This Isn't Your Father's Anti-War Movement:
Comparing the Political Mobilization of Vietnam and Iraq Veterans

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Abstract

The mobilization of veterans can be a powerful force for any political cause, especially when that cause is concerned with ending a war. Vietnam veterans' voices were a prominent feature of the Vietnam antiwar movement, and, by 2007, antiwar Iraq veterans' groups were playing an important role in the public debate on the merits of continued U.S. military involvement in Iraq. By comparison, however, these two episodes of veteran antiwar mobilization looked very different. Changes in the social, technological, and political environment held important implications for the efficacy of veteran political mobilization. This paper examines those changes and the way in which select veterans organizations adapted to them. While a traditional antiwar movement did emerge to trade in more conventional protest activities, veterans' opposition to the Iraq War also signaled the beginning of a political action committee-based approach to veterans' politics that is likely to remain for the foreseeable future.

Keywords: Political science, veterans, Vietnam, Iraq, civilian-military relations, social movements

Introduction

On April 22 1971, the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations heard a striking indictment of the ongoing war in Vietnam. It was a powerful, full-throated condemnation of the war, its basic rationale, its conduct, and the U.S. government's treatment of the American service members who had waged it for almost a decade. Just as important as the message, however, was the credentials of the messenger. John Forbes Kerry was not the typical peace activist. He was a member of the prominent New England Forbes family; a graduate of Yale University; and, most importantly, a decorated Vietnam veteran himself, representing the thousands of Vietnam veterans who had joined the group Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW).

John Kerry was also not speaking in ordinary times. Outside the capital that day, approximately 1,200 Vietnam veterans were camped on the lawn of the National Mall, taking part in a week-long veterans' protest known as Dewey Canyon III. That week of veteran anti-war activity would precede a full month of Washington protests that brought groups from around the country to the nation's capital. Within months, popular media attention to the war would peak, as *the New York Times* published the Pentagon's secret history of the Vietnam War and *Life Magazine* began running brutal stories of the war's impact on Vietnamese civilians. By the end of the summer, Congress would pass its first resolution calling for the termination of the war. In the years to come, popular pressures would eventually force Washington to end the war in Vietnam, and, for decades to come, an important public face of those pressures would remain the war's veterans themselves.

Important differences, however, would mark veteran responses three decades later to the Iraq War. Though approval ratings for the Iraq War began to sink quickly in the general public and even among service members (Pew Research, 2006, 2007; Lowe, 2007), observers, like the columnist Jeffrey Zaslow (2004) of the *Wall Street Journal*, concluded that it simply was not "easy for antiwar veterans to persuade their onetime brothers in arms to join their cause" against the Iraq War (p. 1). But was this true?

In one of the most comprehensive accounts of Iraq service member and veteran protest, Lisa Leitz (2014) points out that Iraq veterans began organizing against the war much sooner than veterans of Vietnam (p. 14). How, then, do these two veterans anti-war mobilization episodes compare? What organizational approaches were adopted and why? To what degree were these approaches successful in shaping the public debate? And what does this say about the future of veterans' mobilization?

Veterans represent a particularly salient group for consideration in such cases, receiving special attention in the American public policy and political development literature. The political scientists Anne Schneider and Helen Ingram (1993), place veterans among the most advantaged advocacy populations, when considering how the social construction or stereotypes associated with different groups impact their perceived legitimacy in policy debates (pp. 620–621). Similarly, Theda Skocpol (1992) details how veterans focused social policy following the Civil War actually put the U.S. on the early forefront of social provisioning, not the state welfare laggard of conventional wisdom. The political scientist Suzanne Mettler (2005) describes how educational benefits bestowed on World War II veterans through the GI Bill transformed post-war America, and historian Jennifer Mittelstadt (2012) argues accordingly that the GI Bill was an important stamp of "social approval and legitimacy" on World War II and subsequent Cold War service members (p. 141).

Building on these insights and literature from the field of social movements, this study offers a comparative case analysis of the Vietnam and Iraq War veteran protest episodes, drawing on historical data, veteran interviews, and public media representations of the leading veterans' organizations involved in each movement, including Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW), Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW), and VoteVets. Keeping with the existing body of literature on social movements (Jenkins & Parrow, 1977, pp. 249–268), we argue that the political efficacy of these two movements, defined as each movement's ability to shape the public debate, was predicated on three important characteristics of the prevailing political opportunity structures: density of broader social movement activity, technology driven changes in the media environment, and the way in which the All-Volunteer Force (AVF) reconceived military service.

These three changes in the opportunity structure are critical independent variables for understanding how veterans' mobilization efforts changed between these two cases. First, the presence and nature of other contemporary social movement activities profoundly shaped how each movement manifested its opposition. In particular, a frenetic social movement environment and dense network of antiwar and civil-rights organizations provided Vietnam veterans a critical support structure and replicable model for action. The less dense and less frenetic nature of Iraq-era, non-veteran protest activity meant that Iraq veterans against the war had to look for other sources of support. Second, the proliferation of electronic media outlets and the revolutionary changes in people-to-people communications in the intervening years significantly lowered the opportunity cost for transmitting public messages, expanding the number of often competing veterans' voices. Finally, perhaps the most important and obvious difference between the opportunity structures in these two eras, was in the changed nature of military service. The end of conscription altered the make-up of the military in ways that reduced familial and personal connections between the military and key American demographic groups. This has held important implications for Iraq veteran protest activity, not necessarily foreclosing the possibility of mobilization, as much as profoundly restructuring its approach and strategy.

Social Movement Networks and the Political Opportunity Structure

Social movements do not exist in a vacuum. Especially in modern liberal democracies, these movements are situated in dense networks of structures, norms, and rules constituted by the state and

civil society, in which individuals and other groups interact (Goodwin & Jasper, 2003, p. 257). This political opportunity structure defines the realm of the possible for movement demands, and much of social movement literature has been concerned with determining how these external environmental factors make it more or less likely that emergent groups will achieve success (Tilly, 2004). Vietnam veteran anti-war protests took place in the context of a much larger anti-war movement that itself drew strength from a broader set of social movements and efforts for political and social change. Though polls suggested broad political dissatisfaction with the Iraq War, this disaffection never resulted in anything like the intensity of opposition and density of antiwar groups that characterized the Vietnam era social landscape. In the case of Iraq, antiwar groups responded to this change in one of two ways, either by turning for support to targeted communities where traditional activism was still alive, or by adapting their approach and message to more mainstream audiences.

While it is true that one of the most important aspects of any social movement is the number of individuals in its ranks, in the case of VVAW, it would be a mistake to focus too narrowly on the number of involved Vietnam veterans alone. Of the 30,000 or so members of VVAW, for instance, less than 2,000 showed up on the National Mall for the pinnacle April 1971 Dewey III protest (Nicosia, 2001, p. 108). Nevertheless, Dewey Canyon III and the Congressional testimony that accompanied it were but a prelude to a summer of anti-war activity in the nation's capital from groups like the National Peace Action Coalition, People's Coalition for Peace and Justice, Youth International Party (Yippies), and even Federal Employees for Peace. The first Congressional resolution opposing the war came at the end of that summer. It was a resolution that should be seen in light of both the efforts of veterans at Dewey Canyon III and those of the much larger peace movement.

The story of support VVAW received from this broader movement extends beyond the compounding effects of similar motives and objectives. Early in the veterans' movement, protest activities scheduled for the 1968 Chicago Democratic National Convention ended with the brutal treatment of veteran and non-veteran alike at the hands of the Chicago police and, most discouragingly, fellow service members. Disheartened and angry at this response to what many had hoped would be peaceful protest, the movement in the fall of 1968 began a retrenchment. The veteran opposition to the war, however, was able to survive in the mainline, non-veteran organizations. To facilitate this mutual support, veterans: Carl Rogers, Steve Wilcox, and Jan Berry, formed the organization LINK, whose expressed objective was to ensure veterans and anti-war service members were quickly connected to support in the broader peace movement (Wells, 2005, p. 51). Efforts like these would prove critical to sustaining organized veteran and service member war opposition during a post-Chicago Democratic Convention year in which VVAW was attempting to reorganize. Though the tension between veterans and groups in the broader peace movement would eventually prompt Vietnam veterans to reestablish their own organization, the dense network of groups operating toward similar antiwar goals provided veterans needed support at critical moments.

The lack of a significant broader anti-Iraq war movement posed a strategic choice for many veterans' groups. Some groups, like the older Veterans for Peace,[1] which sprung up in 1985 in resistance to U.S. military involvement in Central America, turned for support to a small number of traditional left-leaning and reliably anti-war organizations. In keeping with its more traditional base of support, VFP channeled most of its energy into traditional protest activity, including marches, demonstrations, and public forums (Rezniceck, 2007). One of VFP's more important contributions was in using these ties to traditional anti-war communities to channel funding to younger, start-up veterans' organizations built specifically around opposition to the Iraq war.

The most notable of these new groups was Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW). In fact, IVAW was founded by Iraq war veterans at the 2004 annual convention of Veterans for Peace in

Boston and was officially a 501(c)3 subsidiary of Veterans for Peace. With the assistance and inspiration of former VVAW activists David Cline and Michael Uhl, and the financial support of VFP, IVAW opened its first small office in the basement of the American Friends Service Committee in Philadelphia. Like VFP, IVAW largely pursued more traditional resistance tactics, albeit with younger veterans from the Iraq conflict itself.

The goal, as IVAW explained, was to undermine the traditional public and governmental pillars of support for the war effort, especially support from service members themselves. Military recruitment was one critical requirement for the war effort targeted by IVAW. This included tactics like the "Befriend a Recruiter" initiative, which advised recruiting aged people to: "Flood recruiters and recruitment centers with phone calls, appointments, questions and smiling faces" in an effort to "waste their time and resources […] stealing away recruiters' ability to do recruitment" (Miller, 2007, p. 26). Another tactic, labeled the "Truth in Recruiting" campaign employed former service members to carry anti-recruiter messages to high school students (Miller, 2007, p. 26).

IVAW leadership, in their own words, chose to stay with the Anti-Iraq War T-shirts, rather than don the Brooks Brothers suit that was the uniform of the "inside the political system" resistance. Much of this approach was an expression of the younger, more junior veterans that populated the IVAW ranks. However, the approach was also reflective of the community that served as an incubator for IVAW's birth and source of continued financial and moral support. Unfortunately for IVAW, it was a community that commanded limited public allegiance in an era in which antiwar activism was fragmented and weak.

This lack of broad traditional social movement support networks did not affect every antiwar veterans' organization equally. Founded in 2004 by U.S. Army Lieutenant Paul Rieckhoff, Jon Soltz, and Eric Schmeltzer, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) advocated for newly returning veterans on issues like Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury, health coverage for reservists, and GI Bill educational benefits (Reickhoff, 2006, pp. 259–309). In order to engage political advocacy, including the more partisan task of addressing the growing dissatisfaction with the war itself, IAVA founded the VoteVets (401(c)(4)) political action committee. Separating from IAVA in 2006, VoteVets boasted an advisory board made up of retired generals and distinguished veterans like former NATO commander General Wesley Clark, former Senator Bob Kerry, and former head of the Council on Foreign Relations Leslie Gelb.[2]

With the advancement of veterans' care issues as a primary goal and a coterie of well-established national leaders providing support, VoteVets began voicing concerns about the conduct of the war in Iraq. Rather than engaging on the moral validity of the war, VoteVets focused on what it saw as more pragmatic, publicly-compelling questions regarding the war's strategic logic and operational efficacy. Relying on new media, including social networking sites like YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook, VoteVets quickly grew to over 40,000 supporters and donors (Levey, 2007). Its membership and fundraising success eventually brought it into collaboration with similarly emergent progressive groups like MoveOn.Org. In 2006, MoveOn.Org and VoteVets conspired to create a joint spinoff of their organizations, Americans Against Escalation in Iraq, which, by the end of September 2007, had raised $12 million to fund grass-roots organizing, polling, and television advertisements dedicated to war termination (Crowley, 2007). Such progressive associations meant that the antiwar cause, both veteran and nonveteran, became increasingly associated with and an ally of the Democratic Party, whereas the Vietnam case revealed a Democratic Party torn between antiwar and pro-war factions.

In these ways, anti-war Iraq veterans' groups responded differently to a political opportunity structure that contained broad public discontent with the war, but without the intense social movement mobilization. Some groups, like Vets for Peace and IVAW, responded by finding support

in traditional antiwar communities, pursuing more-or-less established patterns of street-level protests. Other groups, like VoteVets, sought to engage broadly on the overall merits of continuing to prosecute the war, working along-side similarly focused online advocacy efforts. Without a John Kerry testimony event to transmit such a message, this latter approach was made possible by the growing ubiquity of electronic communications in public life.

The Impact of Technology on the Prospect and Nature of Veterans' Protest

No exploration of how veterans' mobilization changed between Vietnam and Iraq would be complete without some attention to the profound role technological change played in shaping these efforts. Such changes were generally a mixed bag for political mobilization, which again resulted in different responses from alternatively focused Veterans groups. Some leveraged the new media to organize traditional protest activities, while other groups used the new tools to directly influence mainstream public opinion.

The proliferation of so-called new media followed a rapidly expanding Internet, markedly broadening access to information and communications, on the one hand, and fragmenting media and public messaging, on the other. In the 30-year interregnum between Vietnam and Iraq, the average number of television channels a typical American received went from seven to 71 (Hamilton, 2006). In 1969, the three major nightly news broadcasts held an 85 percent share of the viewing market. By 2004, the market share for these broadcasts was down to 38 percent (Excellence in Journalism, 2005). Add to this the proliferation of Internet-media sources like magazines, newspapers, and blogs, and it is easy to appreciate how the spectrum of consumer choices between the wars had increased by orders of magnitude. This had the effect of expanding, what the sociologist Charles Tilly labelled, "the repertoire of collective action" for social movements and lowering the threshold for political participation (1984, pp. 297–317).

The Internet proved especially important in organizing protest activities within the small but dispersed group of Iraq War veterans and families. IVAW, Gold Star Families for Peace, and Military Families Speak Out (MFSO) were three of the military peace movement organizations that leveraged the Internet to organize a series of activities in Washington around the Mother's Day 2006 weekend. Participants from across the country, many of whom had no previous organizational affiliation, met to display antiwar art, participate in a Dedication of the Boots ceremony for the fallen, and march in silent protest on the National Mall. Such rallies became a visible symbol of the war's unpopularity and an important component of a strategy meant to stress protestors' dual identities as both military and antiwar (Leitz, 2014, pp. 157–200).

Though all of the military peace movement organizations leveraged the Internet in some way, arguably none harnessed the medium as thoroughly and as successfully as VoteVets. The group brought a number of notable veterans into the anti-Iraq War cause, focusing the effort on conventional political contestation like fundraising, lobbying, and campaigning rather than sit-ins and street protests. The VoteVets blog, VetVoice, featured nationally known military figures, like Retired General Wesley Clark and Retired Major General John Batiste, leading discussions with thousands of relatively unknown veterans from around the country. Raised largely from online sources, VoteVets spent over $1.5 million in the 2006 election cycle to support candidates who were veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan military actions (Layton & Weisman, 2007).[3]

In 2007, the group again relied heavily on Internet donations to raise over $8 million for the 2008 election year. This level of fundraising allowed VoteVets to become an important player in traditional television advertising as well. Labeling each advertisement with "VoteVets.org: The Voice of America's 21st Century Patriots," the group created a line of advertisement that challenged candidate votes on such issues as funding for new body armor (VoteVets, 2008). Advertisements

featured a demonstration showing the ability of newer body armor to stop bullets that older versions could not. In the 2008 Presidential campaign, VoteVets spent over $290 thousand on three advertisements challenging John McCain's position on the Iraq war and his refusal to support the Post 9-11 GI Bill legislation (VoteVets, 2008).

In addition to a general ability to raise money and garner Internet based support, VoteVets also proved particularly capable of adapting to the condensed timeline and rapid news-cycle of the changed media environment. In an especially revealing exchange on September 26, 2007, Rush Limbaugh charged that service members objecting to the conduct of the Iraq war were "phony soldiers." Within hours, Jon Soltz of VoteVets wrote an article challenging Limbaugh to invite him on to his show and accusing Limbaugh of aiding al Qaeda by being obstinate on Iraq (Soltz, 2007). Within 48 hours, VoteVets débuted a television advertisement featuring the names of prominent veterans calling for an end to Iraq involvement and accusing Limbaugh of being the "real phony" because of his draft deferment during Vietnam (VoteVets, 2007). Just days after the Limbaugh comment, General Wesley Clark appeared on NBC's Today Show (NBC, 2007), calling for an end to public funding for the Limbaugh program on the Armed Forces Network. The Limbaugh comments would become mainstay in VoteVets advertising on both traditional television and on-line venues like Facebook and YouTube.

While VoteVets demonstrated some of the ways in which the changed face of media and electronic communications could be an asset for veterans' groups seeking to influence public debate, there were also a number of challenges associated with the lower barriers to public voice. The same set of technological innovations that made it possible for VoteVets become an active voice in the Iraq War debate also made it possible for numerous other splinter groups to form around any number of anti-war causes, including umbrella civilian-veterans organizations like AfterDowningStreet and geographically organized groups like South Bay Mobilization. Other veterans' groups included the re-named Veterans for America (previously the Vietnam Veterans of America), West Point Graduates Against the War, Courage to Resist, Veterans Against The War, Veterans for Common Sense, National Lawyers Guild Military Law Task Force, Traveling Soldier, and Veterans' Truth Project, to name but a few.

In addition to this list of veterans and hybrid-veteran organizations that sprang up against the Iraq War, there were also those that emerged in response to these groups in order to support the war, including Veterans for Freedom, which spent over $4 million in pro-Iraq war advertising prior to the 2008 election. There was also the phenomenon of so-called "astro-turf" veterans' organizations, which are derogatively termed for the practice of wealthy donors creating a group made to look like it formed organically. For instance, in the summer of 2007, former White House Press Secretary Ari Fleischer launched a new organization dedicated to fighting a public relations campaign to salvage Congressional support for the war. Called Freedom's Watch, the new organization launched a $15 million advertising campaign that featured its own set of Iraq veterans who supported the war and argued for Congress's continued funding. The proliferation of veterans' advocacy groups revealed the increased importance, by the early 2000s, of what Hugh Heclo (1978) had earlier described as "issue networks," or lose associations of groups trading support around a particular policy. The expanding advocacy structure on both sides of the Iraq War debate, also typified the clear partisan division that, unlike Vietnam, fell neatly along political party lines.[4]

The impact of such dramatic communications advancement between Vietnam and Iraq was mixed. Without such near-ubiquitous access to broad electronic communications, Vietnam veterans recognized early the importance of Vietnam veteran unity toward the cause of gaining public attention. For example, Jan Barry Crumb stressed the need for a singular purpose centered on ending the war beginning in the group's initial meetings (Nicosia, 2001, p. 17). As Gerald Nicosia

(2001, pp. 283–361) notes, it was only later, through slow and careful evolution, that VVAW began to develop a more robust and coherent politics that included advocacy for GI rights and veteran benefits. By the start of the Iraq War, the Internet made it possible for VoteVets to become an important voice in the Iraq War debate and, indeed, the 2006 and 2008 national elections. Nevertheless, this same expanded repertoire of action also made it possible for any number of veterans' organizations to transmit their own messages to an ever more fragmented audience. Compared to Vietnam, Iraq veterans had greater access to public debate at lower costs, but the many veterans' voices this inspired may have appeared at times less like a movement and more like a cacophony. In many ways, as University of Antwerp researchers Jeroen Van Laer and Peter Van Aelst (2010) have observed, the Internet made collective action easier, but it also multiplied the competing messages, creating a different set of challenges for individual groups hoping to have political effect.

The All-Volunteer Force and the Changed Concept of Military Service

The final major distinction between these two veterans' protest eras is perhaps the most significant. It is difficult to underestimate the way in which the 1973 shift to an All-Volunteer Force (AVF) fundamentally changed the character and perception of U.S. military service. For veterans and the prospect of veterans' mobilization, the impacts can be seen beyond the obvious observation that the smaller AVF resulted in fewer veterans to mobilize. The shift to an AVF also changed the demographics of the U.S. armed forces. These changes and the smaller AVF societal footprint, recast how the average citizen experienced the military and perceived military service. Equally important, the citizen soldier conception of military service based on obligation was eclipsed by a model that, on the one hand, was derived from the voluntary market exchange of service for fee and, on the other, the expertise of the dutiful professional. These changes in military service resulted in some veterans' organizations adjusting their messaging to fit with the new expectations and perceptions. The most visible of the latter-day groups, proved especially capable at leveraging the resources of military professionalism and expertise as a means of bolstering and legitimating an antiwar message.

The most apparent difference in the two periods was that the AVF resulted in fewer citizens with military experience and, therefore, fewer veterans to mobilize. By the Dewey Canyon III protests of 1971, VVAW boasted a membership of over 12,000 veterans out of the 3.4 million service members who served in South-East Asia during the conflict (Nicosia, 2001, p. 101).[5] Richard Moser (1996) argues that such formal group numbers were but a small fraction of the overall military resistance, which he estimated to be 20 to 25 percent of those who served during the conflict (p. 132). Such numbers are hard to confirm. It suffices to conclude that, in both absolute terms and in proportion to the contemporary civilian and veteran populations, the numbers of veteran resisters during Iraq were much lower (Hagopian 1998, pp. 310–311).

By late 2007, the number of American service members who had deployed to either Afghanistan or Iraq was 1.64 million (Tanielian & Jaycox, 2008, p. 98), and, by 2015, that number rose to 2.6 million. Comparatively, IVAW maintained a membership of approximately 1,300 (Leitz, 2014, p. 43), and Veterans for Peace, an organization that included veterans of all conflicts in its efforts to oppose war, reported approximately 7,500 members (B. Reznicek, personal communication, September 25, 2007). One can add to these organizations like Military Families Speak Out (MFSO) and Gold Star Families for Peace (GSFP). Nevertheless, when traditional antiwar veterans' groups are considered, one is forced to concede some truth to Jeffrey Zaslow's 2004) Iraq war observation that it was not "easy for antiwar veterans to persuade their onetime brothers in arms to join their cause" (p. 1).

The anti-war veteran participation rates, however, look much different when one considers political action committee model of veterans' mobilization. By 2009, VoteVets boasted a combined veteran and non-veteran membership network of over 100,000—up to over 500,000 by 2018 (VoteVets, 2018). This, of course, was a different kind of veterans' mobilization, one far less demanding of its members. Registering online to be a member of VoteVets held a very low opportunity cost and may have involved as little as receiving periodic email updates on the activities of the organization. This is in marked contrast to those IVAW members who participated in the "Befriend a Recruiter" tactics or VVAW members who camped out on the National Mall during Dewey Canyon III. Yet, such trends in veterans' association and mobilization are in keeping with changing patterns of civic engagement more broadly, in which low-cost virtual engagement and the occasional donation superseded Rotary Clubs, Shriners meetings, and bowling leagues (Putnam, 2000; Davis, Elin, & Reeher, 2002).

In addition to the size and nature of veterans' antiwar organizations, the AVF also brought about important changes in military and, therefore, veteran demographics. The AVF took fewer service members from narrower segments of American society for longer periods of service (Baiocchi, 2013). The Iraq-era service member was older, more likely to be from rural parts of the U.S., more likely to be married, and more likely to have had a family than earlier draftees (Moskos, 2001; Kane, 2006). With fewer Americans serving, Iraq and Afghanistan veterans would also spend far more time deployed than their Vietnam era predecessors. It was not uncommon for many service members to complete five or six deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan in the space of a little over a decade in uniform (Wenger, 2018). This has translated into a veteran population that is more dispersed, more settled, and more likely to have spent a retirement-eligible career in the military. It also resulted in broader segments of American society having little experience with military service or connections to service members and veterans.

The AVF also shifted the socioeconomic makeup of the armed services in important ways. Despite popular criticisms of Vietnam as a poor man's war waged through unfair conscription practices (Appy, 1993, p. 29), the armed forces of the Vietnam era, especially after the end of college exemptions from the draft in 1969, were more representative of the broader American society than the subsequent AVF (Mittelstadt, 2018, pp. 93–94). The details of this shift deserve some parsing.

First, considering race, new African-American enlistments grew from 10 percent of accessions in 1964 to 20 percent in 1977 (Defense Manpower Commission, 1976; Office of Assistant Secretary of Defense, 1978). As a result, by 1981, African Americans made up 19.8 percent of the armed forces, while comprising only 12 percent of the total population. African-American representation in the military then fell to 7.7 percent of the uniformed force by 1990, before rising back to 19.8 percent in 2000, when African-Americans comprised 13 percent of the U.S. population (Lutz, 2008, p. 173). During this same period, those in the military who identified as Hispanic grew from 3.7 percent in 1981 to 7.9 percent in 2000, well below the 16.5 percent of Americans who identified as Hispanic that year (Lutz, 2008, p. 177). Thus, minority representation in the AVF military waxed and waned in the decades between Vietnam and Iraq, with African-Americans over-represented in the military that went to Iraq and Afghanistan and Hispanics underrepresented.

If the AVF's impact on the racial-ethnic composition of the military was mixed, the differences in the socio-economic make-up of the Vietnam and Iraq-era military are more clear-cut. First, what did not change was the underrepresentation of the poorest Americans in military service, which remained below levels in the broader population in both the conscript and AVF militaries. One 1976 Defense Manpower task force blamed this on the disqualifying effects of "the bad education and health records of many poor families" (Defense Manpower, 1976, p. 168). The changes instead occurred in the upper tiers of the socio-economic distribution, where there were notable reductions in

military ranks of service members from families in the middle class, the upper middle class, and, especially, the wealthiest sectors of the American population. These changes can be seen most strikingly in the number of new recruits with some level of college education. In 1970, that number was over 28 percent. By 1975, it had fallen to 5.3 percent. The decline prompted military sociologist David Segal (1983) to worry that the AVF had rendered the college-educated service member "almost extinct [, and, …] since college attendance was a close proxy for middle class status, the data suggested that the middle class had virtually vanished from the volunteer Army" (p. 10).

If the dwindling presence of college-educated enlisted recruits are suggestive of an AVF decline in middle and upper-class representation in the military, a number of studies have marked this decline in other ways. Employing data from the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS), Amy Lutz (2008), demonstrated that the likelihood of military service in the AVF decreased significantly with increased family income (pp. 184–185). Douglas Kriner and Francis Shen (2016) compared county-level data on income and education levels to fatal and nonfatal casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan, determining that the poorer and less-educated counties bore a disproportionate share of combat casualties. As Kriner and Shen (2016) demonstrate, the counties that fell between the second and fourth decile from the bottom of the income scale (counties whose average incomes were greater than 10 percent of American counties but less than 40 percent), experienced dramatically more casualties proportionally than the 50 percent wealthiest counties.[6] In fact, as average income increased in those wealthiest 50 percent of counties, the proportion of combat casualties continued to decline. Moreover, the highest proportion of combat casualties were found in those counties whose average income put them between 20 and 30 percent of other counties on the income scale (Kriner & Shen, 2016, p. 564). Seen yet another way, if one aggregates the lowest and highest casualty counties, a significant income gap appears, one that emerged during the Korea and Vietnam Wars but reached a zenith during Iraq and Afghanistan (Kriner & Shen, 2016, p. 561). In sum, the AVF yielded a working-class military, populated by families in the middle of the bottom half of the income scale. These recruits were more rural, more African American, and less likely to have a college education than the veterans that emerged from Vietnam. Largely missing in the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts, were service members from higher earning, professional, white collar, and college-educated families.

The absence of elite representation in the military is of particular importance. Public opinion researchers and political scientists have long emphasized the critical role of social, political, and cultural elites in shaping and framing public debate (Verba et al., 1987; Verba & Orren, 1986). In the learning model of mass beliefs described by political scientists Herbert McClosky and John Zaller (1984), elites interpret values and translate that interpretation to the general public. If one accepts that elites have an important role in the framing and interpretation of public debate and discourse, then the actions and arguments of this group are of special significance. The lack of elite representation in the military translates to fewer future elite connections to veterans' groups and, by extension, veterans' political contestation.

By contrast, despite the much discussed socio-economic and racial inequities of service in Vietnam, there remained connections to segments of the socioeconomically advantaged that were not observable during the Iraq conflict (Ensign, 2004; Halbfinger & Holmes, 2003; Roth-Douquet & Schaeffer, 2006; Schaeffer, 2004; Kane, 2006). John Kerry, for instance, proved a very important figure for VVAW. The son of New England privilege, Kerry transmitted the veterans' message to Congress, to prominent national news programs, and to the fund-raising circuit. Above all, Kerry's origins and education made it difficult for the VVAW to be dismissed. Such elite connections and endorsements have a legitimating quality that can be critical to group success. The lack of personal

connections between the most advantaged of Americans and the military represented a challenge for Iraq-era veterans' groups.

Here again, however, VoteVets sought ways around this dearth of organic connection between veterans' organizations and elite, politically-connected segments of American society by turning to a different leadership model: that of the senior professional military leader. With retired senior military officers, including a number of General Officers emerging as prominent faces in the VoteVets media arsenal, the organization sought to demonstrate that an institution with less organic connections to elite sectors of society could still gain access to public debate by leveraging the professional military bona fides of some of its most accomplished members. This increasingly prominent public frame of the veteran as one who speaks from the position of privileged professional military expertise, rather than moral legitimacy of having fulfilled a community obligation, is worth noting.

With the end of conscription, the republican ideal, at least, of universal citizen obligation to military service, was supplanted by an AVF model of military service based on market choice and professional military expertise. VVAW embraced the republican citizenship underpinnings of conscription by casting the veteran protestor as the consummate citizen-soldier. Rather than betraying their oath, these citizens were instead the democratic patriots of Valley Forge or, as one observer described, the "new winter soldiers" (Moser, 1996). This citizen-soldier image of the American service member became harder to maintain in the era of the AVF. Replacing this conception of soldiering as a democratic obligation was that of the service member as the highly expert warrior professional (Bacevich, 2013). These were men and women who volunteered for years of training and education in a unique body of expert knowledge (Burke, 2002). Americans owed the military their thanks, but only a few were expected to offer their service. The military became one of the most revered public institutions, even as personal connections to military service dwindled for many sectors of society (King & Karabell, 2002).

With this changing image of military service, the anti-war veteran narrative also changed. VoteVets, in particular, did not focus on the once especially powerful connection between republican citizenship, public legitimacy, and military service, nor was it challenging the war on a moral basis, as did IVAW and Vets for Peace. Instead, VoteVets' opposition to the war was born of what it considered to be a professional military judgment that the war was not in the national security interest of the country and had, in either case, been prosecuted ineptly. To bolster this expertise-based attack on the merits of the war, VoteVets rolled out a platoon of former senior military and diplomatic leaders to challenge the professional judgement of the serving leadership. The group's recommendations often took the shape of technical policy proposals rather than morality-based appeals for immediate withdrawal, including central themes like the importance of a regional engagement and political vice military solutions to security challenges.

The AVF, then, changed the political landscape for veterans' movements in myriad ways, both big and small. The size of veterans' cohorts, their demographic and socioeconomic make up, their connection to American society, and the very conception of what it meant to serve were all impacted by the end of conscription. Veterans and veterans' causes were on the frontlines of many of these changes. Some groups held their course in this new environment with events like IVAW's 2008 "Winter Soldier" investigation into Iraq war crimes, a replication of the 1971 VVAW media event of the same name. Other groups searched for different points of entry and leverage in a system that includes a host of new civil-military realities. With the AVF well into its fourth decade and Americans showing no appetite for a return to conscription any time soon, veteran success will continue to depend on how well this search goes.

Taking Stock of Veterans' Movements

In a 2007 interview with the authors, noted Vietnam antiwar activist and veteran Michael Uhl stressed the importance of commitment as the essential resource antiwar Iraq veterans would need to succeed in their efforts. He argued that moving the political system would demand individuals with an unwillingness "to compromise, to cut a deal … willing instead to remain forever in opposition short of fundamental change." According to Uhl (personal communication, October 3, 2007), "the core of any movement is the people that cross that bridge and never go back." If it is in some degree true—that any successful social movement requires a core, at least, of those whose commitment to opposition is so absolute, so basic that they will not compromise, and are likely to remain outside the system forever—the all-volunteer force would seem a poor place to find such individuals. Yet, a visible veterans' opposition to the Iraq War emerged relatively quickly, and this movement soon began to adapt to a political environment much changed in the three decades since the U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam. But what did they achieve? If VVAW helped to add legitimacy to a broader peace movement that eventually reversed public opinion on the war to such an extent as to make it impossible to continue, what can we say was the legacy of groups like IVAW and VoteVets?

Eight years after President Barack Obama announced the complete withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq, success in forcing an end to U.S. involvement has been mixed. Three years after that 2011 withdrawal announcement, President Obama ordered the return of a limited number of forces to Iraq to support the Iraqi government's efforts to combat the Islamic State, a policy that has been continued and extended under the administration of Donald Trump. Though IVAW has maintained strong opposition to this intervention, VoteVets has opted for a more nuanced stance, opposing U.S. attacks into Syria while cautiously supporting U.S. military assistance to the Iraqi government and anti-terrorism efforts in Iraq, as well as globally. Still other veterans' organizations, like Vets for Freedom, have been more forthright in the support for the war and subsequent opposition to the Obama Administration directed withdrawal.

If the record on ending combat operations in Iraq is uneven, successes in securing benefits and seeking redress for service-related injuries have been more visible. The past decade has witnessed an expansion of targeted benefits for the veterans of America's most recent wars, including the most significant expansion of veterans' educational benefits since the World War II GI Bill (Dortch, 2012).[7] There has also been an increase in Department of Defense and Veterans Administration efforts to deal with the unique wounds of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, including especially effects of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) like Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI).[8] These programs are especially noteworthy, given the long campaign Vietnam veterans had to wage to get recognition of injuries associated with PTSD and exposure to the chemical Agent Orange (Nicosia, 2001, p. 434). In all of the political wrangling associated with these efforts, IAVA and its political arm VoteVets played a visible public role.

The question, then, of what these two antiwar veterans' movements achieved comparatively, is a difficult one. Vietnam veteran war opposition was one part of a much broader antiwar movement that was fueled by a draft that subjected broad segments of American society to the potential of military service in Vietnam. The scale and especially the intensity of non-veteran opposition to the Iraq War never approached that of Vietnam. Souring public opinion for the war largely remained a reportable statistic rather than a visible presence in the streets. Nevertheless, this does not mean Iraq and Afghanistan veterans were without recourse in the changed environment. Armed with increasingly ubiquitous communications platforms, the new face of veterans' political mobilization can be seen in groups like VoteVets; the pro-war Vets for Freedom; or, the more recently minted and pro-free market, Concerned Veterans for America. These groups may have grown from the Iraq War experience, but they now represent sustained, professional, and partisan affiliated efforts to impact

electoral politics and shape public policy beyond a narrow focus on veterans' benefits. The changes reflect adaptation to the new social, technological, and demographic realities faced by the first generation of all-volunteer force veterans to fight an extended war. With the Post-9/11 wars well into their second decade, this generation will likely not be the last.

Notes

[1] Veterans for Peace movements have sprung up in a number of conflicts, including Korea and Vietnam. As discussed subsequently, the current VFP has its origins in the 1980s opposition to U.S. military support of the Contras in Nicaragua.

[2] VoteVets.org is made up of two components, VoteVets.org Political Action Committee (PAC), which provides funding to candidates and for political advertisements on issues it supports, and the VoteVets.org Action Fund. The VoteVets PAC has three clearly defined goals: elect Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans to public office, oppose officials who do not support veterans' care causes, and sustain the organization as a long-term advocate for veterans' issues.

[3] Election spending reached $11.4 million in the 2016 election cycle. OpenSecrets.org, https://www.opensecrets.org/pacs/lookup2.php?strID=C00418897

[4] There is a burgeoning political science literature on political polarization in the U.S., including the way in which the most severe polarization increasingly falls along party lines. This is contrasted with earlier periods in which robust ideological diversity was contained within each of the two major American parties (Rosenfeld, 2017; Zelizer, 2004; Delton, 2002; Skocpol, 1995).

[5] VVAW itself claims membership during Vietnam reached over 30,000 "About VVAW" available at http://www.vvaw.org/about/

[6] In keeping with earlier studies, the poorest 10 percent of U.S. counties had proportionally fewer casualties than each of the next four wealthiest deciles (Kriner & Shen, 2016, p. 564).

[7] The Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 (or Post-9/11 GI Bill), provided a 100 percent tuition benefit at a public college or university for service of at least three years and a housing stipend during the period of attendance. The benefit was also made transferable to the spouse or children of an eligible veteran.

[8] As of March 2018, the Department of Defense program on TBI and PTSD had awarded over $4.7 million for clinical trials on innovative PTSD treatments. Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs: "Report in Response to the House Report 115-219, Page 286, Accompanying H.R. 3219, the Department of the Army Appropriations Bill, 2018, 'Traumatic Brain Injury and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Pilot Program,'" February 2018; In 2017, Congress also mandated a longitudinal medical study on the relationship between blast pressures from weapons discharges and TBI. See U.S. Congress, *National Defense Authorization Act, 2018*, 115th Congress, 1st Session, 3 January 2017, section 734.

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