

Vietnam war research papers example

[Countries](#), [Vietnam](#)



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Introduction

The Vietnamese War, fought from December 1956 up to April 1975, is one of the Cold War-era proxy wars fought in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.

Although, on paper, the war was fought between North and South Vietnam, allies of the two antagonists were also involved in the war. For example, North Vietnam was supported by its communist allies (such as China), while South Vietnam was supported by anti-communist allies (such as the United States and France). Up to date, there is no consensus about whether the war itself was necessary, and whether objectives of the war were achieved.

Background

In the period preceding 1949, the rapprochement that existed between western nations and the Soviet Union began to crumble. As a consequence, the Cold War began in earnest. Although the pro-communist and the pro-capitalist nations never engaged directly, any opportunities arising to show

supremacy were grabbed with both hands. This was evident in the 1950 when the People's Republic of China in Conjunction with the Soviet Union recognized the communist Democratic Republic of Vietnam led by Viet Minh, while the United States and Great Britain recognized the anti-communist State of Vietnam led by Bao Dai.

Western powers, led by U. S and Britain, opined that the war in Indochina was a communist expansion plan led by the Soviet Union. The policy makers would not allow such as move because it threatened the success and the well-being of the capitalist nations. Policy makers from the communist nations, on the other hand, felt that the capitalist western nations wanted to maintain their stranglehold in Vietnam, and extend their colonial rule. It is because of this anticipation that People's Republic of China (PRC) military advisors sought to assist Viet Minh. The support given by PRC transformed Viet Minh's guerilla force into a regular army that could stand its ground. In reaction to this new development, the U. S formed a special unit named Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) whose main aim was to advise the French troops on the ground on strategy, and train the Vietnamese soldiers. As time went by, the U. S government continued to commit more resources and personnel to that mission. For instance, by 1954, the U. S government had spent more than \$ 1 billion supporting the French troops on the round and supplied more than 300, 000 small arms. By this period, U. S should 80 % of the war.

However, the government was non-committal in making its intentions known, at least in the public. For example, a military strategy involving the use of three small tactical nuclear weapons remained a closely guarded

secret. Although Vice-President Richard Nixon at one point suggested that U. S might have to put the American boys in, no other highly placed public figure wanted to give exact details of the military strategy. In addition, although President Eisenhower wanted the U. S troops to get involved under the contingency that Great Britain would be involved, directly military involvement was ruled since the political risks were far much greater than the benefits of military intervention.

Nevertheless, France did not want to let go its former colony and this explained the presence of French troops in Indochina. However, Viet Minh's forces handed the French troops a humiliating defeat in 1954. The French garrison sundered, and 12, 000 French prisoners were taken by Viet Minh's forces. However, out of the 12, 000 French prisoners, only 3, 000 survived. The defeat of the French troops opened an opportunity for negotiations and a ceasefire was achieved after Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam were granted independence at the Geneva Conference.

U. S Involvement

After the death of President John F. Kennedy, the incoming administration changed tact with regards to Vietnam. Although President Lyndon Johnson did not initially consider the issue of Vietnam a priority, that position changed towards the end of 1963. With reference to Vietnam, President Johnson said the U. S should join the battle against communism with full strength and determination. The remark came after the situation in South Vietnam deteriorated following the ouster of Ngo Dinh Diem as the leader. President Johnson then replaced Kennedy's policy of disengagement with his own policy of expanding the war.

On August 2 1964, U. S intelligence gathering boat (USS Maddox) along the North Vietnam fired and destroyed several boats stalking it on Tonkin Gulf. This attack attracted successive attacks on the USS Maddox and the USS Turner Joy. The second attack on U. S naval ships prompted the U. S Congress to approve the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution that allowed the U. S army to carry out retaliatory air strikes without declaring a war. The resolution also allowed the U. S Army to conduct its operations in Southeast Asia.

Interestingly, the Tonkin Resolution gave the president the power to carry for full-scale war if he deemed it necessary.

Initially, the strategy adopted by the National Security Council was to use air strikes to deter North Vietnam from supporting Viet Cong. The planners opined that threatening to destroy the air defenses and industrial infrastructures of North Vietnam would discourage North Vietnam from supporting the Viet Cong and bolster the morale of the South Vietnamese. The bombing campaign lasted approximately three years. The bombing was not confined to North Vietnam only but also other areas where the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese Army had interests. For example, the war supplies route that ran through Laos and Cambodia was also affected.

Following the attacks carried out by the U. S. Air Forces, it was clear that more protection was required as the South Vietnam army was not capable of providing enough security. This necessitated the dispatch of 3, 500 U. S. Marines into South Vietnam, which marked the beginning of the ground offensive. The numbers were progressively increased, and towards the end of that year the number hit 200, 000 U. S. Marines fighting in South Vietnam. During this period, U. S. public opinion in support of the deployment was

overwhelming.

As the war progressed, the countries at the centre of the conflict had divergent views. On one hand, the North Vietnamese leadership argued that their main aim was to unify both North and South Vietnam and secure their independence. On the other hand, U. S. military advisors felt that the main aim of North Vietnam was to topple all the non-communist governments neighboring them. They argued that Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Indonesia could be the next in line if North Vietnam won the war.

Another turning point in the Vietnam War came when General William Westmoreland came up with proposals to move away from a defensive posture to an aggressive posture sidelining the South Vietnamese. The plan drafted by Westmoreland was to depart from the strategy used by previous administrations that involved giving South Vietnam the responsibility of fighting the guerillas. Although the plan was approved, President Johnson did not communicate the change of strategy. However, key NATO allies such as Canada and Britain kept off the war.

The game changer in the Vietnam War came in 1967 when the communists ricked the U. S. Forces to fighting at Dak To and Qaung Tri Province. Without giving much thought to the change in tact, the U. S. Army committed many men to fight in the hinterlands. They thought they would gain quick victories because they could use heavy firepower without being impeded by civilians. However, on 31 January 1968, the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese Army broke the truce accompanying the Tet holiday and launched the biggest offensive. They attacked over 100 cities using approximately 85, 000 men. Among the places attacked was U. S. Embassy in Saigon.

The Tet Offensive prompted quick response from the U. S. and South Vietnam. However, Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese army had killed many unarmed civilians and take control of some cities. Although the Tet Offensive gave the U. S. and the allied forces significant victory, it has unintended consequences when looked at from a strategic viewpoint. Despite the military failure of the part of the communists, it was a political victory for them because the approval ratings of President Lyndon Johnson reduced significantly and the public support of the war also reduced drastically. The fact that the president had refused the request for an extra 200, 000 men and the significant number of American lives lost (approximately 30, 000) was seen as an admission that U. S. had lost the war.

Finally, ceasefire talks between U. S. and North Vietnam began in May 1968. The incoming administration of President Nixon agreed to withdraw troops and build the capacity of South Vietnam. The president also pursued rapprochement with China and détente with the Soviet Union. All these steps reduced the simmering global tensions between the western nations and the communist states. During the same period, the domestic support for the war continued to plummet. This followed reports of the My Lai Massacre where U. S. forces raped and killed people as well as the Green Beret Affair in which eight U. S. officers were arrested for the murder of an officer who was suspected to be a double agent.

The Fall of Saigon, which signified the end of the Vietnam War, came on April 1975 after the U. S. withdrew all its troops from South Vietnam. This allowed

the North Vietnamese Army to take control of all the key buildings and installations with minimal resistance.

Implications of the Vietnam War

One of the major impacts of the Vietnam War was the significant loss suffered by the civilian population. Although the continuous air bombardment was meant to deter the proliferation of the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese Army, civilians living in the villages were also affected immensely.

Another impact of the war was destruction of the environment. The defoliants used by the U. S. Forces had a negative impact on the forests and the vegetation. For example, one of the defoliants known as ‘ Agent Orange’ destroyed 1, 034, 300 hectares of land. Another defoliant known as ‘ Agent Blue’ used to spray the paddy fields on North Vietnam destroyed 688, 000 acres used for planting rice. There are also indications that many infants died prematurely following the destructive effects of “ Agent Orange’.

For obvious reasons, the infrastructure on both the North and South Vietnam was also destroyed. For example, during the Tet Offensive, 80 % of Hue was left in ruins. Other key installations and buildings were also destroyed during the war, which had a negative impact on the economy of Vietnam.

Postwar Impact

The Vietnamese were not the only people affected by the war. The American public was also affected by the aftermath of the Vietnam War. The people also became skeptical of the honesty and competence of their leaders. The faith that the people had on their institutions was also greatly eroded. The U.

S. Forces, for instance, became greatly discredited in the public opinion. The unwavering support that the people had given to the American foreign policy during the cold war also suffered a major setback.

The fear of getting involving in another protracted military war saw the country change tact especially regarding military intervention in third world countries. From that point onwards, it was clear that the country's interests would come first when making a decision to use military force. In addition, it was agreed that military intervention would be the last resort in pursuing foreign policy objectives.

This shift in foreign policy was occasioned by the debate on whether the U. S. should have been involved in the Vietnam War in the first place. The fact that successive U. S. governments did not achieve their military objective means that the war was lost – according to the American public. The huge expenditures on the war, the unnecessary loss of service men and the humiliation by the North Vietnamese made many people rethink the necessity of the war to the American public. In addition, details emerging that the government lied to the public about USS Maddox and USS Turner Joy getting attacked eroded public confidence on the honesty of their leaders and their ability to deliver.

Reports indicate that President Lyndon Johnson's administration lied about U. S. naval ships getting attacked along Tonkin gulf in order to deceive the public and gain the necessary public support. It also emerged later that Johnson's administration changed its policy from non-involvement to full involvement in the Vietnam War without informing the American public. The media was also guilty of failing to probe some emerging details of the war,

and only presenting the grounds that the U. S. Forces were making on the enemy. The military on its part did not play its role effectively. The fact that they continued to rely on air strikes to fight a guerrilla army points to a lapse of strategy on their part. In addition, the decision to sideline South Vietnamese soldiers who had a better knowledge of the terrain of the area let the military down in a big way. All in all, intelligence gathering and dissemination during the war was a big failure. For example, an effective intelligence system would have stopped the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese Army attacks during the Tet holiday that hugely embarrassed the U. S. Forces.

Conclusion

The involvement of the U. S. in the Vietnam War remains one of the hotly contested subjects in history. The fact that the country's agenda was not achieved means that U. S lost the war. Nevertheless, useful lessons have been learnt from the war, and they guide the country's foreign policy in the 21st century. Above all, U. S. now uses military force as the means of last resort when dealing with conflicts.

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