

**Introduction/Short Description:** The question exists as to why the Vietnam disaster did not fundamentally disrupt American confidence in the ultimate effectiveness of its coercive power capabilities. This conviction is evident in the prevailing perception of the nature of the Cold War. I.e. the Vietnam conflict was one episode in the long Cold War between the US and an expansionist USSR that the US ultimately won.

**Abstract/Long Description:** American prevailing perceptions of the Cold War serve current US polity foreign policy process goals that emphasize the expansion of US global influence. The prevailing view in the American polity remains that the Soviet Union was an aggressive, imperialist threat that the US defeated through its containment strategy. The validity of this ultimately self-serving assumption requires critique because communist state postwar foreign and public policy behavior patterns did not conform with this prevailing position. Failure of most of the academy to predict the remarkably peaceful collapse of the Soviet Union is further evidence that this politically prevailing viewpoint was fundamentally flawed. Current dissent is in effect tied to the New Left that emerged partly as a critique to Cold War assumptions that produced the Vietnam debacle. The predominant belief that the US nevertheless won the Cold War despite this left dissent overwhelms current critique of US global dominance relying on hard power methods. These methods were constructed during the Cold War. By accepting the validity of this assumption that the US supposedly won the Cold War, the academy weakens significantly its ability to critique US foreign policy behavior in the so-called war on terror.

**Background/Relevance:** The social movement consequences of leaving unchallenged the politically prevailing narrative of supposed US victory in the Cold War that ended 30 years ago are far-reaching. They include politically effective attacks today on progressive activism, including condemnations of counternarratives that challenge domestically white patriarchal supremacy. E.g. conservative denunciations of cultural pluralism include a focus on trends in the post-New Left public education system curriculum. They claim a leftist bias generally characterizing the academy and those teachers produced by it. The popularity of Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* (2015) among educators as assigned reading is frequently cited as evidence of this bias (McCarthy 2012). A high-profile example is the critique by Daniel J. Flynn, former executive director of Accuracy in Academia (Goode 2003). This organization first gained national media prominence during the Reagan administration, seeking, it claims, to rectify this alleged leftwing bias. Flynn writes, "Who is the most influential historian in America? Could it be Pulitzer Prize winners Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. or Joseph Ellis or David McCullough, whose scholarly works have reached a broad literary public? The answer is none of the above. The accolade belongs instead to the unreconstructed, anti-American Marxist Howard Zinn, whose cartoon anti-history of the United States is still selling 128,000 copies a year twenty years after its original publication. Many of those copies are assigned readings for courses in colleges and high schools taught by leftist disciples of their radical mentor" (2003, para. 1). Flynn focuses his ire also on the academy which tends to favor Zinn's work. "This slanderous tome and its popular and academic success are monuments to human credulity and delusion, and to the disgraceful condition of American letters" (Ibid., para. 40).

**Research Question/Hypothesis:** This prevailing belief that the US-led containment saved humankind from Communist totalitarianism is a critical factor in the conceptualization and legitimation of US foreign and also domestic policy today. The New Left challenge has thereby been effectively quarantined.

**Methods/Methodology:** This historical social movements study utilizes the public record of political developments in conjunction with triangulation with published scholarly literature.

**Participants/Sample:** Historical trends in the evolution of the American polity are identified and extrapolated to tease out critical implications of the Vietnam War and the response of the American polity to it to the present.

**Results:** The College Board utilized Flynn's 2003 essay in a preparation syllabus for the Advanced Placement test for American history college course credit (n.d.). Efforts at the state level to limit the use of the Zinn text by public high school instructors continue. High profile attempts included Indiana governor Mitch Daniels' endeavor to exclude the Zinn text from public schools and universities (Jaschik 2013). An Arkansas case sought passage of state legislation to ban Zinn's work from public school classrooms (Allmann 2017).

**Conclusion/Summary:** Daniel J. Flynn, in 2003 the executive director of Accuracy in Academia, excoriates the American academy for making Howard Zinn "the most influential historian in America" (Ibid., para. 1). Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* constitutes "assigned readings for courses in colleges and high schools taught by leftist disciples of their radical mentor" (Ibid.). Leftist intellectuals such as the late Howard Zinn and his adherents and acolytes allegedly teach American students to disdain their country. "His book is a dagger aimed at the heart the country that has given him more freedom than most of the writers who have ever written and made him a millionaire in the process" [sic] (Flynn 2003, para. 39). The metaphorical depiction of the book as a mortal threat to the US implies that it serves to undermine the amenability of the American public to mobilization by America's leadership. The need to do so is assumed to be in response to challenges, past, present and future. The foundational assumption is that the US won the Cold War, in spite of the New Left. The fact that it is presumed is a further indication of the dominance of this narrative; Flynn does not see the need to defend this supposition in his 2003 polemic against Zinn. Whether or not the Soviet Union was ineluctably threatening to the US is not typically questioned. The US prevailing view takes for granted that the threat existed. The possibility that the Cold War was a conflict spiral based upon mutual misperception of threat remains at best a minority view, both on the left and the right.

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T1, 1964, US Motivational Scheme in Vietnam		T3, 1968 (Tet Offensive), US Motivational Scheme in Vietnam	
A)	Defense (by far the most important)	A)	Bureaucratic Vested Interests Military Vested Interests Economic Vested Interests
B)		B)	Defense
C)	Military Vested Interests	C)	Grandeur

Source: the author, applying Cottam 1977, 31-33

T2, 1967, US Motivational Scheme (i.e. at the peak of the Vietnam intervention)		T4, 1970, US Motivational Scheme in Vietnam	
A)	Defense (by far the most important)	A)	Grandeur
B)	Military Vested Interests Economic Vested Interests → i.e. the military industrial complex Bureaucratic Vested Interests → i.e. vast number of Americans vested their career interests in US Southeast Asian policy	B)	Military Vested Interests Economic Vested Interests Bureaucratic Vested Interests
C)	Grandeur (more important than prestige or credibility)	C)	Defense

Source: the author, applying Cottam 1977, 31-33

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