

EXTRACT 1

US foreign policy experienced greater domestic shocks in the 1970s than at any other time since the 1930s. By easing the most obvious threats to the nation's security, Nixon's agreements with the Soviet Union and steps towards reconciliation with China cut away at support for continuing Cold War sacrifices and commitments. As the Vietnam War dragged on, costs skyrocketed and the domestic debate raged, Americans became increasingly wary of overseas entanglements. Polls taken shortly before the fall of Saigon produced the stunning revelation that a majority was willing to send troops abroad only to defend Canada. "Vietnam has left a rancid aftertaste that clings to almost every mention of direct military intervention", the columnist David Broder observed in March 1975. Spiraling economic problems reinforced 'already strong tendencies to turn inward. Cold War expenditures had sustained a period of unprecedented economic expansion, but by the early 1970s that bubble had burst. The Vietnam War triggered runaway inflation; the 1973 **Arab oil embargo** – an economic Pearl Harbor – triggered an energy crisis.

From Colony to Superpower: US Foreign Relations Since 1776
by George Herring (Oxford University Press, 2008)

EXTRACT 2

'National obligations', 'dominoes' and 'treaty obligations' caused the United States to persist with the Indochina debacle long after it was plainly apparent it had lost that war and would lose much more elsewhere if it continued with its folly. However rationally motivated the origins of these doctrines were in terms of rationalizing the expansion of imperialism, by 1975 they became a menace insofar as they forced objectives on the United States that far exceeded its capacity to attain. "The American Destiny", "dominoes" and "credibility" which the Secretaries of State and Defense and the President continued to cite at the beginning of 1975, despite the fact that they could no longer always convince either Congress or the press with such verbiage, revealed only that the conventional wisdom of thirty years had become increasingly self-destructive to a system that was structurally incapable of veering from its collision course.

Main Currents in Modern American History by Gabriel Kolko (Pantheon, 1976)

EXTRACT 3

The realist critique of the Vietnam War remains very popular today. It permits ageing veterans of the Sixties Left, embarrassed by their former support for Ho Chi Minh's vicious dictatorship and their denunciations of American presidents as war criminals or their avoidance of the draft, to claim they were right to oppose the war, even if their rationale was mistaken. But there was, and is, a realist case in favour of the Vietnam War. The fact that the United States was defeated in Vietnam does not necessarily discredit the strategic logic that inspired US commitment to South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia and their Southeast Asian neighbours. The failure of American policy in Indochina may have resulted from inappropriate military tactics, or the characteristics of the North Vietnamese and South Vietnamese societies and governments, or the support provided to Hanoi by the Soviet Union and China, or the peculiarities of American political culture – or by a combination of all these factors. The case that Indochina was worth a limited American war of some kind, particularly in the circumstances of the Cold War in the 1960s, is compelling.

Vietnam: The Necessary War by Michael Lind (Free Press, 1999)



Using your understanding of the historical context assess how convincing the arguments in the extracts are in relation to ...

the success of US Foreign Policy 1945 - 1975.