

# After the vietnam war

[War](#), [Cold War](#)



The new unified Vietnam became the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV). With Americans gone, however, Vietnam's military problems were not over. In neighboring Kampuchea (previously named Cambodia), Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge began a reign of terror in hopes of creating a pre-industrial utopia, murdering around 2 million people in so-called "killing fields." In 1978, the SRV invaded Kampuchea to stop the Khmer Rouge, in what became known as "Vietnam's Vietnam." While the invasion put an end to the "killing fields," China became upset by the SRV's extension of influence in the region and began a border war with Vietnam. After decades of war, Vietnam found itself with the world's fourth largest army but one of the poorest economies. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, it began to turn more and more to capitalism and a liberal economy. By 1975, Vietnam was off the Gallup Poll list of top issues in the US. Outside of concern for remaining POWs still in Vietnam, Americans became less and less concerned with events in the country. Nonetheless, the war had lasting impacts. It inspired a public distrust of the US government and made the military less popular, at least in the short term. The draft has not been used since. President Reagan tried to follow the Weinberger Doctrine, "No More Vietnams." In 1982, Yale student Maya Ying Lin's design for the Vietnam War Memorial was built in Washington DC, a permanent monument to the American casualties of the war. Another monument to the Vietnam War is the role it continues to play in American popular culture. *Angels from Hell* (1968), *Satan's Sadists* (1969), *Chrome and Hot Leather* (1971), *The Losers* (1971), and *Taxi Driver* (1976) deal with Vietnam veterans' difficulties with life after returning to the US. *Tracks* (1976), *Who'll Stop the Rain* (1978), *Between Heaven and Earth*

(1994), and *The War* (1994) deal also deal with veterans scarred by the war. Other films such as *Coming Home* (1978), *The Deer Hunter* (1978), and *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989) depict veterans' mostly successful struggles to cope with life after the war. *Apocalypse Now* (1979) made officers villains, but *An Officer and a Gentleman* (1982), *Lords of Discipline* (1983), *Taps* (1981), and *Private Benjamin* (1980) portrayed the military involved in Vietnam more positively. From *Rambo* (1982) to *Platoon* (1986) to *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), movie depictions of the Vietnam experience have varied a great deal. Nonetheless, the Vietnam War has remained a lasting touchstone for American popular culture. Commentary In 1975 it appeared that the US had lost the Vietnam War. But while much of Indochina did become communist, validating the domino theory to an extent, the war left mostly psychological scars in the US. The war did not affect the United States' status as a superpower. While North Vietnam "won" the war, realizing Ho Chi Minh's lifelong dream, Vietnam's postwar period was filled with more fighting, poverty, and suffering for its people. Today, as multinational capitalist ventures make inroads in Vietnam, one would hardly suspect that communism had won the war in 1975. In previous wars, especially World Wars I and II, the US could go "all out." Those wars were "winner take all," with few outside considerations affecting American military policy. The Vietnam War was fundamentally different, since a victory on the battlefield might translate into a global war between superpowers. And further, with new media technology, the American military also discovered that even when battlefield victories triggered no larger Cold War response, those victories could be transformed into defeats by the American media. Vietnam

was not simply a war between two sides. The US was burdened by a whole host of other issues in its dealings with Vietnam, while North Vietnam's objectives were simple and straightforward. For the US, Vietnam was about "grand strategy," but until Nixon and Kissinger it was too often viewed in terms of tactics and kill ratios. Ultimately, Vietnam was an entirely new kind of war for the US that still remains morally and historically problematic. It is a war, though far smaller than those earlier in the century, that helped to define the new warfare of the second half of the twentieth century, and also helped to define the US military policy within that new world order. -

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