# United States History Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Unit 13 Identifying Arguments: Vietnam Date:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Period:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Read the selections below. Identify the main argument or thesis of the two excerpts and then identify the major reasons the authors use to support their main argument.**

**“Cold War Blinders and the Tragedy of Vietnam,” [1999] by Robert McNamara, James Blight, and Robert Brigham**

Throughout the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, we operated on the premise that the loss of South Vietnam to North Vietnam would result in all of Southeast Asia being overrun by communism and this would threaten the security of both the United States and the entire noncommunist world. Our thinking about Southeast Asia in 1961 differed little from that of many Americans who fought during World War II to help turn back German and Japanese aggression. Like most Americans, we saw communism as monolithic. In 1954, it was President Eisenhower who coined that term “falling dominoes”; he said that if Indochina fell, the rest of Southeast Asia would indeed fall like a “row of dominoes.”

But as our discussions with Vietnamese officials and scholars evolved, I [Robert McNamara] became keenly aware of how ignorant we had been. The Vietnamese saw the conflict within a much longer span of time than the United States. They had spent the better part of their long lives fighting for Vietnamese unification and independence. [North Vietnam’s] Ho Chih Minh reached out to Washington D.C. for support in the nation’s anticolonial struggles with France, even quoting from Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence in his speeches. American involvement in Vietnam simply turned the United States into the “big enemy.”

**“Vietnam: A Necessary War,” [1999] by Michael Lind**

The Cold War was the third world war of the twentieth century. It was a contest for global military and diplomatic primacy between the United States and the Soviet Union, which had emerged as the two strongest military powers after World War II. The Vietnam War was at one and the same time a civil war and a proxy battle in the Cold War. The fact that the United States was defeated in Vietnam does not necessarily discredit the strategic logic that inspired the U.S. commitment to South Vietnam.

In the mind of the public, the idea of defeat in the Cold War was associated with nuclear Armageddon. After the first major defeat, confidence in America’s military capability would have collapsed. At that point, something akin to a panic in the Stock Market would have ensued. Once the Vietnam War is viewed in the context of the Cold War, it looks less like a tragic error than like a battle that could hardly be avoided. Power in world politics is perceived power. U.S. efforts in Vietnam proved that it was willing to be an ally in the fight against global communism. Had the United States refused to fight in the proxy-duels with the Soviet Union during the Cold War, it seems likely that there would have been a dramatic turn towards the Soviets in world politics.

# Data on Vietnam

**Using the following data, construct your own argument about whether or not the Vietnam War was a benefit to America.**

**Cost of the War**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Cost of World War II** | **Cost of Korea** | **Cost of Vietnam** |
| $296 billion (in 1945 dollars) | $30 billion (in 1953 dollars) | $173 billion (in 1975 dollars) |
| $885 billion (in 1975 dollars) | $60 billion (in 1975 dollars) | $173 billion (in 1975 dollars) |

**Public Opinion on the War**

**YES responses to the question: Do you think going to Vietnam was a mistake?**

**Deaths in Vietnam, 1965-1973**

**Total acres defoliated by chemicals: 4,747,587**

**Bombs dropped on North Vietnam: 822,054**

**Number of Vietnamese killed (both North and South): 2,000,000**

**Number of antiwar demonstrations, 1965-1975: 197**

**Number of Vietnam Veterans affected by PTSD: 700,000**

**47% of homeless veterans served in Vietnam**