recalls that his desire to have the social prestige attached to valiant military service is what drove him to volunteer to fight in Vietnam. For Eastman, she was a bit more conflicted but ultimately chose to serve. Furthermore, for Eastman, the prestige and valor associated with military service was secondary to the trauma she experienced as a result of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. In short, Karl Marlantes and Marjorie Eastman existed in two distinctly different eras, and were attracted to military service for

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[234] David E. Rosenbaum (Special to *The New York Times*), "Nation Ends Draft, Turns to Volunteers: Change is Ordered Six Months Early—Youths must Still Register," *The New York Times* (accessed through *New York Times* archive), January 28, 1973,
https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1973/01/28/103216556.html?pageNumber=1
[235] George H.W. Bush, "Address on Gorbachev Resignation," C-SPAN internet archive; George H.W. Bush, "Speech to State Lawmakers," C-SPAN internet archive.

distinctly different reasons. However, the most significant principle of their two stories is how the value associated with military service changed. In Marlantas' era, it seemed to be almost a given that any young man would be quick to be like their fathers and answer the call of duty wherever that may have taken them. In Eastman's era, that concept had almost completely evaporated, and despite the best efforts of politicians to mobilize the populace towards a direction of military service, it required a catastrophic event like 9/11 for some people to even consider joining the military.[236]

This question of the value of military service was undoubtedly connected to the tropes of popular American films. American films about the Vietnam War asked their audiences to contemplate whether or not the atrocities endured by the soldiers was worth their sacrifice. Overall, films of the post-Vietnam war era fed into the narrative that sacrifice through military service might not produce the personal benefits or gratifications it did for the veterans of the World War II generation.[237] So, by the early 2000s, the symbiotic relationship of politics and popular culture perpetuated a developing narrative that described military service to be not necessarily an obligation, but in some cases a last resort. Marjorie Eastman was motivated to join the Army because of 9/11, and that event also mobilized other segments of the American populace to serve, but even then, military service was not necessarily viewed or depicted as a civil obligation. For example, in the films such as *The Hurt Locker* and *Thank You for Your*

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[236] "Iraq, Afghanistan and Vietnam War Veterans," C-Span internet archive; Richard Stacewicz, *Winter Soldiers: An Oral History of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War*, 29—56; E.J. Dionne Jr. "KICKING THE 'VIETNAM SYNDROME'," *The Washington Post*; George H.W. Bush; "Address on Gorbachev Resignation," C-SPAN internet archive; James Dao, "They Signed Up to Fight," *The New York Times*.

[237] Michael Cimino, dir. *The Deer Hunter* (Universal Pictures, released 1978); Francis Ford Coppola, dir. *Apocalypse Now* (American Zoetrope, released 1979); Ted Kotcheff, dir. *First Blood* (Anabasis N.V., released 1982); George P. Cosmatos, dir. *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (Anabasis N.V., released 1985); Oliver Stone, dir. *Platoon* (Metro Goldwyn Mayer, released 1986); Oliver Stone, dir. *Born on the Fourth of July* (Ixtlan Corporation, released 1989); Richard Stacewicz, *Winter Soldiers: An Oral History of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War*, 29—56.

Service some of the characters are described as having joined military forces because they simply had nothing better else to do back home. In short, the evolution of perceived military culture within the American public occurred alongside the transformations of military depictions in certain popular films.[238]

Conclusion

On December 18, 2011, the last of the United States soldiers in Iraq left the country. At the conclusion of direct United States involvement, the war cost about eight hundred billion dollars along with four and a half thousand American deaths. More than one hundred thousand Iraqis had also been killed.[239] After the United States left Iraq, the nation was subjected to the corrupt Shia regime of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, who cracked down against Sunni protestors in 2013. This political and economic instability, coupled with the breakout of the Syrian Civil War, allowed the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) to possess stable control of a significant portion of northern Iraq.[240] By the end of 2014, ISIS had controlled enough territory in northern Iraq and southern Syria to be in possession of a landmass equating to the size of Great Britain.[241]

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[238] "Iraq, Afghanistan and Vietnam War Veterans," C-Span internet archive; Kathryn Bigelow, dir. *The Hurt Locker* (First Light Production, released 2009); Jason Hall, dir. *Thank You for Your Service* (DreamWorks Pictures, released 2017); Michael Cimino, dir. *The Deer Hunter* (Universal Pictures, released 1978); Francis Ford Coppola, dir. *Apocalypse Now* (American Zoetrope, released 1979); Ted Kotcheff, dir. *First Blood* (Anabasis N.V., released 1982); George P. Cosmatos, dir. *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (Anabasis N.V., released 1985); Oliver Stone, dir. *Platoon* (Metro Goldwyn Mayer, released 1986); Oliver Stone, dir. *Born on the Fourth of July* (Ixtlan Corporation, released 1989); James Dao, "They Signed Up to Fight," *The New York Times.*
[239] Council on Foreign Relations, "The Iraq War: 2003—2011".
[240] Zack Beauchamp, Max Fisher, Dylan Matthews, "27 maps that explain the crisis in Iraq," *Vox*, August 8, 2014, https://www.vox.com/a/maps-explain-crisis-iraq
[241] Megan Specia, "The Evolution of ISIS: From Rogue State to Stateless Ideology," *The New York Times*, March 20, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/20/world/middleeast/isis-history-facts-islamic-state.html

When examining the state of Iraq nearly twenty years after the United States decided to invade, it is difficult to argue that the mission was truly within the purview of America's regional interests.

On February 29, 2020, the United States signed a peace deal with the Taliban that would draw down United States military presence in Afghanistan and create an opportunity for the Taliban to negotiate intra-Afghan affairs with President Ashraf Ghani. In November of 2020, acting United States Defense Secretary Christopher Miller announced a reduction in the number of United States troops in Afghanistan that would lower American forces by at least half before a January 2021 deadline.[242] According to the Defense Department, the United States' war in Afghanistan has cost the lives of almost two thousand five hundred soldiers in its entirety.[243] Based on data from late 2019, the United States has also spent two trillion dollars over the course of nearly two decades on a war that has left the Taliban in control of significant portions of the country, has left almost forty-thousand Afghan civilians dead, has allowed Afghanistan to be one of the leading black market cultivators and exporters of heroin, has left Afghanistan with an incompetent self-defense military apparatus and a government incapable of addressing the nation's widespread poverty.[244]

Much like the state of Vietnam at the conclusion of United States involvement, it is difficult to argue that the War on Terrorism has fulfilled the objectives it initially sought to achieve. We are then left to ask ourselves, did the trajectory and outcome of the Vietnam War provide any meaningful lessons for the American public and their elected officials when contemplating the War on Terrorism? While we would like to think that someone should have

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[242] Council on Foreign Relations, "The U.S. War in Afghanistan: 1999-2021."

[243] U.S. Department of Defense, "Immediate Release: Casualty Status," https://www.defense.gov/casualty.pdf

[244] Sarah Almukhtar, Rod Nordland, "What Did the U.S. Get for $2 Trillion in Afghanistan?" *The New York Times*, December 9, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/12/09/world/middleeast/afghanistan-war-cost.html ; Adam Nossiter, "The Taliban Think They Have Already Won, Peace Deal or Not," *The New York Times*, March 30, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/30/world/asia/taliban-victory-afghanistan.html

seen the disaster that was the War on Terrorism coming based on previous experiences, it is

perhaps more likely true that at the time in which the United States had to make a decision of

whether or not to instigate two wars on opposite ends of the globe, how one subjectively chose to

remember certain aspects of the Vietnam War and its aftermath had a greater impact than any

sort of uniform memory.[245]

As evidenced by the cinematic productions of the post-Vietnam era, it became possible to

assign all sorts of lessons, values, messages, and meanings that contributed to a national

collective memory that both blamed the government for the tragedies of the 1970s as well as cast

the individual veteran as the victim of a foreign policy that was doomed to fail. These

constructions of collective memory undoubtedly cast an influential shadow that defined both

foreign and domestic policies for the Reagan, H.W. Bush, and Clinton administrations.

Therefore, by the time John Kerry and George W. Bush were competing for the White House

amidst a geo-political crisis that had an equal potential to be a success or total failure, both men

invoked their own constructions of collective memories of the Vietnam War to serve as a

compass for navigating their foreign policy outlooks.[246]

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[245] David Kieran, *Forever Vietnam: How a Divisive War Changed American Public Memory*, 236—237.

[246] David Kieran, *Forever Vietnam: How a Divisive War Changed American Public Memory*, 3—13, 235—240;
Michael Cimino, dir. *The Deer Hunter* (Universal Pictures, released 1978); Francis Ford Coppola, dir. *Apocalypse Now* (American Zoetrope, released 1979); Ted Kotcheff, dir. *First Blood* (Anabasis N.V., released 1982); George P. Cosmatos, dir. *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (Anabasis N.V., released 1985); Oliver Stone, dir. *Platoon* (Metro Goldwyn Mayer, released 1986); Oliver Stone, dir. *Born on the Fourth of July* (Ixtlan Corporation, released 1989); Kathryn Bigelow, dir. *The Hurt Locker* (First Light Production, released 2009); Kathryn Bigelow, dir. *Zero Dark Thirty* (Annapurna Pictures, released 2012); Peter Berg, dir. *Lone Survivor* (Film 44, released 2014); Clint Eastwood, dir. *American Sniper* (Mad Chance, released 2015); Jason Hall, dir. *Thank You for Your Service* (DreamWorks Pictures, released 2017); Ronald Reagan, "1980 Republican National Convention Acceptance Address,"; Ronald Reagan, "Address to the Veterans of Foreign Wars Convention in Chicago."; George H.W. Bush, "Speech to State Lawmakers," C-SPAN internet archive; Glenn Kessler, "Bill Clinton and the missed opportunities to kill Osama bin Laden," *The Washington Post* (Blogs); John Kerry, "Global War on Terrorism," C-SPAN internet archive; "Senator John Kerry Presidential Campaign Announcement," C-SPAN internet archive; "Veterans of Foreign Wars Convention," (President George W. Bush), C-SPAN archive.

Beyond the 2004 election, collective memory of the War on Terrorism took on a manifestation of its own in some of the same ways as the post-Vietnam era. As demonstrated by some of the cinematic productions that depicted components of the War on Terrorism, the same sorts of tropes that described the American warrior as a relentless, traumatized, courageous, and surviving character crafted a narrative that made ideological statements about the conflicts in which the film portrayed. Therefore, a crucial way in which collective memory recycled itself from the Vietnam War to the War on Terrorism was that the conflicts were remembered and explained through the eyes of the individual veteran.[247]

How we choose to remember the War on Terrorism in relation to the Vietnam War is predicated on a host of factors, but it stands based on the evidence presented here that we should perhaps consider these conflicts not as separate events, but intimately connected points on a continued trajectory of American socio-political culture.[248]

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[247] Michael Cimino, dir. *The Deer Hunter* (Universal Pictures, released 1978); Francis Ford Coppola, dir. *Apocalypse Now* (American Zoetrope, released 1979); Ted Kotcheff, dir. *First Blood* (Anabasis N.V., released 1982); George P. Cosmatos, dir. *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (Anabasis N.V., released 1985); Oliver Stone, dir. *Platoon* (Metro Goldwyn Mayer, released 1986); Oliver Stone, dir. *Born on the Fourth of July* (Ixtlan Corporation, released 1989); Kathryn Bigelow, dir. *The Hurt Locker* (First Light Production, released 2009); Kathryn Bigelow, dir. *Zero Dark Thirty* (Annapurna Pictures, released 2012); Peter Berg, dir. *Lone Survivor* (Film 44, released 2014); Clint Eastwood, dir. *American Sniper* (Mad Chance, released 2015); Jason Hall, dir. *Thank You for Your Service* (DreamWorks Pictures, released 2017).
[248] David Kieran, *Forever Vietnam: How a Divisive War Changed American Public Memory*, 3—13, 235—240.

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