

Obama's Unconvincing Argument That Afghanistan Is Not Vietnam

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[Comparisons between the wars in Afghanistan and Vietnam](#) have grown stronger in recent weeks. While this concern has been raised, often with the buzzword quagmire, about every conflict since the end of the U.S. effort in Vietnam, it is not without reason that this is mentioned with regards to Afghanistan. It is hard to ignore the similarities between the two conflicts. In both cases, the U.S. got involved in a war far away for which there was no easily foreseeable resolution. Obama, like another Democratic president more than four decades ago, was convinced, to some extent by his own generals, that more troops would make the difference and drew the U.S. further into the conflict. The Vietnam War destroyed Johnson's presidency and overshadowed some of his impressive accomplishments on domestic issues. Critics of the war in Afghanistan, many of whom are supporters of the current president, do not want to see the same thing happen to Obama.

Obama is not unaware of the comparisons between Afghanistan and Vietnam and took the time to address the issue in his [speech at West Point on Tuesday night](#). However, he dismissed the entire notion in only 101 words.

“Unlike Vietnam, we are joined by a broad coalition of 43 nations that recognizes the legitimacy of our action. Unlike Vietnam, we are not facing a broad-based popular insurgency. And most importantly, unlike Vietnam, the American people were viciously attacked from Afghanistan, and remain a target for those same extremists who are plotting along its border. To abandon this area now — and to rely only on efforts against al Qaeda from a distance — would significantly hamper our ability to keep the pressure on al Qaeda, and create an unacceptable risk of additional attacks on our homeland and our allies.”

This is, frankly, appalling. Obama's arguments are not so much inaccurate as simply not relevant. His main points that the U.S. is, at least nominally, part of a multi-lateral effort in Afghanistan, that the insurgency against the Afghan government is not widely popular and that in 2001 the U.S. was attacked by terrorists with bases in Afghanistan who would like to do it again are, largely true, but only of peripheral relevance to the fears that Afghanistan could become another Vietnam.

Obama did not take on the major issues of concern to those who are worried about repeating the mistakes of Vietnam. The echoes of the Vietnam War cannot easily be ignored in Afghanistan. In that war, the U.S. sought to partner with an unreliable ally who was not fully capable of governing his own country; Generals in Vietnam sought more troops and were perpetually seeking to persuade President Johnson that the war was

winnable; the U.S. sought unsuccessfully to build the South Vietnamese army into force that could fight on its own; and as the war dragged on it became both increasingly unwinnable and increasingly difficult for the U.S. to end its involvement. These are the real similarities that raise the specter of another Vietnam for many, but instead of addressing these issues directly, Obama reminded us that we were attacked by Al Quada in 2001.

The American people, particularly those who, while aware that Vietnam and Afghanistan are different, fear a long and damaging war in Afghanistan that will cost a lot in money and lives while not solving the most security challenges facing our country, deserve more, and better, than this from their president.