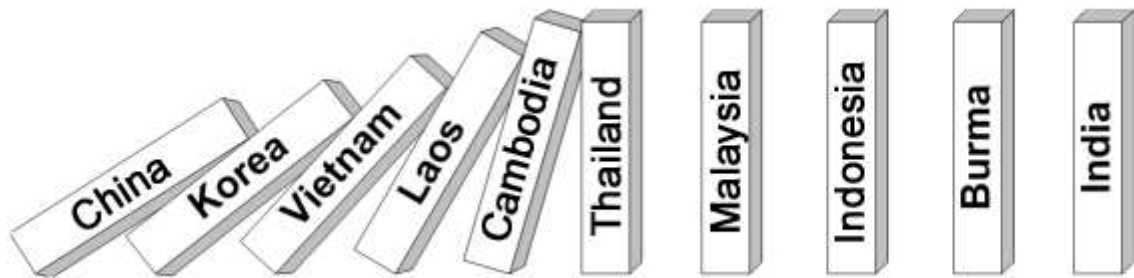
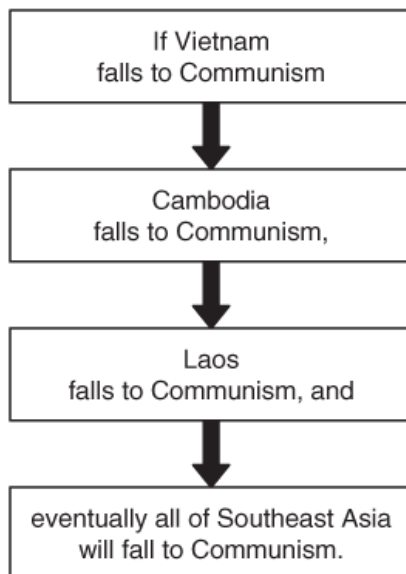


VIETNAM WAR



The Domino Theory



To justify his support for South Vietnam, President Dwight Eisenhower and Vice-President Richard Nixon put forward the '**domino theory**'. It was argued that if the first domino is knocked over then the rest topple in turn. Applying this to South-East Asia he argued that if South Vietnam was taken by communists, then the other countries in the region such as Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Burma and India would follow.

Textbook: In Search of History Grade 12, pp. 48-63

THE VIETNAM WAR 1965



From Young, J. *Longman Companion to America, Russia and the Cold War*. © Addison Wesley Longman Limited 1993, 1999.

VIETNAM WAR

1. AN OVERVIEW OF THE PERIOD IMMEDIATELY AFTER WORLD WAR II (BACKGROUND ONLY)

Vietnam is a small country to the south of China. From the 2nd century BC to the 10th century AD Vietnam was part of the Chinese Empire. From the 10th century AD to the 17th century Vietnam was independent. Then in the 17th century the French missionaries began to show an interest in converting people in the area to Christianity and eventually in 1858 war broke out between Napoleon and the Vietnamese Emperor. The French were victorious and in 1868 the Vietnamese Emperor signed a peace treaty with France. After defeating China, France also took control of Laos and Cambodia. Under French control Vietnam became one of the major rice-producing countries in the world. However, most of the Vietnamese were sharecroppers on the vast estates owned by the French.

By the time the Second World War broke out many Vietnamese people began to question the right of France to rule their country. One such person was **Ho Chi Minh**. He supported the communist ideals and believed that it was his duty to: *"make contact with the masses to awaken, organise, unite and train them, and lead them to fight for freedom and independence."*

During World War Two, in September 1940, the Japanese took Vietnam from the French. A strong anti-Japanese resistance movement developed, the **Vietminh** or **Viet Minh** (the League for the Independence of Vietnam). The Viet Minh was established in 1941 as a front organisation of the Indochina Communist Party (ICP). It was led by Ho Chi Minh who had lived in exile since 1911. During the war, the Viet Minh made plans to seize power once the Japanese had been defeated.

Within days of the Japanese surrender in 1945, the Viet Minh seized control of the most of north and central Vietnam. There was less support for them in the south. On 2 September 1945, Ho Chi Minh announced the formation of the **Democratic Republic of Vietnam** (what was to become North Vietnam).

The British, who had occupied the south of Vietnam, decided to return this to France – who refused to recognise North Vietnam. So, a war between France and the Viet Minh was fought from 1946 to 1954. Eventually the French, after eight years of guerrilla warfare and a massive defeat at Dien Bien Phu, admitted defeat and decided to withdraw. The **Geneva Agreement** was signed in 1954. Here it was agreed that:

- Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam would be granted independence;
- Vietnam would be temporarily divided into North and South Vietnam at the 17th parallel. A five-mile (8 km) wide demilitarized zone (DMZ) would separate the two sides.
- North Vietnam would be ruled by Ho Chi Minh;
- South Vietnam would be ruled by Ngo Dinh Diem, a strong opponent of communism;
- After countrywide elections held in July 1956, under the supervision of an international commission, North and South Vietnam should be reunited under one government.

Ho Chi Minh was disappointed at the partition, but was confident that the communists would win the national elections. As it turned out the elections were never held and a repeat performance of the Korean situation seemed likely. A civil war gradually developed in South Vietnam which involved the north and the USA.

2. 1957 – 1965: THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE ARMY AND THE VIET CONG

2.1 The Democratic Republic of North Vietnam

The communist Viet Minh government of Ho Chi Minh ruled the north of the country from its capital Hanoi. In a popular programme of land reform, large estates were broken up and distributed among the peasants. Later these were formed into collective farms and industries were nationalised. Great attempts were made to improve education. Harsh measures were taken against landlords and others who opposed reforms, and large numbers of Catholics fled to South Vietnam to escape persecution in the north.

The US government mistakenly believed that the North Vietnamese government was controlled by China or the USSR – the communist states did however supply economic and military aid.

2.2 The Republic of South Vietnam

In 1955 the USA helped **Ngo Dinh Diem** set up his government in Saigon. His government was an oppressive and corrupt police state and soon lost support. Diem belonged to the landlord class which treated the Vietnamese peasants with contempt. He was a Vietnamese nationalist and Roman Catholic ruling a mainly Buddhist country - 90% of the population were Buddhist peasants. He gave all the best jobs to Catholics and appointed members of his own family, or friends, to important positions. His regime was very brutal – his secret police used detention and torture to stamp out opposition - and refused to hold elections, even local elections.

Although the US government was aware that Diem was unpopular, it supported him because he was anti-Communist and prepared to exile or jail Communists. They feared that the communists would win the election in South Vietnam, and thus prevented the elections which had been planned at Geneva from taking place in the south. Ho Chi Minh, who was disappointed that elections were not held, started a guerrilla warfare against the government in the south.

2.3 The formation of the Viet Cong

By the late 1950s opposition to Diem's government in South Vietnam had grown. More and more peasants began to support the communists.

The **National Liberation Front (NLF)** was formed in 1960 to oppose Ngo Dinh Diem. It demanded a democratic national coalition government, which would in turn introduce reforms and negotiate for a united Vietnam. Diem refused to give in to their demands and the NLF, which was communist in orientation, began a guerrilla campaign in South Vietnam, putting the country into civil war, attacking government officials and buildings, while Buddhist monks had their own special brand of protest, committing suicide in public by setting fire to themselves. The NLF's own guerrilla force was known as the **Viet Cong (VC)**. The only way the VC could operate successfully was with the full support of the local peasantry. They therefore tried to treat them well and promised to give them land when the enemy was defeated. In return, the peasants provided the VC with food, shelter and places to hide. The VC who were trained in the north by the VC also received arms and supplies from North Vietnam, which were smuggled into South Vietnam through the **Ho Chi Minh Trail**.¹ This trail was a series of jungle paths that led from north to south by way of Laos and Cambodia.

When it became clear that Diem could not cope with the situation, the USA decided to increase her military presence in South Vietnam. Under **President Eisenhower**, the US had been supporting the regime since 1954 with economic aid and military advisors to train the **AVRN** (South Vietnamese Army). (At the same time, North Vietnam was receiving economic and military aid from China and the USSR). As tension between North and South Vietnam increased, the USA became more heavily involved, especially after the Viet Cong began attacking US supply bases. Presidents **John F Kennedy** and **Lyndon Johnson** continued Eisenhower's policy of supporting the South Vietnamese government

¹ Ho Chi Minh Trail – it is 1500 mile-long network of jungle and mountain passes extending from North Vietnam's coast along Vietnam's western border through Laos, parts of Cambodia, funnelling a constant stream of soldiers and supplies into the highlands of South Vietnam.

– Kennedy by continuing to send military advisors and introducing strategic hamlets, i.e. the 'safe village system', while Johnson stepped up the aid and sent soldiers to Vietnam.

Matters in South Vietnam reached a crisis point in 1963. Student protests were held and several monks burnt themselves to death in public protesting against the harshness of the Diem regime and its treatment of Buddhists. Diem's response was to impose **martial law**² and detain large numbers of protestors. This led to the overthrow and execution of Ngo Dinh Diem in a South Vietnamese army coup in November 1963. He was replaced by military rulers who were also corrupt and had little support from the Vietnamese people.

The Vietcong took advantage of the problems in South Vietnam, winning the support of the local people because they treated them well, gave land to the peasants and provided necessary infrastructure to the local community, e.g. schools. The fact that the local people in South Vietnam were turning to support the Vietcong alarmed the Americans, who, as already mentioned, feared the spread of communism as a result of the "**Domino Effect**".

2.4 The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution

By 1964, the Viet Cong who initially attacked government targets and officials, began to attack US targets and personnel as well.

In August 1964, the US government accused North Vietnamese patrol boats of firing on the US warships, the '*USS Maddox*,' and '*USS Turner Joy*' in the Gulf of Tonkin off the coast of North Vietnam. In retaliation, Congress passed the **Tonkin Resolution**, giving Johnson the power to take any action he thought necessary to halt further aggression and achieve peace and security. It effectively meant that Johnson could take the USA into full-scale war if he felt it was necessary, and very soon that was the case. In March 1965, 100 American jet bombers attacked North Vietnam. This marked the beginning of **Operation**

² Martial law = when the army is given special powers of control

Rolling Thunder, a bombing campaign which continued for the next eight years. During three of these eight years, the bombing was very intensive, killing thousands of civilians and destroying military and industrial targets. On 8 August 1965, on General Westmoreland's advice, 3 500 US marines, combat troops rather than advisors came ashore at Da Nang. America was at war in Vietnam

By 1968 there were well over 500,000 US troops in South Vietnam. Australia and New Zealand also sent troops in an attempt to stop a communist take-over.

3. THE VIETNAM WAR, 1965 -1969

Between 1965 and 1969, the US was heavily involved in what has become known as the Vietnam War. The war between the Americans and North Vietnamese was a war of attrition³. On the American side it took the form of continual bombing of North Vietnam, the policy of 'search and destroy' and the use of technological weapons. On the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong side, it took the form of continual guerrilla attacks on the Americans and their South Vietnamese allies, with the occasional major offensive, e.g. Tet.

Remember that U.S. involvement in Vietnam occurred within and because of the larger context of the **Cold War** between the United States and the Soviet Union. Three major events in 1948 and 1949 brought the American fear of Communism to a fever pitch:

- Firstly, the USSR, which controlled East Germany, attempted to drive U.S., British, and French forces out of West Berlin by cutting off all outside access to the city. The United States responded to this blockade with the Berlin airlift over the winter of 1948–1949, dropping crucial supplies into West Berlin until the Soviet Union relented.
- Then, in August 1949, the USSR successfully tested its first atomic bomb.
- Finally, in October 1949, after years of civil war, the Nationalist government of China fell to the Communist forces of Mao Zedong. The

³ Attrition: the process of reducing something's strength of effectiveness through sustained attack or pressure.

combined force of these three events plunged the United States into a deep paranoia and fear that Communists would take over the world and might even be plotting secret operations in the United States.

3.1 American involvement in the war.

Until 1954 the Americans supported the French against the Vietminh with money and equipment.

But after the fall of Dien Bien Phu in 1954, President Dwight D. Eisenhower, stated that the United States needed not only to contain the USSR at critical locations, but in *all* locations, for if one nation became Communist, its neighbours were likely to turn Communist as well, falling like a row of dominoes - the **domino theory**. Because of the domino theory, U.S. policy makers began to see Vietnam as extremely important. If Vietnam became Communist, domino-theory logic held that all of Indochina, and perhaps even all of Southeast Asia, might become Communist. Well aware of the popularity of Ho Chi Minh, and his Viet Minh associates, in both North and South Vietnam, U.S. leaders feared that the free elections promised at the Geneva Conference, which were scheduled to occur in 1956, would result in a unified, Communist Vietnam. Consequently U.S. leaders sought to forestall the elections in Vietnam and threw its support behind Ngo Dinh Diem.

In June 1954, President Eisenhower sent a small group of military advisors, soldiers and intelligence agents to Saigon. The plan was to mount a propaganda campaign to persuade the Vietnamese people in the south not to vote for the communists in the forthcoming elections and to train the South Vietnamese army (ARVN) in modern fighting methods.

In 1955, with U.S. support, Diem rejected the prospect of Vietnam-wide elections as specified by the Geneva Accords and instead held a referendum limited to the southern half of the country. Using fraud and intimidation, Diem won over 98% of the vote and proclaimed South Vietnam to be the Republic of Vietnam (RVN).

The United States then helped Diem organize, and train the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) to control his new state.

Between 1954 and 1960 the USA sent aid, equipment and military advisors to assist the South Vietnamese.

In November 1960, John F. Kennedy was elected U.S. president. He tried to keep American involvement down to an anti-guerrilla campaign. In May 1961 President Kennedy sent 400 American Green Beret 'Special Advisors' to South Vietnam to train South Vietnamese soldiers in methods of 'counter-insurgency' in the fight against Viet Cong guerrillas. Later that year (in October) he sent additional military advisors along with American helicopter units to transport and direct South Vietnamese troops in battle, thus involving Americans in combat operations. By December 1961 there were some 11 200 US soldiers in Vietnam.

In 1962 the Strategic Hamlets' Programme or "safe village" system approach was introduced in an attempt to stop the Viet Cong winning over South Vietnamese peasants and villages. If a village was seen to be in danger of Viet Cong 'influence', the villagers were 'relocated' to a fortified camp, with enclosed ditches, barbed wire fences or sharp bamboo fences. Each of these new villages or 'strategic hamlets' was guarded by local non-communists. For many South Vietnamese peasants it was no different from living in a form of prison/labour camp after being forcibly removed from their village and placed elsewhere.

The strategic hamlet policy was supposed to '**win the hearts and the minds**' of the South Vietnamese people towards Diem's government and the USA. Instead, this strategy failed dismally and some observers claimed that it actually increased the number of peasants joining the NLF – Peasants did not want to move, they did not want to travel longer to reach their rice fields or leave their fields for religious reasons. Many villages were burned and civilians were killed in this process.

It was also very difficult to decide which villagers might support the Viet Cong and which did not. Every time ARVN soldiers and US advisors relocated a village (more often than not against residents' wishes), they had no idea if it contained Viet Cong supporters, or if they were in fact only moving Viet Cong influence to a new area. So they had no way of knowing if the policy was working.

After the assassination of JF Kennedy, Vice-President Lyndon B Johnson became president (1963-69). His key military personnel advised him that US combat troops were needed in South Vietnam and that military advisers were not enough. The military chiefs also said that if he bombed North Vietnam he might cut off supplies to the Viet Cong along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Johnson, however, was concerned about US public opinion if he started to send US combat troops to South Vietnam. He also realised that convincing the US public and world opinion that bombing North Vietnam was justified could be difficult. He was also worried that an unprovoked attack would bring China into the conflict, which the USA was very keen to avoid.

Despite these doubts he escalated the war. On 2 August 1964, North Vietnamese torpedo boats were reported to have attacked two U.S. destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin. Acting on the **Tonkin Gulf Resolution**, passed on 7 August 1964 by the U.S. Senate, authorizing increased military involvement⁴, President Johnson ordered jets to South Vietnam and the retaliatory bombing of military targets in North Vietnam. (He assumed that the Viet Cong were controlled by Ho Chi Minh and decided to bomb North Vietnam hoping that Ho Chi Minh would call off the campaign). Between 1965 and 1972 giant B-52 bombers of the US air force launched a massive bombing campaign known as 'Operation Rolling Thunder.' They bombed the Ho Chi Minh Trail to try to stop the supply of weapons from North Vietnam. To achieve their aim of destroying the opposition the USA made use of advanced technological and chemical weapons e.g.:

⁴ On 8 August 1965, 3 500 US marines, combat troops rather than advisors came ashore at Da Nang. America was at war in Vietnam. From 1964 to 1968 Gen. William C. Westmoreland was commander of U.S. forces in South Vietnam; he was replaced in 1968 by Gen. Creighton Abrams

- Helicopters were used to transport troops quickly and at short notice;
- They used a **defoliant** called **Agent Orange** (a weedkiller) to destroy the vegetation which hid the supply routes, causing lasting environmental damage;
- They sprayed a herbicide, **Agent Blue**, over crops to deprive the guerrillas of food – this meant peasants starved as well;
- They used chemicals that caught fire. The most important was **napalm**. Napalm is a thick gel that attaches itself to the skin and burns through to the muscle and bone.

They also bombed strategic targets in North Vietnam causing large numbers of civilian deaths and a great deal of damage to towns, cities and infrastructure. They bombed sites in Cambodia and Laos as well, because the US believed that they were providing the North Vietnamese with refuge and supplies.

General Westmoreland, commander of U.S. forces in South Vietnam from 1964 to 1968, told Johnson that his current force of 23,000 men was not enough to deal with the Viet Cong threat. On 8 March 1965, 3,500 US marines were sent to South Vietnam to strengthen the US effort.

Westmoreland was convinced that the Communist forces could be destroyed by a war of attrition. One method introduced was the '**search and destroy**' tactic, i.e. to find the enemy and destroy him. The idea was to insert ground forces by helicopter, wipe out enemy forces and withdraw immediately afterwards. The biggest weakness of this tactic was the VC would soon return to the area – this placed the Americans in a 'quagmire'⁵ as they would have to come back and clear the area again. This led to atrocities e.g. the **My Lai Massacre** - in March 1968,

⁵Quagmire – awkward, complex

a 'search and destroy' mission led to the murder of over 300 unarmed civilians, including women and children, in the village of My Lai. (see below)

In spite of massive efforts by the US soldiers, the Viet Cong still managed to create problems for the US soldiers, e.g. the **Tet Offensive** in January-February 1968. On 31 January 1968, the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces led by Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap, launched a surprise attack on more than 100 towns, cities and military bases throughout South Vietnam. It was totally different to the guerrilla fighting they had used before and was a surprise attack timed to coincide with Tet, the Vietnamese New Year, when an attack was not expected. They entered the heart of Saigon and attacked the American embassy. Over 100 000 people were killed during the battle.

Despite the initial territorial gains in which the VC captured nearly 80% of all towns and villages in South Vietnam and its devastating psychological effect, the campaign, which Giap hoped would be decisive, failed, and Vietcong forces were ultimately driven back from most of the positions they had gained and urban areas they had occupied. In the fighting, North Vietnam lost some 85,000 of its best troops.

In spite of the US victory of this offensive, disillusionment set in. It convinced many Americans of the hopelessness of the situation and that the US would lose the war. Great pressure was now brought on the government to withdraw from Vietnam. This Johnson had no intention of doing, though he did suspend the bombing of North Vietnam (March 1968).

3.2 The My Lai Massacre

An incident that would have a great effect on the US public was the My Lai Massacre. Prior to this event soldiers had been advised that Mai Lai and surrounding area could be considered a VC stronghold or VC sympathetic. A search and destroy mission was thus sent to the area. On 16 March, 1968, nine helicopter gunships landed three US platoons near the village of My Lai. 1 Platoon

was commanded by Lieutenant William Calley and was ordered to My Lai village. The platoon acted with extra-ordinary brutality and over a two-hour period, the Americans killed almost the entire population which consisted mainly of old men, women and children – the number of villagers killed at My Lai has been estimated as being between 347 and 504. Only three of those killed were identified as known Viet Cong. Only one American was wounded. The massacre reportedly only ended when an Army helicopter pilot landed his aircraft between the soldiers and the retreating villagers, threatening to open fire if they continued the attack.

The events at My Lai were originally covered up by high-ranking army officers, but in April 1969, nearly 13 months after the massacre, Ron Ridenhour, a GI who had been with the 11th Brigade, wrote letters to the President, the Secretary of Defense and 30 members of Congress. In these letters Ridenhour described some of the atrocities committed by the soldiers at My Lai. In September 1969, Lieutenant William Calley was charged and eventually convicted of war crimes, but only served three years of his life sentence. The 25 others who were charged were acquitted.

Pictures of the massacre were shown around the world in 1969. One of the effects of the My Lai Massacre was shock and horror around the world and at home in the USA. In America, the anti-war movement became even stronger and the shame of the massacre demoralised American troops even more.

3.3 The nature of the Vietnamese struggle against the USA

Unlike conventional wars, the war in Vietnam had no defined front lines. Much of it consisted of hit-and-run attacks, with the guerrillas striking at government outposts and retreating into the jungle.

The Viet Cong and North Vietnamese received arms and equipment from the USSR and, to a lesser extent, from China, but they were vastly outnumbered by the Americans and their South Vietnamese allies. The Viet Cong could not match the vast quantities of modern weapons which the US poured into Vietnam. But

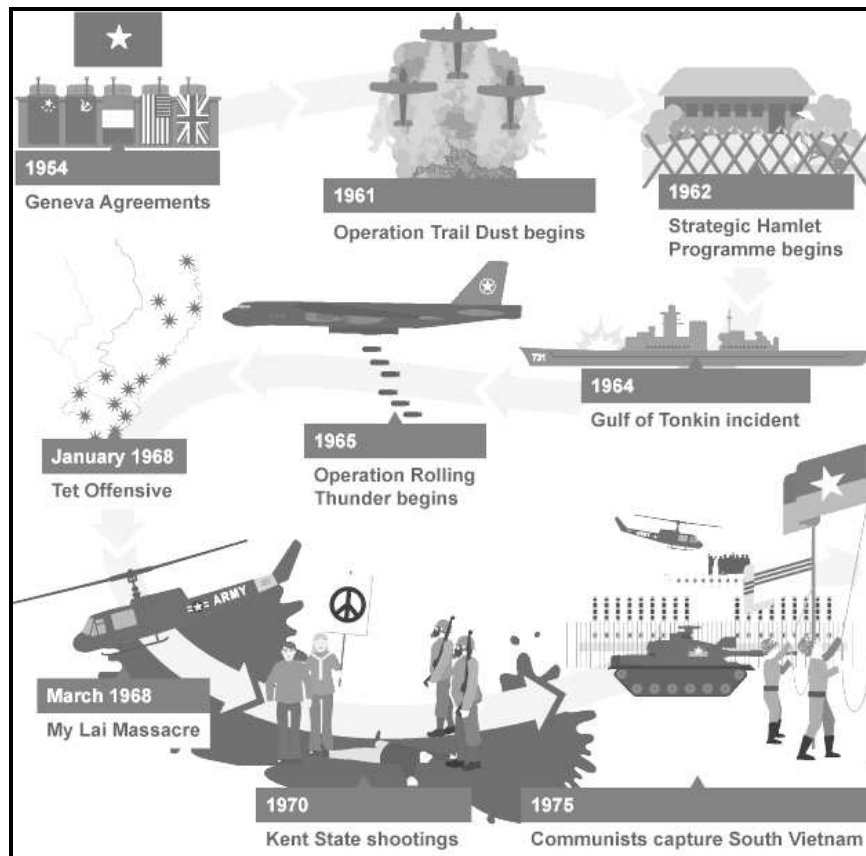
Ho Chi Minh firmly believed that a superior army could be defeated by guerrilla tactics.

The Viet Cong, who had the support of many peasants, were expert guerrilla fighters who operated in small groups, did not wear uniforms and carried few weapons – this made it difficult for the Americans to identify them among the peasant workers in the fields. The Viet Cong used their knowledge of the local terrain and the fact that the Americans could not tell the difference between the Vietcong and local peasants loyal to the South Vietnamese government to their advantage. They launched surprise attacks on American patrols and then seemed to disappear into the jungle.

The Vietcong used a variety of booby traps to catch unwary US troops. They improvised by making booby traps out of bamboo and other local materials to use against the American soldiers. There were many variations on the basic trap they used, which was built from sharpened bamboo spikes and was known as a Punji trap. It was cheap to make and very common, consisting of a small hole covered with leaves. At the bottom of the holes, the sharpened sticks were arranged point up so that the victim's foot was pierced when he fell into the hole. To make matters worse the spikes were often covered in human excrement, which would ensure an infection in the wound. Booby traps were not only responsible for many of the casualties but they also caused great stress.

To avoid the effects of US bombing raids on their supply routes, the Viet Cong built a complex network of underground tunnels, with sleeping quarters, makeshift hospitals, and food, weapons and water supplies. From here they could make quick hit-and-run attacks. The American soldiers began to live in fear of the ambushes and booby traps set up by the Viet Cong. This created a psychological barrier that often detracted from the efficiency of the American and allied forces. Their morale also began to fall. Many of the Americans faced severe problems in returning to civilian life when they returned to America after the war.

The North Vietnamese forces tended to be more conventional in their warfare but their task was mainly to support the Vietcong. Supplies were often taken south through Cambodia along what became known as the Ho Chi Minh Trail.



<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zx6s6fr/revision/1>. Accessed 28 November 2019]

4 THE WAR FROM A VIETNAMESE AND AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE

4.1 The Vietnamese Perspective

To many Vietnamese the Viet Cong were a nationalist rather than a communist movement. They viewed the war as a civil war with foreign intervention. The US had supported the French in their colonial war against the Vietnamese and now they were supporting an undemocratic government. As a result, the Vietnamese resented the interference by the US in their country and the destruction of their countryside and economy.

The war had a devastating effect on Vietnam. The Americans used chemical warfare which destroyed millions of hectare of jungle and farmland and the animals living there. Over 5 million villagers were forced to flee their homes as a

result of American attempts to search/find and destroy the VC. Large numbers of civilians were killed or injured when they got caught up in the fighting. It took decades before Vietnam even began to recover from the war.

However, some South Vietnamese did benefit from US presence, particularly government officials and leaders of the South Vietnamese army. Many middle-class Vietnamese, especially in Saigon supported the USA as they feared a communist take-over of the whole of Vietnam.

4.2 The American perspective

The US did not see the war as a colonial one. To them it was fought over ideology, as part of the Cold War. They were concerned with the idea of a domino effect and therefore felt it necessary to stop any country from yielding to communism. Castro's take-over of Cuba in 1959 made the US even more anxious to stop the spread of communism.

Influenced by Cold War propaganda, at first many Americans supported the US decision to become involved in the Vietnam War. However, this attitude began to change when conscription was introduced and more and more troops were drafted to fight in Vietnam. The rise in the number of American casualties also contributed to a growing opposition to the draft and the war itself. People started to question why America was spending so much money on a war which they seemed unable to win when poverty at home was a growing problem.

4.3 The anti-war movement

From the beginning of active involvement in Vietnam there was opposition at home. Initially, however, young men conscripted into the army were patriotic and wanted to fight for their country. Two-thirds of American people supported the war effort. As the war intensified, though, so did the opposition, especially from students and the young. Between 1965 and 1971 public support for the war dropped from 52% to 28%. Why?

The Vietnam War was a media war and is often referred to as the first TV war. Initially the media supported the war, but after 1968 the tone of reporting became more pessimistic and sceptical. Through extensive uncensored media coverage people saw the destruction and suffering that the war was causing in Vietnam. Television news reports, newspapers and magazines carried stories and footage of the fighting, including incidents where Vietnamese civilians were massacred by American troops and, e.g. My Lai Massacre in March 1968. Many anti-war protestors in the US began making moral arguments against the US involvement in the war in Vietnam.

As a result, anti-war movements developed. Anti-war demonstrations took various forms, such as anti-war musicals, protest marches and bumper stickers that read "*Make Love Not War.*" In 1965, some 25 000 people attended an anti-war rally in Washington DC to protest against what they believed was an unnecessary war. In the next few years, thousands more protestors took part in anti-war marches around the country. In 1969, more than 250 000 joined a massive anti-war protest in Washington DC. Army veterans who had fought in Vietnam also protested. Some men refused to go and fight and became known as 'draft dodgers' e.g. Bill Clinton. They burned their draft cards (conscription) and marchers often chanted words like '*Hey, hey LBJ, how many kids have you killed today?*' By 1968 about ten thousand Americans had immigrated to Canada in order to avoid serving in what they considered an "immoral war."

The Nixon administration's widening of the war into Cambodia in late April 1970 sparked more protests at universities across America, e.g. at Kent University in Ohio. National Guardsmen were called out to preserve order on the campus after days of anti-Nixon protest, and killed four students. Shock waves crossed the nation as students at Jackson State University in Mississippi were also shot and killed for political reasons. In April 1972, thousands of Vietnam War veterans marched on the White House (Washington DC), and hundreds of them threw their medals and decorations onto the steps of the Capitol.

Faced with such immense pressure, President Nixon concluded a negotiated settlement with the Vietnamese, signed in Paris in January 1973. The US agreed to withdraw from Vietnam.

5 1969-1975: US WITHDRAWAL FROM VIETNAM

In 1968, with mounting criticism of the Vietnam War at home and abroad, President Johnson announced that he would stop the bombing of North Vietnam and that he would not run for re-election the following year. He was succeeded in January 1969 by Richard Nixon as President of the USA.

Nixon was a staunch anti-communist, but he was concerned about the growing risk of nuclear war and wanted to ease the tensions of the Cold War and set out to improve relations with China and the USSR.

These efforts to 'manage' the Cold War and to improve relations with the communist powers, along with the increasing level of public criticism of the war, the growing number of American casualties in Vietnam as well as the financial costs convinced Nixon to try and "*end the war and win the peace.*"

On 25 July 1969, President Richard Nixon announced that henceforth the United States would honour its current defense commitments but that it would not commit troops anywhere else. Instead it expected its Asian allies to tend to their own military defense. The Nixon Doctrine, as the president's statement came to be known, clearly indicated his determination to "Vietnamize" the Vietnam War.

The Nixon Doctrine marked the formal announcement of the president's "**Vietnamisation**" policy whereby the USA would gradually withdraw its troops from Vietnam, while strengthening the South Vietnamese army (AVRN) with the aim of getting it to take control of the war against communism. By 1972, Nixon had reduced the number of U.S. troops in Vietnam to 150,000

At the same time, Nixon escalated the bombing campaign in North Vietnam, for two reasons:

1. to disrupt the Ho Chi Minh Trail and hit Vietcong bases in the neighbouring countries of Laos and Cambodia in attempts to block enemy supply routes along Vietnam's borders.
2. to force the North Vietnamese to negotiate after initial peace talks (from early 1969 on) broke down

This expansion of the war, which accomplished few positive results, led to new waves of protests in the United States and elsewhere.

Finally, in January 1973, representatives of the United States, North and South Vietnam, and the Vietcong signed a peace agreement in Paris, ending the direct U.S. military involvement in the Vietnam War. Its key provisions included a cease-fire throughout Vietnam, the withdrawal of U.S. forces, the release of prisoners of war, and the reunification of North and South Vietnam through peaceful means. The South Vietnamese government was to remain in place until new elections were held, and North Vietnamese forces in the South were not to advance further nor be reinforced.

In reality, however, the agreement was little more than a face-saving gesture by the U.S. government. Even before the last American troops departed the communists violated the cease-fire, and by early 1974 full-scale war had resumed. At the end of 1974, South Vietnamese authorities reported that 80,000 of their soldiers and civilians had been killed in fighting during the year, making it the most costly of the Vietnam War.

On April 30, 1975, the last few Americans still in South Vietnam were airlifted out of the country as Saigon fell to communist forces. North Vietnamese Colonel Bui Tin, accepting the surrender of South Vietnam later in the day, remarked, "*You have nothing to fear; between Vietnamese there are no victors and no vanquished. Only the Americans have been defeated.*" The Vietnam War was the longest and most unpopular foreign war in U.S. history and cost 58,000 American lives. As many as two million Vietnamese soldiers and civilians were killed.

5.1 Why was Vietnam able to win the war?

Americans	Vietcong
The American's put too much faith into hi-tech tactics continually killed the wrong people and demoralised their own troops.	The Vietcong's guerrilla tactics were appropriate to the nature of the conflict.
The US was trying to supply a war 8,000 miles from America.	The Vietcong were supplied with weapons by China and Russia.
The South Vietnamese regime was weak, brutal and corrupt - this gave the Vietnamese people even less reason to support the USA.	The South Vietnamese peasants supported and sheltered the Vietcong.
Their short (one-year) tour of duty ⁶ meant that American troops were always inexperienced . They also did not have the motivation of the Vietcong;	The Vietcong had been continuously at war since they resisted the Japanese during the World War One.
The morale of Americans soldiers was rock bottom - they took drugs, shot their officers ('fragging') and deserted.	The Vietcong were fanatically determined to drive out the Americans, whatever the cost .
The war became very unpopular in the US, and lost public support - especially after the impact of the Tet Offensive, the My Lai massacre and the Kent State shootings. Gradually more and more people stopped supporting the government.	The North Vietnamese were motivated , fighting at home to unite their country.
The Americans never won the support of the Vietnamese people. They did not understand the country or its history and the people would not help them.	

6 THE WAR AS A WORLD (GLOBAL) ISSUE

6.1 Attitude towards the USA

The war was a propaganda disaster for the US government.

- People around the world, including the USA, who had been sympathetic to the USA, were horrified by the evidence of brutal American tactics and withdrew their support. Several major anti-war protests were held, not only in the USA as mentioned above, but also in other countries, e.g. in UK, Australia, West Germany. In 1966, the British House of Commons,

⁶ Tour of duty – period of time when a group of soldiers is sent to work/fight somewhere

while generally supporting the US policy in Vietnam, publicly opposed American bombing of the north. In 1968, a full-scale riot occurred in London during which 50 anti-war demonstrators were injured and 300 arrested.

- The Americans had always presented their campaign against Communism as a moral crusade. But, the My Lai Massacre and the herbicides used on the forests damaged America's reputation. The whole campaign had shown to be flawed

6.2 The impact of the war on Cold War politics.

The Vietnam War was a humiliating defeat for the USA. The America policy of containment was in tatters. The strongest military power in the world had been defeated by a guerrilla army. It had failed to prevent the spread of communism in Asia – the people of Cambodia and Laos, angry about US bombing raids in their country, gave their support to the communists. Thus, President Nixon announced the end of the Truman Doctrine.

Their failure in Vietnam affected American policy towards the Communist states. After the war, the US tried to improve relations with China. They stopped blocking China's membership of the UNO, American presidents visited China, and the two countries established formal diplomatic ties. Relations between the USA and the Soviet Union also improved during the 1970s.

The Americans became very suspicious of involving their troops in any other conflict which they could not easily and overwhelmingly win. In later conflicts such as Iraq and Afghanistan the American military has relied upon massive air attacks to weaken the enemy. American leaders have been and still are determined that there would be 'no more Vietnams.' How successful do you think they have been?

6.3 What was the impact of the war on the people of America and the Cold War?

- ✓ There was a high level of casualties. Some suffered illness, or had deformed

children, if they had handled Agent Orange. There was a high level of casualties.

- ✓ Many veterans had serious mental problems. Approximately 700 000 American veterans suffered negative psychological effects from fighting in the war. Drug addiction within the American forces in Vietnam became a real problem. Tens of thousands committed suicide after the war.
- ✓ Vietnam veterans were often treated as second-class citizens, not returning heroes. Returning soldiers were more likely to turn to crime, alcohol, drug addiction, suicide or suffer broken marriages.
- ✓ The war cost billions of dollars. The US government spent more than \$120 billion on the conflict in Vietnam between 1965 and 1973. This led to cut-backs in Johnson's Great Society programme and caused increased taxes, price increases and inflation.
- ✓ Some blamed the war for increasing racism in the USA, as many blacks, rightly or wrongly, believed that a disproportionate number of their young men had fought in the war.
- ✓ The USA was blamed for war crimes in Vietnam. American atrocities against the Vietnamese people had a negative image on the USA's global image.
- ✓ Large numbers of books, films, TV shows, plays, etc. were produced during and after the war.
- ✓ Some people thought that the Vietnam War led to less respect for authority – this was linked to the student movement.
- ✓ Relations between the USA and Vietnam remained hostile. There was no trade between these two countries until 1993.
- ✓ The Americans failed to stop communist takeovers in Laos and Cambodia. Thailand did not become a communist country.
- ✓ The USA had thus failed to stop the spread of Communism and as a result President Nixon announced the end of the Truman Doctrine.

SUMMARY

Beginning

- Vietnam declares independence in **1945**
- Last battle against France in **1954**, France pulled out
- The Geneva Accord divided Vietnam along the 17th parallel.
 - North: Ho Chi Minh's Communist. South: Ngo Dinh Diem's Democrat.
- Eisenhower proposed the Domino Theory

U.S steps in

- Election of **1956** was cancelled - Communists were favoured; Diem lost popularity due to corruption
- U.S wants to prevent a communist takeover - send troops
- The Vietcong & Ho Chi Minh Trail was formed
- Kennedy assassinated, Johnson is president.

Escalation

- Tonkin Gulf Resolution - power to the president
- Rolling Thunder - intensive bombing
- Johnson sent a large number of troops to Vietnam
- Napalm & Agent Orange vs. Guerrilla jungle tactics
- Search and destroy missions
- War of attrition

The War Turns

- Tet offensive **1968** - Military victory, psychological defeat
- Election of 1968 divided the nation; Johnson withdrew, (Robert) Kennedy shot
- Nixon became president
 - Kissinger and Vietnamization - train Vietnamese to fight, no more U.S troops
- Violent events escalated protests at home & over the world
 - My Lai massacre, Invasion of Cambodia, Kent State University protest, Pentagon Papers,
- Most American troops were out by **1973**
- Last effort - Christmas Bombing **1974**
- South Vietnam fell in **1975**. War is over

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