

BRITAIN'S VIETNAM

Is there validity to the argument of historians who compare the American Revolution to the Vietnam War?

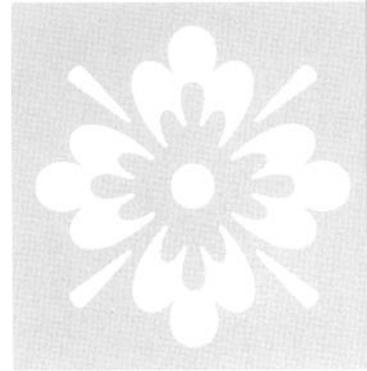
Viewpoint: Yes. Parallels between the Revolutionary War and Vietnam War include overconfidence among military leaders, guerilla warfare, increasing opposition at home, enormous logistical problems, and critical foreign aid to the opposition.

Viewpoint: No. More differences than similarities exist between the two conflicts, and Britain had greater justification in trying to subdue the American colonies than the United States had in intervening in Vietnam's civil war.

It is a common maxim that "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." Of course, history rarely repeats itself exactly, which makes it problematic for anyone attempting to draw lessons to use in the present. However, this difficulty has not stopped American scholars from trying to use the lessons of the past to influence present-day domestic and foreign policies. A fairly recent example is found in the alleged parallels between the American Revolution (1775–1783) and the Vietnam War (ended 1975).

Beginning in the late 1960s, historians who opposed the Vietnam War used the past to serve their political purposes by writing essays in popular journals demonstrating the similarities between British involvement in the Revolutionary War and U.S. participation in Vietnam with the hopes of convincing the American nation of its flawed foreign policy. Characterizing the American Revolution as "Britain's Vietnam," these scholars pointed out that both Crown officials in the 1770s and American leaders in the 1960s believed that failure to achieve their objectives would initiate the downfall of their supremacy in world affairs. Likewise, both Great Britain and the United States, because of their overwhelming military superiority, were confident in their ability to defeat their enemies. However, this confidence soon waned as both superpowers confronted logistical challenges in waging war in difficult geographic conditions on the other side of an expansive ocean. In both conflicts the enemy employed guerilla tactics, fighting techniques with which the British military in the 1770s and American forces in the 1960s were largely unfamiliar. Contributing to both defeats was assistance provided by other nations to their enemies and the flawed assumptions behind plans to replace regular troops with local forces. Finally, both nations waged limited wars that led to military setbacks. These defeats, in turn, led to increasing domestic opposition that ultimately forced the British and American governments to seek peace before achieving their military objectives.

Historians have recently reevaluated the Vietnam War and its parallels with the Anglo-American dispute of the late eighteenth century. In short, they find more differences than similarities between the two military conflicts. First, the American rebellion was a war for independence; therefore, Britain was more justified in trying to retain control of its colonies than the United States was in intruding in a Vietnamese civil war. Second, except in occasional auxiliary action, both sides in the American Revolution strove to



fight a conventional war, whereas the Vietcong (Southern Communist guerillas) intentionally chose to wage a guerilla war. Third, Prime Minister Lord Frederick North's government in Britain enjoyed more popular support at home for suppressing the Rebels than the Johnson administration ever had for its attempt to stop the spread of communism in Southeast Asia. Finally, the American Revolution evolved into a global conflict, whereas fighting in the Vietnam War was isolated in Southeast Asia.

Although historians disagree on the parallels between the American Revolution and the Vietnam War, analyzing the similarities and differences between these two military conflicts can still prove fruitful in several ways: it forces one to engage in a healthy introspection concerning who we are as a people and as a nation; it helps one to gain greater insight into the character of the British nation during the late eighteenth century; and, finally, it teaches the importance of an informed and politically active citizenry.



Viewpoint:
Yes. Parallels between the Revolutionary War and Vietnam War include overconfidence among military leaders, guerilla warfare, increasing opposition at home, enormous logistical problems, and critical foreign aid to the opposition.

When comparing British attempts to quell the American Revolution (1775–1783) and U.S. involvement in Vietnam (ended 1975) almost two hundred years later, one can point to many similarities. Although no two historical events will ever be exactly the same, the number of parallels between these conflicts easily leads one to conclude that the American Revolution can indeed be characterized as “Britain’s Vietnam.” Both countries were the most powerful nations of their era and accordingly were overconfident at the onset of hostilities. Both placed an inordinate importance on military victory but still chose to fight limited wars. Both conflicts presented special logistical problems. Both powers overestimated the strength and impact loyal citizens would contribute to ultimate victory, and both saw the erosion of popular and political support at home as the fighting dragged on.

Britain’s victory over France in the Seven Years’ War (1756–1763) propelled that nation to the pinnacle of international power, the culmination of a process that began as early as the defeat of the Spanish Armada (1588). Defeating the French, however, also spawned ill feeling between the mother country and some of its North American colonies. Because inept leaders within the British ministry did not take preemptive measures to conciliate these differences, the previously loyal colonists began an armed rebellion in 1775 that the British felt duty-bound to put down with military force. King George III and British policy makers felt such force necessary in order to

maintain the nation’s position of world power. Many Britons were led to believe that giving in to the American colonists would mean the end of the British Empire. In a letter written to Prime Minister Lord Frederick North, King George III observed: “The moment is certainly anxious; the die is now cast whether this shall be a Great Empire or the least dignified of the European states; the object is certainly worth struggling for and I trust the Nation is equally determined with myself to meet the conclusion with firmness.” One of the King’s greatest concerns, however, was the role France would play in the war in America. Once England’s traditional adversary entered the war on the side of the United States in 1778, the British viewed the French as their real enemy. As Lord Sheffield noted, “We must either fight France in America or we must fight her in the west, in the east, or at home in the rich fields of Britain.”

The United States by the mid twentieth century had become as powerful as Great Britain had been in the late eighteenth century, and like Great Britain’s rivalry with France, U.S. supremacy was challenged by a strong rival, the Soviet Union. When the United States adopted the policy of containment in order to stop the spread of communism, it became involved in Southeast Asia to a degree it had not anticipated. Rather than recognizing the goals of the Vietnamese people—for example, to end the civil war, reunify the country, and create an autonomous government without foreign intervention—the United States saw only a Communist plot to further undermine Western influence and eventually take away freedom throughout the world. Historian Neil L. York wrote that “Just as British policymakers equated British security with possession of American colonies, American policymakers equated American security with the maintenance of a communist-free Vietnam.” These policy makers included five U.S. presidents, from Harry S Truman through Richard M. Nixon. Truman characterized Southeast Asia as



Nineteenth-century engraving of a Patriot woman fending off Tories who raided her cabin

(Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.)

an area “vital to the future of the free world.” His successors agreed. Just as Britain saw France as the ultimate enemy in the Revolutionary War, the United States saw international communism as embodied in Soviet Russia and Red China as the ultimate enemy as the nation became more deeply drawn into the Vietnam quagmire.

At the outset of their ill-advised wars, both the British and the Americans felt invincible because of their military superiority. Such feelings of dominance can best be illustrated by two timely statements. Lord George Germain, Secretary of State for the American Colonies, advised in September 1775: “As there is not common sense in protracting a war of this sort, I should be for exerting the utmost force of this Kingdom to finish the rebellion in one campaign.” During a hearing in 1966 Senator Thomas Dodd (D-Connecticut) echoed such overconfidence. Like so many other Americans, he assumed that the United States could easily impose its will on “a few thousand primitive guerrillas.”

Neither superpower adequately addressed logistical challenges before plunging headlong into hostilities. Both wars were fought on battlefields on the other side of huge oceans and under alien geographic conditions—the often impenetrable wilderness in the American colonies and the equally impenetrable jungles of Southeast Asia. Regarding the problem of distance, Sir Edmund Burke reminded his British constituents:

Three thousand miles of ocean lie between you and them. No contrivance can prevent the

effect of this distance in weakening government. Seas roll, and months pass, between the order and the execution; and the want of a speedy explanation of a single point is enough to defeat a whole system.

Because of modern transportation and communication systems, the factor of distance was not as daunting for American forces in an even more distant Vietnam, but it did present a challenge. However, similar to the difficulty and extent of the terrain in the United States that contributed to the failure of the British Army, the geography of Vietnam created problems for the Americans. Even with the latest innovations in scientific warfare and technology at their disposal and with superior air support, U.S. ground troops still had to wage guerilla-type battles in rugged areas to secure one village at a time, often to see their hard-won conquests later fall into enemy hands. As in America during the Revolution, there was no strategic nerve center whose capture would end the war. In both cases it was like fighting a sponge. Historian Don Higginbotham called attention to such parallels when he wrote, “Much of the time . . . the superpowers and their local foes were in a classic standoff, with the foreign army occupying the cities and the insurgents dominating the countryside, with the former using the roads by day and the latter making them unsafe by night.” Near the close of the Revolution one French military official was heard to say, “No opinion was clearer than that though the people of America might be conquered by well disciplined Euro-

pean troops, the country of America was unconquerable.” Can not this observation also be said of Vietnam?

Another mistake common to the British of the eighteenth century and the Americans of the twentieth century was their reliance on loyal local residents to help their cause. England’s leaders planned to have British regulars replaced by colonials loyal to the King and even projected that the Loyalists would run the government after the rebellion was put down. However, they never really knew the extent of loyalism in America. Even General Sir William Howe incorrectly assumed that “the insurgents are very few, in comparison with the whole of the people.” In spite of the fact that there was a large population of Loyalists in America, their numbers were not spread evenly throughout the colonies, nor were they well organized.

During the presidential election of 1964 President Lyndon B. Johnson, perhaps feeling the need to appear as the peace candidate, used election-year rhetoric when he declared, “We are not going to send American boys nine or ten thousand miles away from home to do what Asian boys ought to be doing for themselves.” Six months later he increased troop deployment to Vietnam. Four years later Nixon’s campaign promise was to bring American military personnel home. He came up with the plan of Vietnamization—gradually turning over the ground fighting to the South Vietnamese. Large numbers of U.S. combat troops were returned home, but overall the program proved unsuccessful. When the South Vietnamese were left to fight on their own, their resistance quickly crumbled. Vietnamization was comparable to the equally unsuccessful British plan of Americanization, in which they attempted to turn the war over to American Loyalists in the South.

Relying too much on local support presented additional problems. How could one tell a Loyalist from a Patriot or a South Vietnamese from a North Vietnamese or a member of the Vietcong (Southern Communist guerillas)? This confusion allowed the enemy to infiltrate opposition forces easily. Both conflicts also saw many cases of changing allegiances. To illustrate further the problem with colonial Loyalists, historian Richard M. Ketchum has pointed out that “it was a very difficult matter to retain one’s loyalty to the King unless friends and neighbors were of like mind and unless there was British force nearby to safeguard such a belief.”

Things were not so different for the South Vietnamese, who shared a common heritage with the people of the North. One journalist noted that unlike the situation with friendly,

liberated Europeans during World War II (1939–1945), the rural people in Vietnam “kept their eyes down or looked the other way and offered no greeting” when American soldiers passed through their streets or villages. “They just wanted us to go home,” he concluded. Barbara W. Tuchman asked: “What nation was ever built from the outside?” Clearly, earlier hopes that local support for the superpowers could be relied upon proved ephemeral.

The goals of both Great Britain and the United States affected the outcome of their respective wars and helped bring about the eventual erosion of domestic public support. They also determined how the wars would be waged. Although the decision to put down the colonial uprisings aroused plenty of heated debate in Parliament, in the end a majority of members chose to support the King and his ministers. Men such as Edmund Burke, Charles James Fox, John Wilkes, and William Pitt the Elder spoke out against such action, but they did not at that time wield the greatest power and influence in the English government. The King counted on the backing of the English people even though Lord North might not have been as sanguine in this regard. The opposition’s viewpoint that the colonies would return to the fold through peaceful negotiation proved ultimately compelling. Although leading adversaries could not prevent Britain from going to war, at least they influenced how the war was fought.

Thus, the American Revolution became a limited war—“limited from the standpoint of its objectives and the force with which Britain waged it,” according to Ketchum. The British wanted the colonies to remain within the Empire when the conflict was over and were not bent on their complete annihilation. As the interminable hostilities continued, and Britain suffered defeats and was no closer to ending the rebellion, the British people lost the will to go on fighting. While the goals of personal freedom and independence held great appeal for the Patriots and their supporters, according to Ketchum, the goals of Great Britain did not inspire the British citizens and soldiers to put much effort into winning the war:

In England the goal had not been high enough, while the cost was too high. There was nothing compelling about the limited objective of bringing the colonies back into the empire, nothing inspiring about punishing the rebels, nothing noble in proving that retribution awaited those who would change the nature of things.

In Vietnam, the United States also fought a limited war. The country was torn between the two conflicting goals of encouraging Viet-

namese autonomy and of keeping those people free of communism. The latter goal superceded the former. York commented on America's ambivalent aims:

American policymakers saw military success as a necessary means to an end, a way to help win the larger war for the 'hearts and minds' of the people. . . . They fought something short of all-out war while they looked for a total victory. American policymakers wanted their enemy to concede defeat and surrender without being completely destroyed.

In 1964 both Houses of Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. Senator James William Fulbright (D-Arkansas) introduced and supported this measure in committee, giving President Johnson full military discretionary power in Vietnam. Some opposition to its passage existed, but at first no general protest developed. Even when Johnson sent U.S. ground troops to Vietnam the following year, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara defended this policy: "The greatest contribution Vietnam is making . . . is developing an ability in the United States to fight a limited war, to go to war without arousing the public ire." He predicted the United States would be facing this type of war in the next five decades.

Some trusted advisers close to President Johnson, however, began to have second thoughts about deeper U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Among them was Clark Clifford, who briefly replaced McNamara as Secretary of Defense and wrote in a private letter to Johnson that "further build-up of ground forces" could become an "open-end commitment . . . without realistic hope of ultimate victory." By the end of 1966 both public and political opposition to the war had become more generalized, even among ranking members of Johnson's own political party, including Fulbright and McNamara. The increasingly open, strident, and often violent protest against the war and what it was doing to the American economy and morale finally doomed Johnson's chances of running for the presidency again, just as the prolonged war in the former American colonies brought down the North ministry and diminished support for King George III's war policy almost two hundred years earlier. President Nixon, sadly, did not learn from that history or from the failure of his predecessor.

In demonstrating the critical interest in stopping the spread of communism in Southeast Asia, in 1954 President Dwight D. Eisenhower introduced an interesting analogy comparing the situation there to dominoes: if the United States allowed Vietnam to fall, one by one all of the other noncommunist coun-

tries in that area would topple. President Johnson, expanding on this concept, concluded that the United States would have to "pull back our defenses to San Francisco." Of course, such dire predictions were unfounded. The British had visions of great peril if they lost in America, but such fears also proved erroneous. In both cases the lessons learned came too late—only after a great toll on human life; vast political and public turmoil; and a lengthy, needless enmity between peoples who otherwise might have been allies.

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Viewpoint:
No. More differences than similarities exist between the two conflicts, and Britain had greater justification in trying to subdue the American colonies than the United States had in intervening in Vietnam's civil war.

The scientist's claim to truth often rests on the ability to repeat an experiment many times or to make substitutions to see if the results are different. Since the historian cannot repeat an historical event, the best substitute is comparative history, one of the more useful tools in the historian's toolbox. While every historical event is exceptional, historians have found this methodology especially helpful in looking at wars and revolutions where underlying causes, events, and results have some similarities. Even participants in wars and revolutions will consciously or unconsciously seek out models to support their action or provide guidance.

During the 1970s historians began comparing the Vietnam War (ended 1975) to the American Revolution (1775–1783). In each war the imperial power exerted its military might only to be challenged by a rather ragtag group of dedicated revolutionaries. In both cases the imperial power lost to the indigenous forces. Specific events can also be compared. For example, the Kent State shootings (1970) can be compared to the Boston Massacre (1770), although this comparison seemed more compelling in the 1970s than at the dawn of the twenty-first century. While there are points of similarity between the American Revolution and the American war in Vietnam, in fact these were different events, fought under different contexts for different pur-



TARLETON'S QUARTER!

During the Revolutionary War (1775–1783) both sides committed atrocities. One of the more infamous incidents occurred at the Waxhaws, South Carolina. On 29 May 1780 Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton and the British Legion overran a detachment of Virginia Continentals, and just as a white flag appeared in the American ranks, Tarleton's horse was shot from underneath him. The Legionnaires, fearing that their leader had been killed, massacred the surrendering enemy soldiers, and the American battle cry "Tarleton's Quarter!" (no quarter) was born. An American doctor wrote the following account:

The demand for quarters, seldom refused to a vanquished foe, was at once found to be in vain; not a man was spared, and it was the concurrent testimony of all the survivors that for fifteen minutes after every man was prostrate they went over the ground plunging their bayonets into every one that exhibited any signs of life, and in some instances, where several had fallen one over the other, these monsters were seen to throw off on the point of the bayonet the uppermost, to come at those beneath. . . .

Capt. John Stokes . . . received twenty-three wounds, and as he never for a moment lost his recollection, he often repeated to me the manner and order in which they were inflicted.

Early in the sanguinary conflict he was attacked by a dragoon, who aimed many deadly blows at his head, all of which by the dextrous use of the small sword he easily parried; when another on the right, by one stroke, cut off his right hand through the metacarpal bones. He was then assailed by both, and instinctively attempted to defend his head with his left arm until the forefinger was cut off, and the arm hacked in eight or ten places from the wrist to the shoulder. His

head was then laid open almost the whole length of the crown to the eye brows. After he fell he received several cuts on the face and shoulders. A soldier, passing on in the work of death, asked if he expected quarters. Stokes answered, "I have not, nor do I mean to ask quarters. Finish me as soon as possible." He then transfixed him twice with his bayonet. Another asked the same question and received the same answer, and he also thrust his bayonet twice through his body.

Stokes had his eye fixed on a wounded British officer sitting at some distance, when a serjeant came up who addressed him with apparent humanity and offered him protection from further injury at the risk of his life.

"All I ask," said Stokes, "is to be laid by that officer that I may die in his presence."

While performing this generous office the humane serjeant was twice obliged to lay him down and stand over him to defend him against the fury of his comrades. Doctor Stapleton, Tarleton's surgeon, . . . was then dressing the wounds of the officer. Stokes, who lay bleeding in every pore, asked him to do something for his wounds, which he scornfully and inhumanely refused until peremptorily ordered by the more humane officer, and even then only filled the wounds with rough tow, the particles of which could not be separated from the brain for several days.

Source: William Dobein James, A Sketch of the Life of Brig. Gen. Francis Marion and a History of His Brigade (Charleston, S.C.: Gould & Milet, 1821), Appendix, pp. 1–7.

poses. The comparative model yields far more differences than similarities.

These two revolutions were fought not only in different times but also at contrasting points in the development of the English and American nations. England's move to develop an American empire began in 1607 with the first permanent settlement of Englishmen in Jamestown, but the Empire was only beginning to reach a point of maturity throughout the globe by 1776. It was only in 1768 that Parliament was concerned enough about the colonies to appoint Lord Hillsborough as the first Secretary of State for the Colonies. The economic theory of capitalism had only been

spelled out in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), the same year as the Declaration of Independence was written. For the British, the failure to keep America in the imperial fold was an isolated experience. In the future they would maintain much tighter control over their empire and not give local residents so much political power.

The British Empire did not reach the pinnacle of its extent and power until the mid to late nineteenth century under the reign of Victoria. By 1900 the British Empire included almost one-quarter of the world's lands and population. By then they had developed the administrative machinery to control colonies all over the world, the naval power to protect that empire, and an

entrepreneurial capitalistic system that drove the great pioneers of empire (such as Cecil Rhodes in Africa) to commercial exploitation of the natural resources of the colonies.

At the point where Vietnam emerges as an important diplomatic issue in the 1960s, the American empire is fully mature and the world is witnessing the undoing of the Anglo-American domination of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Wars of liberation had swept through South America and Africa, and several countries allied with the Soviet bloc, which decidedly rejected capitalism as a way to organize the economy. Thus, Vietnam stands at the twilight of Western colonialism, while the American Revolution stands at the point when the sun was still rising on imperial exploitation.

The military and diplomatic background of the wars were also quite different. The American Revolution occurred near the end of almost one hundred years of conflict among the British, French, Spanish, and Dutch over the construction of large-scale overseas empires. As the history of the nineteenth century illustrates, England was on the way to constructing the richest and most widespread empire the world had ever seen. The global extent of this empire, protected by the Royal Navy, was truly awesome. The Vietnam conflict, however, came at the beginning of the end of a global cold war between the United States and the Soviet Union. Wearing ideological prisms created in the post-World War II period, American policy makers saw all foreign-policy issues as a contest with the Soviet Union. Smaller, less powerful, and less prosperous developing countries had to choose between the democratic/capitalistic model of the West or the socialist/communist ideology of the Soviet Union and its allies. The Americans could not accept the efforts of Ho Chi Minh and the Vietnamese as an authentic war of national liberation that would result in a world where they, not a foreign power, would control their national destiny.

President John F. Kennedy said about Vietnam, "No one can call these 'wars of liberation.' For these are free countries living under their own governments." He also contended that "Vietnam represents the cornerstone of the Free world in Southeast Asia, the keystone to the arch, the finger in the dike. Burma, Thailand, India, Japan, the Philippines and obviously Laos and Cambodia are among those whose security would be threatened if the red tide of Communism overflowed into Vietnam." Had American policy makers in the 1960s looked back upon their own revolution, they might have proceeded in a different direction in Vietnam. The Vietnamese had rejected Chinese

domination, driven out the French, and resisted the Japanese. President Lyndon B. Johnson, who took the presidency after Kennedy's assassination in 1963, felt trapped by the war because it was going to cost him the Great Society social programs. Nevertheless, he said that "everything I knew about history told us that if I got out of Vietnam and let Ho Chi Minh run through the streets of Saigon, then I'd be doing exactly what Chamberlain did in World War II." The history of Vietnam and all of Indochina after the American withdrawal illustrated that the feared domino effect would not occur.

The Vietnam War, unlike the American Revolution, did not draw in other participants to make it a global war. France had had enough of Vietnam, and Britain, in a long decline, did not have the resources or will to get involved in a global conflict. Only America had a prosperous postwar economy to risk in the jungles of Vietnam.

Furthermore, the military strategies used by the Americans in Vietnam and the British in America were quite different. Although there were incidents of guerilla warfare in the American Revolution, most of the conflict was based on conventional eighteenth-century rules of engagement. The closest example of guerilla conflict in the American Revolution was the skirmishing between Francis Marion and Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton in the Carolinas in late 1780. In contrast, George Washington's early defeats in and around New York City convinced him that he would have to choose his battles carefully. The acknowledged end of the war came when Washington and French general Comte de Rochambeau pinned General Charles Cornwallis on the York Town peninsula and placed him under a traditional military siege. In a well-orchestrated move, Admiral François de Grasse of the French fleet blocked the entrance to the Chesapeake Bay, depriving Cornwallis of support from the Royal Navy. So while the Americans utilized guerilla tactics, primarily in the South, they used them mainly as a backup for the more traditional methods of fighting. In fact, the guerillas might have even posed a threat to the nationalizing force of the Continental Army. As historian Don Higginbotham wrote:

From all this we can conclude that the Americans opted for conventional military responses in the Revolution because of their British background and because of the nature of their society. Once hostilities erupted and Independence became the final goal, there was still another reason. A martial approach that stressed guerilla methods would inevitably tilt the Revolution in the wrong direction—toward localism and provincialism, with each colony-state devising its own ways of striking

at the enemy. Thus among other things, Washington's army—appropriately called the Continental Army—was a nationalizing factor in American life.

A different military strategy and mode of fighting was utilized in Vietnam. Unlike the British in the American Revolution, the Americans could not define winning by the territory they had under their control. One day they would seem to control an area, and within a week or month their control evaporated. Body counts became a dreadful measure of success.

Another major difference between the American Revolution and the Vietnam War was the fundamental relationships between the combatants. The war in Vietnam was a war of national liberation, where a group of people with a similar history, political ideology, religion, and cultural values was trying to establish control over its own destiny. The American Revolution was in many ways a civil war, not a war of national liberation. Robert MacNamara, U.S. Secretary of State in the 1960s, later wrote that "I had never visited Indochina, nor did I understand or appreciate its history, culture or values. . . . When it came to Vietnam, we found ourselves setting policy for a region that was terra incognita." This statement is a rather stark admission by one of the chief architects of the war in Vietnam. The country was an abstraction for Americans, not a reality. The American Revolution was a brothers' war, or in the words of historian Kevin Phillips, a "Cousins' War." The first British commander in chief in America, Thomas Gage, was married to a woman from New Jersey. The connections between the Americans and British went back to the founding.

The political ideology of the American Revolution was essentially British in origin. Virginia politician Thomas Jefferson drew freely on the writings of English philosopher John Locke to compose the Declaration of Independence (1776), and much of the pamphlet literature that was so critical to shaping an ideological consensus was based on the Whig political theorists of the English Civil War (1642–1646) and the Glorious Revolution (1688). There was no great break from the English ideas—only a push in a radical direction. After the Declaration of Independence the American states, counties, and localities disconnected from British control functioned smoothly on the English system of administration that had matured in the colonies for nearly 175 years.

In the area of economics and business, historians often argue that the Revolution was fought so that Americans had the same freedom to trade as they perceived the British had.

They avidly endorsed capitalism, preferring to exploit other countries rather than be exploited by the British. In the 1780s and 1790s U.S. Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton was anxious to reconnect the United States with the British Empire's trading network, but without any political ties. This set of economic values was completely alien to the peasants of Vietnam and to their leaders who were drawn to communism.

Ethnically, a high percentage of American citizens during the Revolution had been born in England, Scotland, Ireland, or Wales or were descendants of people who emigrated from these four parts of Great Britain. Native Americans, of course, had been killed or marginalized; Africans held a clearly subordinate place in the colonies. White Americans were deeply influenced by the folkways of Great Britain. In Vietnam the situation was different. Most Vietnamese had different religious, cultural, and political values than the French they expelled or the Americans they fought. The fact that the United States picked a Catholic to be its political puppet in Vietnam exposed America's lack of understanding of the Vietnamese culture.

Ho Chi Minh was an avowed Communist, although foremost he was a nationalist. He chose to ally with the enemy of his enemy. The United States tried to create the fiction that South Vietnam was a nation that wanted to resist the Communists in the North and establish a Western-style democracy in the South. This dream was that of the Americans, not the dream of the Vietnamese leadership. It is not at all clear how the Vietnamese peasant felt, but the more the United States bombed North Vietnam and committed atrocities against the Vietnamese people, the more the Vietnamese hated Americans, and the peasants were pushed into the hands of the Vietcong (Southern Communist guerillas). This situation was in stark contrast to the American Revolution. As Higginbotham wrote:

It is impossible to imagine the Americans as terrorists in the modern sense, for terrorists hate their opponents and all they stand for. Terrorism spawns guerilla warfare, which in turn produces more terrorism; terrorism rips apart the vitals of a community. If in 1776 Americans turned toward independence, they did not wish to risk the destruction of their social and intellectual fabric in winning it.

While the American Rebel and his British opponent shared the same political values, the Vietnamese saw the U.S. system as strange. Americans were trying to impose an alien system from outside. Vietnam was also caught in an economic struggle between the East and the West. American fears about the collapse of Southeast

Asia (as seen in the domino theory) drove them to follow a certain set of policies. All the British wanted was for the Americans to follow British laws and trade regulations. They were not trying to impose a new system. The Americans and British shared the same culture and traditions. American colonists honored England as the mother country and revered King George III right up until the outbreak of war.

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