

According to the Congressional Research Service, “From the Washington Administration to the present, Congress and the President have enacted 11 separate formal declarations of war against foreign nations in five different wars” (Elsea, 2014). Now you must be thinking “the United States has definitely fought in more than eleven wars, what happened to all the other ones?” Well, although the last time the United States declared war was against Japan in World War II, we have a broad history of fighting undeclared wars. The Vietnam War specifically was the center of much public controversy and was very influential in our history. The war caused lasting social, political, and economic effects that shaped the way the United States viewed war, and how the world viewed the U.S.. These effects included the War Powers Act of 1973, which was established soon after the end of the Vietnam War. This act caused controversy and confusion concerning the war making powers of our governmental branches. Furthermore, it has created a certain ambiguity around the word war, and has been influential in the lack of declared wars despite continued foreign conflicts. The War Powers Act is not the only law created many years ago which still has major effects on modern society. The Social Security Act of 1935 and the amendment to it that established Medicare in 1965 are still law today. These Acts of government were established in the past, and although they may have been favorable then, their relevance to modern society, and their continuation in the future may not be beneficial for America. As key events in history unfold, the public perceptions and governmental responses that follow can be significant in creating the current atmospheres.

September 2, 1945 officially marked the end of the second World War for the United States. They had been vital in winning this war, fighting both on the European and Pacific fronts, as well as providing allies with weaponry and ammunition produced in the United States. This

war made it clear that the U.S. was an economic and military superpower. According to the University of Groningen, “In the postwar period the United States consolidated its position as the world’s richest country. GNP...Jumped from about \$200 thousand million in 1940...to more than \$500 thousand million in 1960” (let.rug.nl, 2018). They were so prosperous that they gave around \$13 billion to European countries to help them recover following the end of the war. They also continued their role as the “world’s policeman” with the Truman doctrine; giving Greece and Turkey money to protect them from Communism. Additionally, they were the only country with atomic weapons, and they had 15 million men in the military. The superiority and position of the U.S. caused them to feel the need to provide aid to countries that were inferior to them, especially those who were threatened by Communism. This attitude paved the way for the United States’ entrance into Vietnam in 1964. North Vietnam was a Communist state, and they were frustrated with the U.S. presence in Southeast Asia, so they attacked multiple U.S. destroyers off the coast of Vietnam (Elsea, 2014). Due to this act of violence against the United States, President Johnson asked Congress to approve the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which states that the President can “Take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression” (ourdocuments, 1964). Other than the threat to the United States, the desire to defend South Vietnam was also associated with their entrance into SEATO (Southeast Asia Treaty Organization). According to the office of the historian, “The inclusion of Vietnam as a territory under SEATO protection gave the United States the legal framework for its continued involvement there” (history.state, 2018).

As the war continued, people in America were shocked when they realized what they thought would be a simple, fast win, turned out to be a deadly war resulting in over 58,000

American casualties during the eleven years of fighting. This devastation became quite apparent to the U.S. public as television displayed images of the terrible conditions of the war. This did not sit well with the hippie counterculture present in the 60s and 70s that promoted peace and love-not war. Thus, there were many protests, including a demonstration of over 2 million people on October 15, 1969. This massive public disapproval, and the economic toll that the war had on America made it clear to President Nixon that it was time to withdraw from Vietnam. To do this, North Vietnamese and American diplomats met in Paris and started negotiating secretly to end the war. After almost five years of bargaining, on January 27, 1973, all participating countries signed the Paris Peace Accords. The Paris Peace Accords divided Vietnam at the 17th parallel, and removed all the U.S. troops still stationed in Vietnam. This peace however did not last long, in 1973 North Vietnam invaded the South and obtained complete control, making Vietnam a fully Communist country

This war was not only disastrous in the toll it had on American life, but its economic effects were considerable. In 1964, near the start of the Vietnam War, President Johnson declared a “war on poverty”. He would fight this war on poverty through the creation of “The Great Society”. The Great Society was a set of domestic programs and policies that focused on racial issues, poverty, education, and health care (Longley, 2017). The Great Society, although slightly helpful in lowering the number of people in poverty, was also quite costly. This became a problem economically, because the cost of the Vietnam War was also very high, totaling at around 167 billion dollars. According to the University of Illinois, “Johnson’s decision to finance a major war and the Great Society simultaneously...launched a runaway double-digit inflation and mounting federal debt that ravaged the American economy” (Sitikoff, 1999). These high

inflation rates led to an increase in prices and unemployment which affected the consumer culture that had emerged post-World War II. Furthermore, as Alan Rohn stated: “Huge spending on the war in Vietnam led to an increasingly unfavorable balance of trade, which contributed to an international monetary crisis and a threat to U.S. gold reserves in 1967-68” (Rohn, 2016). Overall, the spending on the Vietnam War coupled with President Johnson’s Great Society programs drastically changed not only the economy of the United States but also International economies.

The Vietnam War was the first war that the United States failed to win, this harsh loss had severe social effects that lasted several years. Losing the Vietnam War was a huge hit to America’s ego, we were supposed to be a military superpower, yet we had lost to Communists, who we thought to be inferior. Citizens began to lose confidence in their country. Originally, after the war had concluded, most people refused to talk about the war, acknowledge it happened or accept that America was not all powerful, that they had actually lost a war. In the 1980s, people started to talk about the devastating war of the previous decade and it became a popular topic of literature, movies, television, and music. Although the public began to embrace the tragedy of the Vietnam War, Veterans, on the other hand, were discarded. After the end of WWII veterans came home as heroes, and were treated accordingly. On the contrary, when Vietnam veterans arrived back home they were treated with resentment, as if it was their fault that the United States had lost. They were even made out to be ruthless killers and victimizers. This, along with the devastating effects of the war, left many Vietnam veterans damaged, homeless, and jobless. Sadly, it drove many to the edge as displayed in the shocking statistic: “more Vietnam veterans committed suicide after the war than had died in it”. (Sitikoff, 1999)

The humiliation of the Vietnam War also changed the way people thought about their government and its involvement in global politics. Primarily, there was a general attitude of mistrust towards the government. Citizens were unsure whether political leaders had their best interests in mind. Additionally, the military's reputation was degraded, and people did not see our military as the superpower it was after WWII. To try and make up for the loss of their people's' trust, the government got rid of the draft, making the American military an all-volunteer force. Also, in order to incentivize young men to join the Army, they changed the voting age to 18. Who would want to risk their life for a country that they weren't able to participate in? Finally, and perhaps the most drastic political effect was the "Vietnam Syndrome". This term was used to describe the caution of the United States Government in intervening overseas unless it was positively vital to America's interests. (Rohn, 2016)

This Vietnam Syndrome caused the role of the U.S. in world conflicts after the Vietnam War to be limited. All the Presidents were afraid of being responsible for another disaster similar to the Vietnam War. The U.S. began to take on an isolationist view of the world similar to that after WWI. Unlike prior to the Vietnam War, the United States was no longer regarded as, and no longer strived to be the "policeman" of the world. The U.S. was still a superpower economically, yet they started to relax their efforts to contain Communism, and their military presence was essentially withdrawn. I believe that although President Bush said, "we've kicked the Vietnam syndrome" in 1991, we never really kicked it, as there are still many people who believe that the U.S. should not be involved in foreign territories, and every time we do get involved, there is a huge debate about it. I think that this fear stems from the Vietnam War, and it

will prevent our role as the “world’s policeman” from ever being unanimously supported by the public.

According to the Constitution, the Legislative Branch of Government (Congress) can declare war, and the Executive Branch (the President) is the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces of the United States and can only recommend that Congress declare war. These constitutional rights of each branch came under scrutiny after the conclusion of the Vietnam War, and Congress passed the War Powers Act, also known as the War Powers Resolution, to clarify their responsibilities regarding the reaction towards foreign conflicts, and the distribution of troops abroad. According to History House, the act was passed as a result of “widespread discontent with the Vietnam War and public support for curbing the President’s ability to wage an undeclared war” (History.House, 2018). Furthermore, during the war Nixon bombed Cambodia, a country where hostility was not authorized under the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, and did not request the permission of Congress. This persuaded Congress to limit the President’s powers, and a reason why, when Nixon tried to veto the Act, he was overridden.

The War Powers Act details the requirement of cooperative decisions concerning the placement of troops in foreign conflicts. It is designed to limit the power of the Executive branch. The War Powers Resolution states that within 48 hours of the introduction of Armed Forces “into hostilities or into situations where imminent involvement in hostilities is clearly indicated by the circumstances” the President must complete a formal request for Congressional authorization of their placement. If Congress approves the placement of the troops then they may stay, but if they do not approve, the military forces have 60 days, after the submittal of the authorization request, to be removed. This of course has had many complications, because

almost every single president has either labeled it unconstitutional, or have disregarded parts of it. Also, the time limit has posed issues because some missions, even if Congress does not authorize them, can be carried out within 60 days legally. (History.com, 2017)

After reading both Article I and II of the Constitution and after gaining what I believe to be a sufficient understanding of the War Powers Act, I can see how the W.P.A. could be construed as unconstitutional through its limitations of executive powers originally declared in the Constitution. It states that the President is Commander in Chief of the American Armed Forces which can be defined as a person with the ability to command those under his control. The War Powers Resolution allows the President to send troops to foreign territories, yet he does not really have command of the military because if Congress denies the President's request, (s)he must remove them or else he will be breaking the law. Yet I guess the War Powers Resolution could also be interpreted as a defense of the constitutional power of the Legislative branch to declare war. If there was no W.P.R. then Presidents could circumvent the Constitution by never calling foreign hostility a war, and making people question what level of violence defines a war.

I believe that neither the Executive nor the Legislative branch has challenged the constitutionality of the War Powers Act in the Supreme court for a multitude of reasons. First of all, it directly says in the constitution that Congress must be the one to declare war, so if the President was to take it to the Supreme court, it would be overturned. Also, In the War Powers Act it states, "if any provision of this chapter or the application thereof to any person or circumstance is held invalid, the remainder of the chapter and the application of such provision to any other person or circumstance shall not be affected thereby." This means that if, in court part of the W.P.A. is labeled unconstitutional, the rest of it will remain of legitimate legal

standing, thus a court case would not have much impact. Additionally, of course, those in the legislative branch would not have a desire to question the constitutionality of the act in court because the act protects their constitutional rights and gives them more power.

The Social Security act of 1935 was established on August 14, 1935 by President Roosevelt. This act created a system with the goal of establishing a greater sense of fiscal security for everyone. Primarily used in retirement, Social Security taxes are paid by both a worker and their employer throughout their working years. Those with disabilities that limit their working abilities, and people who were recently fired and in the process of looking for another job are also compensated through this program by the government. Once the worker reaches the age of 62 at the earliest, the funds taken out of their paychecks are paid back incrementally on a monthly basis until they die. The establishment of Social Security is directly correlated with the Great Depression of the 1930's. The Great Depression caused a large rise in unemployment rates, and financial struggles for almost anyone. Although S.S. was not designed to combat the effects of the Great Depression, the state that the Great Depression put people in made them more inclined to pass the program, especially due to the unemployment compensation. Over the years, Social Security programs have been added to fit the situation of the country at the time and help benefit those in need. (ssa, 2018)

Personally, I don't believe that Social Security represents a proper role of government. Social Security is one of the many government programs that have shifted our government more towards socialism, and as someone who identifies as a fiscal conservative, I don't believe it is the government's job to provide expensive social programs that increase taxes. People should be personally responsible for deciding what to do with all the money they make, and shouldn't have



to bear the possibility of not being able to utilize their money if they die before 62. Although, I can see the benefits of S.S. for many people, it is unsustainable in the long run, as I will discuss at a later point, and if nothing is done to change it, will lead the U.S. into even more debt.

One of the additions to the Social Security Act was Medicare which was added on July 30, 1965 by President Johnson. Medicare is a medical plan available to everyone over 65 years old, and includes 4 parts (A, B, C, D). Part A includes covered hospital, assisted living, and hospice benefits. Part B includes screenings, doctor appointments, and physical therapy. Part C is a combination of the benefits of part A and B as well as sometimes D, it is just a part of Medicare that gives private insurance companies the ability to provide Medicare plans along with additions of their own (Medicare, 2018). Part D lowers the cost of necessary prescription drugs. (universal, 2018)

Although my views on the role of government regarding Medicare are similar to those regarding Social Security, I do think that both Social Security and Medicare have been effective at meeting the needs of the people in the past, and many people do rely on their programs for financial assistance. As reported by CBPP, “these (Social Security) benefits lift 15.1 million elderly Americans above the poverty line” (Romig, 2016). Also, according to U.S. Ron Kind, “Before Medicare 51% of Americans 65 and older had health coverage... today... nearly all seniors have coverage” (Umhoefer, 2011). Due to the existence of Social Security and Medicare, people feel much more secure in their financial stability and ability to afford health care.

Unfortunately, these programs have one fatal flaw: they are unsustainable in the future. Nowadays, people are living much longer lives, and one of the largest generation, the Baby Boomers, are reaching retirement age. This means that the government will have to pay Social

Security checks to many more people, for a longer period of time. This means that the Social Security reserves will be quickly depleted, leaving little to the next generation of retirees, even if they have been paying Social Security taxes their whole life. This is not the first-time people have worried about Social Security and Medicare. There have been concerns and amendments in an effort to address those concerns since the 1980s. President Reagan introduced a tax on Social Security, and increased payroll taxes. President Clinton allowed senior citizens to continue working while receiving Social Security, in hopes of increased input into the reserves from payroll tax. The real question is: what will the future hold? Will Presidents keep raising payroll taxes, or finally get rid of a system that is no longer viable even if it may cause public upheaval. (u-s-history, 2018)

In Conclusion, as key events in history unfold, the public perceptions and governmental responses that follow can be significant in creating the current atmospheres. The Vietnam War shaped the current debates of foreign involvement today with its disastrous outcome and effects. Also, the controversy surrounding it created the War Powers Act, which still affects the involvement of the U.S. in foreign conflicts and the distribution of military troops. Finally, although Social Security and Medicare were enacted quite some time ago, their sustainability in the future is an issue that is being debated today, and is very applicable to my future endeavors. Overall, throughout history, the role of government has always been questioned, and their decisions made by our government have caused lasting effects that are regularly debated by the public.

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