

Why did the usa
become involved in
vietnam in the 1950's
and 60's



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Before 1950, the Japanese had taken Vietnam from French rule, and subsequently the Vietnamese started to form resistance groups in southern China. They practiced guerilla tactics and called themselves the Vietminh, and were led by Ho Chi Minh, a leading Vietnamese Communist.

Their main objective was essentially nationalist, to achieve independence. They soon became Communist so that they could fund the resistance of France and Japan, and Ho was later reported to say that “ it was patriotism and not Communism that originally inspired me. The USA sympathized with the Vietnamese at this stage, as they did not want to see old colonial powers back in charge. By 1950 the USA’s view had completely changed due to the Cold War with the Soviet Union, and the Truman Doctrine of 1947, which declared that America would now take a major role in world affairs. The USA was to send money, weapons and advisors to any country, anywhere in the world that was fighting Communism, as by this time, America was scared that the Soviet Union wanted to take over the world, and that Vietnam was just a ‘ domino’ in the sequence, with China being at the start of the ‘ Communist chain’ in 1949. The ‘ Domino Theory’ reasoned that if one country fell to Communism, then every country in South East Asia would.

President Eisenhower believed that “ The loss of any country in South East Asia (to communism) could lead to the loss of all Asia, then India and Japan, finally endangering the security of Europe. ” This was a policy known as ‘ containment’. Up until this time, America had shown little interest in European affairs, and was, in my opinion just acting as the ‘ world’s policeman’, because US morale was high after WWII, and they were an undefeated superpower. The French asked Eisenhower for backup, but

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America had just come out of the Korean War with a heavy loss of 40, 000 American soldiers and was not prepared to see more Americans die over what they saw as an insignificant country that could easily be crushed. Instead, in 1949, the first physical American intervention took place, as the new Communist China under Mao was supplying Minh with weapons, so they decided to supply France with money, weaponry and clothing.

But the more the French intervened, the more hated they became. In the 1950's, public awareness and hatred of Communism was brought to a head by McCarthy, who achieved making Communist into a 'dirty' word, and putting many on trial on the accusation that they were Communists, even though it was a free country. By now, fear of Communism had almost reached hysteria. In 1954 the superpowers met in Geneva to decide the future of Vietnam, which basically outlined that the Communists had power of the North, Capitalists, the South.

The US then put Catholic anti-Communist, pro-American puppet Diem into power in the South, but the Vietnamese public saw straight through it, so again, the more they intervened, the more hated they became. The US were still to send in combat troops, but by 1956 had sent in advisors, yet still had no idea what to do, as they had never had any experience in these matters. By the 60's the US had decided to restrict their involvement. In 1961, Kennedy was elected president, and wanted to take on the Communists, as by 1961, the Berlin Wall was striking terror into the already paranoid Capitalists, and it showed a physical example of Communist power. In 1962, The Cuban Missile Crisis took place, and this was an even bigger shock to the US, because they realized that they were actually now in the firing line.
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This led to US Communism paranoia. The CIA decided to assassinate Diem, and now a whole Pandora's box was about to unfold. Subsequently, South Vietnam became extremely volatile, and coincidentally, Kennedy was assassinated exactly 3 weeks later. Now there was no turning back. At this point, the Americans looked for an excuse to attack the Vietnamese without looking the aggressor. The same tactics were used in the Gulf of Tonkin Incident as in Pearl harbour; Pres.

Johnson sailed large battleships up the coast, and said that they were under attack, and so they had to retaliate. But, the US never actually declared war on Vietnam. Johnson passed the Gulf of Tonkin resolution, which enabled him to take "all necessary measures". In 1965, combat troops were finally sent in, and "Operation Rolling Thunder" intensive bombing campaign was introduced. This bombing only increased the determination of the people to fight back. In 1968, the Vietcong launched the TET offensive, as both sides were at stalemate.

This was the height of America's involvement, with 1/2 million US troops in Vietnam, but they couldn't withdraw now and be seen to be beaten by a country they had never even heard of? This would badly damage American pride, and that is the principle reason that they wouldn't withdraw. The US felt it their job to protect the world from 'the evils of Communism' and that is precisely what they tried to do. Although the trouble was, had anyone ever questioned the "Domino Theory"? The two Communist movements (Korea and Vietnam) were not the same. They were not protecting the world from "the evils of Communism", but instead "the evils of Nationalism".