

VIETNAM: LEAD UP TO WAR

Southeast Asia's Colonial History

- France gained control of Vietnam by 1883 despite fierce resistance from the Vietnamese.
- The French combined Vietnam with Laos and Cambodia to form French Indochina.
- Ho Chi Minh led a growing nationalist movement in Vietnam.
- During World War II, the Japanese army occupied French Indochina.
- A group called the League for the Independence of Vietnam, or the Vietminh, fought the Japanese.
- After World War II, the Vietminh declared independence, but the French quickly moved in to reclaim Vietnam.

Colonial Vietnam

Ho Chi Minh

- Real name is Nguyen That Thanh; Ho Chi Minh means "He Who Enlightens."
- Participated in tax revolts against the French.
- Joined the Communist Party.
- Believed that a Communist revolution was a way Vietnam could be free of foreign rulers.

What policies did Presidents Truman and Eisenhower pursue in Vietnam after WW II?

Truman

- Saw Vietnam in terms of the Cold War struggle against communism
- Supported France; unwilling to back the Vietminh because many were Communists

Events

- Communists seized China in 1949.
- Communist North Korea invaded South Korea in 1950.
- Communist-led revolts in Indonesia, Malaya, and the Philippines

Eisenhower

- Eisenhower believed in the **domino theory**
- Eisenhower Sent arms, ammunition, supplies, and money to the French forces

Vietnam after World War II

The Domino Theory

- Domino theory—the belief that communism would spread to neighboring countries if Vietnam fell to communism
- To avoid this, the United States supported the French during the Vietnam War.
- By 1954 the United States was paying more than 75 percent of the cost of the war \$2.6 Billion
- The French continued to lose battle after battle.
- Vietminh used guerrilla tactics effectively.

France Defeated

- French soldiers made a last stand at Dien Bien Phu.
- French forces hoped for a U.S. rescue, but Eisenhower did not want to send U.S. soldiers to Asia so soon after Korea.
- The French surrendered on May 7, 1954.
- After eight years of fighting, the two sides had lost nearly 300,000 soldiers.
- The Vietminh had learned how to fight a guerilla war against an enemy with superior weapons and technology.

The Geneva Conference

The goal of the **Geneva Conference** was to work out a peace agreement and arrange for Indochina's future.

According to the Geneva Accords, Vietnam was temporarily divided at the 17th parallel.

Vietminh forces controlled the North and the French would withdraw from the country.

General elections were to be held in July 1956 and would reunify the country under one government.

The United States never fully supported the peace agreements fearing that Ho Chi Minh and the Communists would win the nationwide election.

Growing Conflict in Vietnam

Vietnam's Leaders

- Ngo Dinh Diem became the president of South Vietnam in 1954.
- Diem's government was corrupt, brutal, and unpopular from the start.
- He favored Catholics and the wealthy.
- Diem cancelled the 1956 election that would unify Vietnam under one government.
- Ho Chi Minh's leadership in North Vietnam was totalitarian and repressive.
- He gave land to peasants, which made him popular.

A Civil War

- Diem's opponents in South Vietnam began to revolt.
- North Vietnam supplied weapons to Vietminh rebels in South Vietnam.
- The Vietminh in South Vietnam formed the National Liberation Front and called their military forces the Vietcong.
- The Vietcong assassinated many South Vietnamese leaders and soon controlled much of the countryside.
- In 1960 Ho Chi Minh sent the North Vietnamese Army into the country to fight with the Vietcong.

Increasing U.S. Involvement

Diem's Overthrow

- Diem's government continued to grow more and more unpopular.
- He arrested and killed Buddhist protesters.
- U.S. leaders said they would withdraw support if Diem did not change his ways.
- Diem refused to change his stand against Buddhists, and the United States began to support a plot to overthrow Diem.
- In November 1963 the South Vietnamese plotters murdered Diem.

U.S. Involvement in Vietnam

Eisenhower

- Began sending money and weapons to South Vietnam
- Military advisors sent to train South Vietnamese army

Kennedy

- Believed in the Domino Theory
- Increased the number of military advisors and army special forces, or Green Berets
- Advisors were not to take part in combat, but many did

Johnson

- Believed an expanded U.S. effort was the only way to prevent a Communist victory in Vietnam
- Asked Congress to pass the Tonkin Gulf Resolution

Vietnam Air and Ground War

Tonkin Gulf Resolution

- To increase the American military effort in Vietnam, Johnson needed to obtain authority from Congress.
- Johnson asked Congress for this authority claiming that the USS *Maddox* had been attacked by North Vietnamese torpedo boats in the Gulf of Tonkin.
- Johnson claimed this attack was unprovoked, but really the *Maddox* had been on a spying mission and had fired first.
- The Tonkin Gulf Resolution was passed on August 7.

Operation Rolling Thunder

- A bombing campaign over North Vietnam
- Bombed military targets—army bases and airfields—as well as bridges, roads, railways, and power plants
- Main target was the **Ho Chi Minh Trail**

Weapons of the Air War

- Agent Orange—defoliant, or chemical, that destroys vegetation
- Napalm—jellied form of gasoline used to create firebombs
- “Cluster bombs”—sprayed sharp metal fragments when exploded

The Air War

- Bombing did not succeed
- Flow of goods from North to South Vietnam actually increased
- Vietcong repaired bridges, had bunkers underground, and used weapons from the Soviet Union and China

Difficult Ground War in Vietnam

- The number of U.S. ground forces in Vietnam continued to grow.
- U.S. strategy called for ground forces to go on search-and-destroy missions.
 - General William Westmoreland commanded the U.S. ground troops in South Vietnam.
 - Ground troops located the enemy and called for air strikes.
 - Areas that were “cleared” rarely remained that way for long.
- U.S. forces implemented a program of pacification to “win the hearts and minds” of the South Vietnamese people.
 - Nonmilitary pacification involved construction projects.
 - Military pacification involved moving people out of their villages when Vietcong were nearby.

Ground War

- American forces in Vietnam faced many challenges.
 - Vietcong struck and then melted back into the jungle
 - Vietnamese peasants seemed peaceful during the day, but at night aided or became Vietcong.
 - Vietcong knew the local geography.
 - Nearly impossible to tell the difference between a Vietcong fighter and a civilian.
- Enormous casualties inflicted upon the Communist forces did not lead to victory.
 - With the aid of the Soviet Union and China, North Vietnam sent a steady stream of supplies and soldiers to the South.
 - Vietcong continued to refill their ranks with civilians.

–U.S. air strikes and the pacification program turned many peasants into Vietcong fighters.

The Draft

- 25 percent were excused for health reasons; 30 percent received deferments, or postponements of service.
- College students were deferred, so men from higher-income families were less likely to serve.
- A high percentage of combat soldiers were African Americans.
- A draft lottery began in 1969; the draft ended in 1973.
- 3 percent of eligible men escaped the draft by either refusing to register or by leaving the United States.

Non-combat Positions

- Most Americans in Vietnam served in non-combat positions—administration, communications, engineering, medical care, and transportation.
- About 10,000 American military women served.
- Some 20,000 to 45,000 more women worked in civilian capacities, many as volunteers for the Red Cross or other humanitarian relief organizations.

Media's Impact

- Reporters and television crews went on patrol with the soldiers.
- Television brought scenes of firefights and burning villages into America's living rooms.
- Criticized the government's reports about the war

Hawks and Doves

- **Doves**—people opposed to the war
- **Hawks**—people who supported the war's goals
- Both criticized the war effort.
- Hawks wanted more troops and bombing.
- Doves opposed the war for many reasons.

Antiwar Movement

- Movement attracted a broad range of participants
- Much antiwar activity took place on college campuses.
- Most vocal group—Students for a Democratic Society.
- Antiwar protesters made up a small percentage of the U.S. population.

Reasons that Doves Opposed the War

- Argued that Vietnam was not crucial to American national security (Ex. George Kennan)
- Argued that the United States was fighting against the wishes of a majority of Vietnamese
- Argued that the war was draining needed resources from Great Society programs (Ex. Martin Luther King Jr.)
- Argued that it was unfair for African Americans to fight for democracy in a foreign land when discrimination continued at home (Ex. Civil rights activists)
- Argued that Johnson's policies were too extreme

1968

Tet Offensive

- A series of massive coordinated attacks throughout South Vietnam
- In January 1968 thousands of NVA and Vietcong troops attacked a U.S. military base in Khe Sanh.
- This and other rural attacks were diversions to draw U.S. and ARVN forces away from urban areas.
- Main Communist offensive began on January 30, 1968, at the start of Tet, the Vietnamese New Year.
- Some 84,000 Communist soldiers attacked 12 U.S. military bases and more than 100 cities across South Vietnam.

Effects of the Tet Offensive

- General Westmoreland called the Tet Offensive a decisive defeat for the Communists.
- The cities taken by the Communists were retaken.
- About 45,000 enemy soldiers were killed. About 1,100 Americans and 2,300 ARVN troops also died.
- The Communists showed that they were determined to keep on fighting.
- The Tet Offensive showed that no part of South Vietnam was safe from attack.
- The Tet Offensive caused many Americans to question whether or not the war in Vietnam could be won.
- President Johnson announced that he would not seek reelection.

Effects of the Tet Offensive

Growing Doubts

- Walter Cronkite broadcast a television report in which he gave his personal assessment of the situation in Vietnam.
- Major national magazines such as *Time* and *Newsweek* also expressed doubts about the war and began to call for its end.
- Public criticism of the government's policies grew louder and more intense.
- Leaders within Johnson's administration began to criticize Johnson's policies.
- Robert S. McNamara** began to seek ways to end the war.

Democratic Challengers

- Roughly 3 out of 4 Americans opposed his policies in Vietnam.
- Minnesota senator **Eugene McCarthy** challenged Johnson for the Democratic Party's nomination.
- New York senator Robert Kennedy entered the race.
- Shaken by the divisions within his party, Johnson announced that he would not seek nor accept the office of the presidency.

Searching for Solutions

- President Johnson denied General Westmoreland's request for 206,000 more ground soldiers.
- Johnson's advisors could not come up with the best course for the war strategy.
- Robert McNamara suggested limiting the air strikes and reversing the escalation of the war.
- Johnson decided to negotiate with the North Vietnamese.
- The Paris peace talks stalled over two issues: the United States wanted all Vietcong troops out of South Vietnam, and North Vietnam would not accept a temporary South Vietnam government that included a U.S.-backed president.

The Election of 1968

The Democratic Primary Fight

- Vice President Hubert Humphrey entered the race and defended the administration's policies in Vietnam.

- Senator Eugene McCarthy called for a rapid end to the war.
- Senator Robert Kennedy also called for an end to the war and won primaries in Indiana, Nebraska, and California.
- Kennedy was shot leaving a Las Vegas hotel by Sirhan Sirhan, a Jordanian immigrant who didn't like Kennedy's support for Israel.

The Democratic Convention

- Delegates at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago debated between McCarthy and Humphrey.
- Outside the convention, protesters from around the country demanded an immediate end to the war.
- Chicago mayor Richard Daley sent troops to maintain order but violence soon broke out.
- Television crews captured violent scenes between protesters and police.
- The chaos was one symptom of a growing "generation gap" over government, politics, and the Vietnam War.

Other Contenders in 1968

Richard Nixon

- Republican
- Won the nomination at the Republican National Convention
- Chose Spiro Agnew as his running mate
- Appealed to the patriotism of mainstream Americans
- Promised "law and order"
- Claimed to have a secret plan to end the war "with honor"

George Wallace

- Independent
- Former Alabama governor
- Nominated by the American Independent Party
- Opposed the civil rights movement and school desegregation and war protesters
- Appealed to conservative Democratic white southerners and working class whites

The Election of 1968

The Campaign

- Nixon led the polls for most of the campaign.
- Humphrey made gains when he said the bombing in Vietnam should be stopped and that the South Vietnamese should shoulder more of the war's responsibilities.
- The peace talks in Paris made some progress when the North Vietnamese agreed to include South Vietnamese representatives.
- Johnson announced an end to the bombing in Vietnam a few days before the election.

The Results

- The election was very close—just 510,000 votes separated Nixon and Humphrey.
- Nixon won 43.4 percent of the votes cast to Humphrey's 42.7 percent.
- Nixon won 301 electoral votes to Humphrey's 191.
- Wallace was one of the most successful third party candidates in U.S. history (46 electoral votes and 13.5 percent of the popular vote).
- Nixon's electoral margin provided him with a mandate to rule that allowed him to escalate the war in Vietnam.

How did President Nixon's policies widen U.S. involvement in the war?

- During his 1968 campaign, Nixon pledged to end the war in Vietnam.
- Nixon and his National Security Advisor **Henry Kissinger** devised plans to end the war.
- In 1969 Kissinger began secret peace negotiations in Paris with North Vietnamese revolutionary Le Duc Tho.
- The U.S. strategy aimed at achieving "peace with honor."
 - Vietnamization
 - Laos and Cambodia

Widening the War

Vietnamization

- Strategy of turning over more of the fighting in Vietnam to the South Vietnamese while gradually bringing U.S. ground troops home
- Nixon hoped this would give South Vietnamese leaders time to create a stable, non-Communist government.
- Nixon began to slowly withdraw U.S. forces from South Vietnam.
- Antiwar activists opposed the plan calling for an immediate end to the war.
- Nixon believed he had the backing of the **silent majority** of Americans.

Laos and Cambodia

- At the same time, Nixon was secretly expanding the war.
- He ordered the bombing of Cambodia to disrupt the flow of supplies on the Ho Chi Minh trail.
- Concealed the air strikes from the American people—including members of Congress
- Sent U.S. and ARVN troops into Cambodia and into Laos to destroy North Vietnamese army bases
- Renewed bombing of North Vietnam
- Nixon hoped to force North Vietnam to seek peace.

War Protests

- In 1970 Nixon announced that he had ordered troops into Cambodia.
- Antiwar protests intensified—especially on college campuses.
- Antiwar protests erupted into violence.
- Nixon believed that antiwar protesters represented only a minority of Americans.
- Radical antiwar groups turned to violent measures to oppose the war.
- More and more Americans began to oppose the war when they learned about the **My Lai massacre** and the **Pentagon Papers**.

Increasing Protests

Campus Violence

- Kent State University in Ohio
 - 4 students were killed and 9 injured
- Jackson State College in Mississippi
 - 2 students were killed and 9 wounded

Antiwar Movement

- Polls showed that fifty percent of Americans opposed the war.
- Coalition of clergy, trade unionists, and veterans established a nationwide day of protest called Moratorium Day.
- 250,000 protesters made up the largest antiwar demonstration in U.S. history.

Radical Protests

- Some antiwar groups turned to violent measures.
- The Weathermen set off more than 5,000 bombs and carried out the Days of Rage.
- Most antiwar protesters did not support extremist groups or terrorist measures.

My Lai Massacre

- Troops under Lieutenant William Calley killed at least 450 men, women, and children in the village of My Lai while on a search-and-destroy mission.
- No Vietcong were found in the village.
- The My Lai massacre was kept quiet at first, but former soldiers began talking about it.
- This atrocity intensified the divisions between war supporters and opponents.
- Calley was convicted of murder and sentenced to life in prison; he was paroled in 1974.

Pentagon Papers

- A collection of secret government documents that traced the history of U.S. military involvement in Vietnam since the Truman years
- Revealed that government officials had been misleading the American people about the war for years
- Daniel Ellsberg leaked the papers to the press.
- Ellsberg originally supported the war, but then concluded that few South Vietnamese civilians supported the U.S.-backed government.

A Peace Agreement

- Nixon tried to force North Vietnam to make peace concessions by ordering the so-called ----- Christmas bombing. It failed to work.
- Officials from North Vietnam, South Vietnam, and the United States finally reached an agreement in January 1973.
- The United States agreed to withdraw all of its troops and help rebuild Vietnam. Both sides agreed to release all prisoners of war.
- The agreement did not settle the political future of South Vietnam—the key issue behind the war from the start.

The Vietnam War's Legacy

- Two years after U.S. troops were withdrawn, North Vietnamese troops invaded South Vietnam.
- After a short amount of fighting, South Vietnam surrendered.
- The U.S. military rushed to evacuate Americans still working in Saigon.
- Some 130,000 South Vietnamese were also evacuated and flown to the United States.
- After two decades of “temporary” division, Vietnam was reunited under a Communist government.
- In 1975, Communist forces called the Khmer Rouge gained control of Cambodia.
- Vietnam forces invaded Cambodia in 1979, overthrew the Khmer Rouge, and occupied the country till 1989.

Legacy of the War

Southeast Asia

- 635,000 South Vietnamese died; Vietcong and NVA war dead equaled 1 million
- Severe environmental damage from bombs and defoliants
- More than 1.5 million South Vietnamese fled the country after the fall of Saigon.

Veterans

- 58,000 Americans were killed; 600 were held as POWs; 2,500 soldiers reported MIA; 300,000 wounded
- Experienced a negative reception upon return
- Trouble readjusting to civilian life (post-traumatic stress disorder)

Political Impact

- United States failed to prevent Communists from taking over South Vietnam.
- Spent more than \$150 billion on the war
- Changed how many Americans viewed government
- Congress passed the War Powers Act in 1973.

