

The vietnam war

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Vietnam War

Introduction

According to Burrows (2002), the Vietnam War was fought between 1959 and 1975, with the major players being the United States, the Soviet Union. Based not only on my understanding of the conflict but also large volumes of literature that are available on the subject, I believe that the real enemy in the Vietnam War was communism, represented by the Soviet Union. The USSR's continued support and supply of materiel to North Vietnam and the Vietcong prompted the American government to react so as to prevent the fall of South Vietnam and as a result the spread of communism. During the Cold War, there was an intense and bitter struggle between the two main isms that existed at the time, communism and capitalism. Both the United States and the Soviet Union worked towards containing and minimizing the spread of each country's ideologies, and if possible eradicate it. Around this time, China, North Korea and Cuba were also emerging as real challengers and threats to the existence of capitalism and the continued domination of world affairs by the United States. The US government did not want communism to spread and spiral out of control, because it already posed enough threat to capitalism. The Vietcong's invasion of South Vietnam was therefore an excuse and the perfect opportunity to fight communism, and it responded quickly (Murray, 2005).

By 1965 the war had escalated into a full-blown conflict, with US troops being involved in a form of warfare that they had never seen before. The Vietcong believed in and practiced guerilla warfare; they had perfected it to suit their tactics and objectives (Murray, 2005). US troops came face to face with a method of engagement they had never seen before, something very

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different from conventional warfare but just as effective (if not more effective). The war was heavily punctuated by ambushes, surprise attacks, insurgency and counterinsurgency, and there were so many casualties on both sides of the war. This made it very difficult for the American government to bring the war to an end because they were fighting an enemy that was elusive as he was dangerous (Burrows, 2002).

Burrows (2002) states that “ everybody recognized that it would take something special to bring the war to an end, and in 1968 it duly arrived in the form of the Tet Offensive”. This surprise attack is believed to have dealt a major psychological blow to the US government and troops. The American public turned against the Johnson administration, and the president was disgraced to say the least. He subsequently declined his party’s re-nomination, and alluded to a willingness to begin peace talks with the North Vietnamese government. Richard Nixon succeeded Lyndon Johnson and not long afterwards initiated peace talks with the Vietcong on January 25, 1969 in Paris. On 27th January 1973, an agreement was reached. Ceasefire was immediately declared and the US began withdrawing its troops, the last ones leaving on 29th March 1973 (Murray, 2005).

References

Burrows, L. (2002). Vietnam. New York: A. A. Knopf.

Murray, S. (2005). Vietnam War. New York: DK Pub.