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## **The Naval War in Vietnam: Vietnamese and American Perspectives**

The Vietnam War was one of the longest wars in American history and involved all branches of the US Armed Forces up to the cessation of combat operations in 1973. This conference will consider the naval side of the war from both American and Vietnamese perspectives, looking in particular at its causes, course and consequences.

While the seeds of the conflict can be traced back to the anti-colonial turmoil associated with the end of the First World War, and had critical naval consequences for the opening stages of the Pacific war in 1941, American involvement in Vietnam's affairs only really began in the late 1940s. This gradually expanded into the US fighting a major conflict that has had long-lasting consequences for Southeast Asia and for subsequent American policy.

Although the war did not see the traditional great sea battles of the past, the naval side of the war was both extensive and critical to its course and outcome. The prosecution of the war ashore involved all domains of American maritime power as well as elements of the US Army's 9th Infantry Division in support of crucial riverine operations in the Mekong Delta.

This was equally true of the end of the war. The final victory of the North Vietnamese resulted in the departure of the remnants of the South Vietnamese navy and the exodus of nearly one million Vietnamese boat people between 1975 and 1995. This extraordinary sequence of events is still only partially understood, but provides valuable lessons in the difficult mechanics of war termination.

While the domestic turmoil before and after the final US withdrawal is remembered all too well, the strategic and operational lessons consequent to the role played by maritime forces throughout war are not. Nor, for that matter, is the permanent impact US involvement had on the Vietnamese people and their future development, both good and bad. The Conference aims to illuminate Vietnamese impressions of this.

It has been well said that those who ignore the past are condemned to relearn its lessons. The Vietnam War was an exercise in the conduct of a 'limited' war in the shadow of great power competition. It therefore has a permanent salience for present and future US policy. In hosting this conference, the Hattendorf Historical Center will demonstrate the value of historical study in advancing the mission of the Naval War College.