

Revision Three: The Vietnam War

Causes:

The situation in Vietnam by 1961



- Vietnam was a French colony, known as French Indochina. Ho Chi Minh was at war with the French, fighting for Vietnamese independence. He won a decisive victory at Dien Bien Phu in 1954.
- The Geneva Peace Accords (1954) split the country at the 17th Parallel. North Vietnam became Communist under Ho Chi Minh whilst South Vietnam became a democracy, eventually led by Ngo Dinh Diem. President Eisenhower showed American support for the South.
- Ngo Dinh Diem was corrupt. Elections were rigged and the culture of the tribal Montagnards came under attack. The ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) led attacks against Viet Minh forces, which led to insurgency in the South.
- Ho Chi Minh wanted unity with the South and was supported by China and the Soviet Union who provided military and economic aid. The National Liberation Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (NFL) was founded in 1960.

The context of the Cold War

- The arms race meant that the US feared war in Vietnam because of potential nuclear attack from the Soviet Union.
- Involvement in the Cold War was based on the policy of containment (keeping Communism within current Communist countries) and the Domino Theory (that if a country fell to Communism then those surrounding it would fall too). These became the main reasons for involvement in Vietnam.
- There was a Communist revolution in China in 1949. Nikita Khrushchev was the leader of the Communist Soviet Union after the death of Stalin in 1954. Both countries supported the Communist Ho Chi Minh.
- The US was also involved in a war in Korea to prevent the Communist takeover of the South. This set a precedent for US involvement in Asia against Communism.

The actions and policies of President Kennedy

- President John F. Kennedy came into office in January 1961 with the same worldview as Eisenhower. He felt the forces of Communism were a threat that had to be met by the US. He became further involved in South Vietnam as the power of the Viet Cong grew.
- One of Kennedy's first actions was to sponsor an unsuccessful anti-Communist invasion of the Bay of Pigs in Cuba in April 1961. This failure led to an increased desire for success against Communism in South-East Asia. He needed to prove himself.
- Kennedy tried to reduce insurgency in South Vietnam through two non-combat methods. Firstly, the Strategic Hamlet Programme placed peasants into armed and protected villages to deny the Viet Cong manpower, food and intelligence. The peasants disliked this because it uprooted them from their ancestral lands.
- Ho Chi Minh- leader of North Vietnam- was incredibly popular and well liked by the people. Thus, he was able to mobilise mass support. Lots of people moved from South to North Vietnam.

The significance of the assassinations of President Diem and President Kennedy

- The Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, when the Soviet Union began placing missiles in Cuba, was the closest the world ever came to nuclear war. Afterwards, talks between Kennedy and Khrushchev relaxed the tensions between the US and Soviet Union.
- The leader of South Vietnam (DIEM) was corrupt, brutal and oppressive. He dealt savagely with any Buddhist opposition in the country. The US felt something had to be done as protest and discontent was building.
- The arrest and assassination of Diem marked the end of a successful CIA-backed coup d'état (the sudden overthrow of a government by a small group). The removal of Diem presented the US with a chance to further their influence in South Vietnam.
- Kennedy was assassinated on 22 November 1963. LBJ became US president with a more aggressive policy towards Vietnam.
- **LBJ:**
 - Who was advising Johnson – The Working Group – Defence department, State department, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS). They told him:
 - An independent, anti-communist South Vietnam was vital to America
 - That the Domino Theory was a real possibility and danger
 - That American '*national prestige*', credibility and honour were at stake
 - Increasing the war was needed as the weak South Vietnamese government were struggling
 - This was all well and good but Johnson needed to convince Congress (US Government) and the US public that there was a need for more intervention in

Vietnam. (Remember Johnson cannot raise the money to go to war without Congress approval)

USA ATTACKED:

On **July 28, 1964** the United States ordered the Navy destroyer the USS Maddox to sail to the Gulf of Tonkin. The Maddox was to assist South Vietnamese commandos on raids in North Vietnam.

The first couple of days nothing happened and then on August 2 the Maddox was attacked. Three North Vietnamese torpedo boats attacked the destroyer. The Maddox fought back sinking two and sending the other ship away crippled. The people of the United States wanted action for the attack on the Maddox. Then there was report of a second alleged attack, although Captain said he was unsure who had fired.

Due to the attacks Congress gave Johnson the **power to do additional military action to North Vietnam** for the future. The Tonkin Gulf Resolution was formed due to this. It was formed to "*Take all necessary measures to repel an armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.*"

Johnson won a landslide victory in the November 1964 presidential election partly because he was seen as the great protector, taking revenge on the North Vietnamese for the Gulf of Tonkin attack.

USA TACTICS VIETNAM WAR:

Tactic	What was this?	Why was it used?	How successful was it?
Operation Rolling Thunder	<p>Operation Rolling Thunder was an US response to a Vietcong attack on an American base, Pleiku.</p> <p>Nine Americans were killed and nearly 100 wounded.</p>	<p>It was designed to destroy roads, railways and Vietcong bases in North Vietnam, especially the Ho Chi Minh Trail.</p>	<p>The heavy bombing did not destroy the Vietcong. The campaign was only supposed to last eight weeks but continued until October 1968 (3 years) T</p> <p>It had little effect on the guerrilla tactics used by the Vietcong. 643,000 tons of bombs were dropped (3 times the number dropped in WW2) 900 US aircraft were lost. Estimated damage done to North Vietnam was \$300 million. Cost to the US of these raids was estimated at \$900 million. Led to increased demand for soldiers. Draft increased in 1965. Heavy financial burden- war was costing 17 billion by the end.</p>
Search and destroy	<p>It was the use of helicopters by the Americans. They landed the helicopters close to the Vietcong-controlled villages. Vietcong suspects would be interrogated, usually in a brutal manner.</p>	<p>The Americans used search and destroy tactics to try and flush the Vietcong out of the countryside.</p>	<p>Civilian casualties were very high. This made the US and South Vietnamese forces even more unpopular. Often led to deaths of innocent civilians including women and children. The missions made ordinary people hate the Americans: as one marine said of a search and destroy mission – <i>“If they weren’t Viet Cong before we got there, they sure as hell were by the time we left”</i>. The Viet Cong often helped the villager’s re-build their homes and bury their dead (win hearts and minds).</p> <p>US soldiers who took part in search and destroy suffered psychological consequence, became trigger happy, PTSD, addicted to heroin, de sensitized to death.</p> <p>By 1971 5,000 men were treated for combat wounds and 20,000 for drug abuse.</p> <p>Between 1966 and 1973 there were 503,000 cases of desertion. Force was inexperienced with little knowledge of guerrilla warfare. Not full combat troops but men who had been drafted in and who had no skill or desire to fight.</p> <p>70,000 VETERANS SUFFERED PTSD after effects.</p>

<p>Agent Orange and napalm</p>	<p>These were chemical weapons used by the Americans:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agent Orange – destroyed forests and crops. Exposure to it could cause cancers and birth defects. - Napalm – contained petrol and chemicals which burned skin to the bone. 	<p>They were used to try and flush the Vietcong out of the jungle.</p>	<p>These tactics did not work.</p> <p>It turned world opinion against the USA for using inhumane weapons- made USA look brutal and inhumane. The public did not support what they were doing and this hurt the soldiers morale.</p> <p>It alienated even more of the South Vietnamese people who turned to the Vietcong.</p>
<p><u>My Lai massacre</u></p>	<p>On 16th March, 1968, nine helicopter gunships landed three US platoons near the village of My Lai. Over a two hour period, the Americans killed hundreds of men, women and children - probably 300, but maybe more. Rapes and body mutilation took place.</p>	<p>The US troops were on a search and destroy mission and My Lai was believed to be a Vietcong stronghold.</p>	<p>The truth about the massacre did not come out for eighteen months and publication of graphic photos followed. Pictures of the massacre were shown around the world and people were appalled. It was another reason why many Americans began to turn against the war. Massacre removed any thoughts that americasn were fighting a moral good v evil war. US soldiers returning home referred to as baby killers.</p>

VIETCONG TACTICS

Tactic	What was this?	Why was it used?	How successful was it?
Guerrilla Tactics	<p>They fought a guerrilla war, ambushing US patrols, setting booby traps and landmines, and planting bombs in towns. They mingled in with the peasants, wearing ordinary clothes. They were supplied with rockets and weapons by China and Russia. Their tactic was "hanging onto the belts" of the Americans - staying so close to the Americans so they could not use air or artillery backup without killing their own men.</p>	<p>The Americans couldn't identify who the enemy was. They knew the landscape and had the support of the people- used this to their advantage.</p>	<p>Incredibly. America, despite their military and economic advantage, could not beat them. It made US soldiers paranoid and seriously harmed their morale as they could not deal or win against these tactics. Led to serious injuries, death, PTSD amongst soldiers. Brought USA into an unwinnable expensive war- 17 billion a year. Meant they needed more and more troops to deal with these tactics. Led to the draft being increased in 1965 which was deeply unpopular.</p>
<p>Booby traps are an example of a Viet Cong tactic.</p>	<p>Example of Guerilla Tactic. For example, the Viet Cong would place trip wires or dig holes filled with spikes, sometimes coated in human excrement, and then would cover the hole with leaves to deceive the enemy. Markers like broken sticks would be left on the path to warn fellow Viet Cong about the locations.</p>	<p>See Above</p>	<p>See above</p> <p>Power of VC fighters- Fighting for causes they really believed in e.g. unification and independence. Many welcomed the chance to fight for liberation. They won the support of the peasants who were unhappy with the government and the 'search and destroy' tactics being used against them. Almost unlimited economic resources. They were prepared to accept a very heavy body count and between 500,000 and 900,000 died during the war. They knew the terrain and were skilled in guerrilla and jungle warfare. Did not have good air power or much money.</p>

			They were supplied by the USSR and China. The USSR provided 8,000 anti-aircraft guns and 200 anti-aircraft missile sites. Total assistance is estimated at \$2 billion between 1965 and 1968. Their bases were very well hidden and surrounded by booby traps
Tunnels	These were used by Viet Cong guerrillas as hiding spots during combat, as well as serving as communication and supply routes, hospitals, food and weapon caches and living quarters for numerous guerrilla fighters.	They knew the landscape and used this to their advantage.	Deeply frustrated the US soldiers who could not locate the tunnels. Impact – see above.
The Ho Chi Minh Trail	This was a network of paths that served as hidden route through the jungle, not only of Vietnam but neighbouring Laos and Cambodia as well, for Viet Cong soldiers and Vietnamese Civilians.	The Viet Cong used it to move troops, weapons and other supplies into and around the country without being detected by the Americans.	It was essential in allowing the North Vietnamese to beat the Americans. The Americans couldn't attack their supply routes without escalating the war in to Laos and Cambodia
Tet Offensive	Started on 31st January, 1968. It was an attack by the Vietcong on more than 100 cities, towns and military bases throughout South Vietnam, including Saigon during Vietnamese New Year	It was totally different to the guerrilla fighting they has used before and was a surprise attack. 15 man suicide squad took over American embassy and held out for 6 hours. Northern town of Hue captured and took 25 days for US to retake it at a loss of 3000 civilians.	Tet Offensive could be seen as a huge failure for the North Vietnamese and Vietcong; 47% of the people killed during the Tet Offensive were Vietcong, 24% were NVA and 22% were civilians. Just 5% were South Vietnam Army ARVN and 2% were US troops. This seems to show it was a massive success for the Americans As a result of what they saw as a failure, the North Vietnamese agreed to peace talks soon after the

		<p>The Communists expected the people to join them, but the uprisings they hoped for did not happen.</p>	<p>Tet Offensive ended. VC lost most of its best guerrilla fighters From now on, the NVA did most of the fighting, as the Vietcong never recovered from the setback of Tet. On the other hand, the Tet Offensive was a huge turning point and was a major reason why more and more Americans turned against the war; Before the Tet Offensive, the Americans had been quite confident - maybe complacent - about the way the war was going. The US media had given the Americans back home the impression that the war would soon end. But, when the news of Tet appeared, many Americans felt that they had been deceived by the army. Vietcong troops were shown inside the US embassy in Saigon, which seemed to show that the war could not be won, or at least not for a long time. Most Americans became convinced that the war had to be ended as soon as possible. Tet also played a large part in Johnson's decision to give up hopes of standing as President again. Richard Nixon, the Republican candidate, promised to end the war and was elected as President.</p>
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REASONS FOR US WITHDRAWAL:



The importance of television and the media in influencing public opinion

- Vietnam was the first television war. It brought the horror of war into people's living rooms and eventually turned many against it.
- The US administration, unlike most governments at war, made no official attempt to censor the reporting in the Vietnam War. Every night, on colour television, people saw pictures of dead and wounded marines. Walter Cronkite was a powerful and influential broadcaster on Vietnam War.

- One of the most influential acts during the war was the decision of *Life Magazine* to fill one edition with photographs of the 242 US soldiers killed in Vietnam during one week of the fighting.
- Public opinion polls carried out at the time, however, suggested that tax increases to pay for the war, or the death of someone they knew, were far more likely to influence most people's attitude towards the war than the mass media.

Growing student protests from 1966

The first march to Washington against the war took place in December, 1964. Only 25,000 people took part but it was still the largest anti-war demonstration in American history.

The first big protests came in October 1965 when the draft was increased. In February 1965, it had only been 3,000 a month but in October it was increased to 33,000 a month. Those who had the necessary 'pull' had the opportunity to 'draft-dodge' – but this was not a luxury open to many poor working class young men. Tearing up or burning your draft paper became a common occurrence and was seen to be the first of the protests against the Vietnam War. The most famous person to do this was the world heavyweight-boxing champion Muhammad Ali. Between 1963 and 1973, 9,118 men were prosecuted for refusing to be drafted into the army.

In March 1966, 50,000 anti-war protesters took part in a rally in one of America's most famous cities – New York. With a population that ran into millions, it could be argued that they represented a very small minority of the city. In 1967, 100,000 took part in a protest rally in Washington DC. In 1971, 300,000 took part in an anti-war demonstration in the same city. This particular protest involved many veterans from the war. When they publicly threw away their medals and medal ribbons, many in America were shocked

In 1967, a group of distinguished academics under the leadership of Bertrand Russell, set up the International War Crimes Tribunal. After interviewing many witnesses, they came to the conclusion that the United States was guilty of using weapons against the Vietnamese that were prohibited by international law. The United States armed forces were also found guilty of torturing captured prisoners and innocent civilians. The Tribunal, and other critics of the war, claimed that the US behaviour in Vietnam was comparable to the atrocities committed by the Nazis in Europe during the Second World War.

Many of the anti-war protesters were also hippies, a group of youths who protested against society as a whole. They used drugs and music to rebel against the norm and joined in with mass protest marches against the Vietnam War e.g Kenn State Massacre.

Protests originated in colleges because, at the start of the war, men could avoid the draft by continuing their education. Students used a range of ways to avoid the fighting, including getting braces and claiming insanity.

Alongside students, the Civil Rights Movement also had a role in anti-war protest. Black people were fighting for equality in America and they argued that it was unfair that black soldiers were dying in Vietnam for a country that did not recognise them as equals. Martin Luther King encouraged peaceful protest from African Americans. Eldridge Cleaver, a Civil Rights activist pointed out, in many southern states of America, blacks were being denied the right to vote in elections. Therefore, blacks were fighting in Vietnam "for something they don't have for themselves."

Johnson and Congress naturally paid great attention to public opinion. It is generally agreed that opposition to the war from the public and in the press was the main reason why Johnson finally decided upon retreat. Supporters of the war, however, continued to put pressure on Johnson to maintain the fighting.

COST:

17 Billion a year was an impossible burden for the taxpayer to carry, especially as they questioned the reasons for being in the war in the first place.

Vietnamization:

By 1969 more than 36,000 members of the US military had been killed in the war. Nixon began the policy of Vietnamization to try to end the war. This meant taking American troops out of Vietnam and leaving the South Vietnamese troops of the ARVN to do the fighting. The USA would still help by giving arms and money and advice to the ARVN. At the same time, Nixon continued peace talks as well as continuing to bomb North Vietnam heavily to try to persuade them to give up.

Idea of the 'Madman theory' came about in relation to Nixon.

Nixon ordered the invasion of Cambodia in 1970 and then Laos in 1971. The aim was to disrupt the Ho Chi Minh Trail and to destroy Vietcong bases in these countries. The invasions also led to more protests against the war back in the USA. It seemed as if Nixon was escalating the war, not trying to bring about peace.

Operation Linebacker II:

In October 1972, Henry Kissinger, the US Secretary of State, announced that 'peace was at hand.' However, when President Thieu refused to accept the peace terms Nixon escalated the bombing of North Vietnam. The bombing began on the 12th December and continued for 12 days. This operation was called 'Operation Linebacker II' and was the biggest aerial attack of the war. The aim of the attack was to win concessions from the communists at peace talks in Paris. The bombing was relentless, more than 1600 civilians died and 70 US airmen were killed or captured. The New York Times responded and called the bombing 'Diplomacy through Terror.' In January 1973 the USA and North Vietnam signed a treaty to end the war

Agreement:

An agreement was reached in October 1972. The terms were:

- North Vietnam dropped its demand that President Thieu be replaced by coalition.
- Nixon and Kissinger agreed to allow the North Vietnamese army to remain in the areas they controlled.
- The Vietcong were allowed to participate in the final settlement.
- A ceasefire agreement was reached and the USA agreed to withdraw all remaining troops.

All US prisoners of war would be repatriated.

BUT:

North Vietnam then invaded the South and, in 1975 Saigon fell to the Communists. The government of North Vietnam united both North and South Vietnam on 2 July 1976 to form the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.