

Why did americas  
commitment to  
vietnam deepen  
throughout the  
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America's commitment to Vietnam which resulted with war was a Cold War-era military conflict that happened in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia from November 1, 1955 to the fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975. Despite the expenditure of more than \$150 billion, the loss of 58, 000 lives,[1] the application of astronomical technological implements, and the positioning of a colossal military armoury, the world's most preeminent nation failed to achieve its objectives and suffer its first defeat in war, a humiliating and extremely unsatisfying experience for a people accustomed to success.

It was the Americans longest and most divisive war. This essay seeks to place America's commitment in Vietnam throughout the 1960s, which was a period of the heaviest U. S. involvement. The importance of Vietnam derived from the global strategy of containment, which after the Communist Victory in China 1949; Vietnam was the key for the future of Southeast Asia. If Vietnam came under Communist control, the stability of the rest of the region like Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Burma, Malaya, Indonesia and Philippine archipelagos would be threatened.

The loss of Southeast Asia to communist movements close to Soviet Union and China would have contributed a major shift in the world's geopolitical balance. The loss of Southeast Asia would have deprived the United States, European allies as well as Japan of access to the major sources of raw materials and profitable markets in the world; in the course of the conflict the more the United States invested of its resources in Vietnam the more difficult it became to withdraw or reduce its commitment.

It was not a threat for Vietnam to have a communist control rather than the fear that Vietnam would be the first of series of dominos to collapse.

President Lyndon Johnson referred to the lessons of the past that reinforced the U. S. commitment to Vietnam. The lessons of the confronting aggression of 1930s, preventing a war against the totalitarian states was to halt the aggressiveness. The World War II, was the failure of stopping Imperial Japan, Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany which led to more aggression.

The repression of the Soviet Union by sending troops in Korean in 1950, intervention against leftist groups in Latin America and Middle East, and other American cold war policy- were all seen in the context of avoiding the mistakes of the past. [2] In this context, Ho Chi Minh's movement to unify Vietnam was an example of Communist aggression. In December 1960, southern revolutionaries founded the National Liberation Front (NLF), a wide organisation led by Communists which designed to rally all those alienated with Diem by promising sweeping reforms and the establishment of independence.

The North Vietnam hoped to overthrow Diem by what would looked as an indigenous revolution without aggravating U. S. intervention. The same year 1960, the newly elected Democratic administration of John F. Kennedy took power. The number of American " advisers" reached from 3, 205 in December 1961 to more than 9, 000 by the end of 1962. [3] It was said by a helicopter pilot that it is important to be trained with the Vietnamese, in order to prepare themselves for future wars and defend Vietnam from a Communist takeover.

Supported by an increased American equipment and adviser, the South Vietnamese Army took offensive against the guerrillas. The United States to support this countersurgery expanded its role though the “ Project Beefup” in Vietnam. American military assistance in Vietnam was doubled between 1961 and 1962 including armoured personnel carriers and more than 300 military aircraft. [4] In 1961 the Diem government adopted the so called strategic hamlet program to gain active participation of the rural population in the war against the NLF.

The purpose of the programme was to protect the peasants from the terror of the NLF but to provide the means of social and economic revolution based on self-rule and self-sufficiency. The idea was that all the peasants from scattered villages brought together into hamlets and surrounded by moats and bamboo stakes and be protected by military forces, which are also known as fortified villages. The program did not achieve much, since the land reform was implemented poorly and many peasants left landless and some others did not want to be removed from their lands.

The National Liberation Front had the upper hand in this policy since they promised the peasants more land once communisms have taken root in the South. The August plot concluded two things first that the administration must apply pressure on Diem, including aid cuts to compel him to remove Ngo Dinh Nhu and adopt the necessary changes to defeat the Vietcong. Secondly that Diem’s unpopularity was so great and that it had to be eliminated. It was made clear that even under severe American pressure and cuts in aid, Diem was unlikely to remove Nhu, and all the actions taken by the Americans would only hurt the war against the Vietcong.

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In October 1963, the Americans did cut aid support in order to pressure Diem, and they knew that this action will encourage the coup and the generals, to start planning a coup. Indeed the generals step up their planning and requested more assurances from the United States. The ambassador of South Vietnam of South Vietnam, Lodge, informed the plotters that although the United States do not want to encourage the coup and it will not deny to the new regime economic and military assistance if it proved to be capable of winning mass support to win the war and improving the working relations with the US.

Much of Kennedys fear and its advisers of allowing the coup proceed the administration was divided as to whether led the coup lead and be successful or overthrown the Americans from the country. In November 1, 1963 the generals captured key military installations and communications systems in Saigon and secured the surrender of Nhu's Special Forces, and commanded the resignation of Diem and Nhu. The brothers were captured and brutally murdered in the back of an armoured personnel carrier in November 2, 1963.

Three weeks later, the U. S. President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas. Lyndon Baines Johnson, the new American President vowed to meet the Communist challenge, and he insisted that he would not let Vietnam got the way China had gone in 1949. For Johnson and his advisers Vietnam continued to be vital to America's larger foreign policy goals and that the United States' must continue to display to the major Communist powers their purpose and strength of will. Johnson took the idea of falling dominoes very seriously.

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Diem's successors didn't seem to "agree" with the American plans or follow "orders". General "Bing" Minh, a military junta wanted to negotiate with the NLF by striking a deal that would neutralize Vietnam in the Cold War. In late January 1964, Minh's successor General Nguyen Khanh, made a lot of changes in the government and he also showed signs of talking with the NLF, but he was expelled in February 1965. General Nguyen Van Thieu trusted by the Americans took power. It was clear that American requirements decided who held power in Saigon.

Despite the claims that the United States wanted to protect the South Vietnamese independence, it was the United States that focused on opposing the Viet Cong in a war where took greater burden of fighting, in the ground and air. In March 1964, the U. S. military prepared plans for the large-scale use of bombing in Laos and Vietnam and secret operations against the North. On 2 August North Vietnamese torpedo boats attacked an American vessel, the USS Maddox, in the Gulf of Tonkin.

In response to this the Senate allowed President Johnson to take all necessary measures for arm support against the armed forces towards the United States and to prevent further hostilities. [6] In early 1965 Johnson set up a team on how to proceed in Vietnam which did not even consider withdrawal as an option, because defeat from communist was unthinkable. They came up with three courses; first continue with the current policies, second a build up against Hanoi, which meant costly commitment of U. S. resources and thirdly pressure against the North for its support for the Viet Cong.

With the continuous political instability in Saigon, Johnson accepted the third option. On February 6 1965 a Viet Cong attack on Pleiku killed eight Americans, which led Johnson to approve the attacks on the North as he did in the Gulf of Tonkin. After the second attack on 10 February in which over twenty Americans were killed Johnson was convinced a campaign called Operation Rolling Thunder, should begin, which went on until 1968. With the launch of Rolling Thunder America was fatally committed to a quagmire war from which there was no easy escape.

The United States was fundamentally doomed in its political and military efforts. One of the reasons why the United States lost the war was mainly because of the military strategies. The military strategy call for direct strength against the enemy and seizing the initiative, but the American power was diffused and applied gradually. The air war against North Vietnam, from the military prospective was to reduce the support of Southern insurgency and from the political perspective to inflict sufficient damage and Hanoi to the bargaining table.

The United States had the ability to achieve its objectives quickly and easily, by striking the Viet Cong and North Vietnam and bring the war at an acceptable conclusion. This attack would not only achieved the United States objectives in South Vietnam but compared to the protracted war they fought it would have been more humane, General Davidson stated. [7] The search-and-destroy strategy squandered U. S. manpower resulting heavy American and South Vietnamese casualties without fully engaging the war.

They had the illusion that this strategy could bring victory and underestimated North Vietnam's determination and ability. This strategy led the enemy to retain the advantage, which North Vietnamese and Viet Cong demonstrated in the 1968 Tet Offensive. The key to U. S. victory was concentrating U. S. power against North Vietnam to avoid infiltration of men and supplies into the South. By doing that they had to reinforce bases south of the Demilitarized Zone and establish lines of defence into Laos.

Air power should have been concentrated in populated areas of North Vietnam and Laos and along the Demilitarized Zone. U. S. naval power should have been employed to blockade Northern ports as well Haiphong. According to Colonel Summer's the United States lost the major advantage of escalating dominance and to pose a threat to the enemy. [8] The failure of U. S. military leaders and civilians, to recognise that the war in Vietnam was a conventional and not a guerrilla war. it was conventional in two aspects: (1) it was a Northern aggression was towards the South, and (2) after large U. S. nd North Vietnamese forces entered the war by 1967 most of the fighting was in larger battles and fought by conventional means.

The inability of the Americans to foster a sense of nationhood and find leaders who could rally the dissimilar political and religious groups and stimulate rural reforms, was also a reason of losing the war too. The U. S. failure can be traced in the imbalance of the two Vietnamese governments, but frankly the Americans were supporting a losing cause. Vietnam was really important to the United States in terms of global interests, those interests that demanded fighting a limited war.



Neither Johnson nor Nixon was prepared for a major war over Vietnam with the Soviet Union and China involved. The past showed that when U. S. forces invaded North Korea China had interfered, and that the Communist powers would not tolerate a North Vietnams defeat. The United States made clear that would not invade North Vietnam and that they did not wish the surrender of Hanoi by to abandon its warfare in the South. The basic problem of the United States was that South Vietnam's survival could not be explained as essential to U. S. national security.

The warfare and commitment that was undertaken to prevent Communist unification of Vietnam was important for the geopolitical interests but not essential that it would have justified the risks and force levels in the prospects of achieving those objectives. The "falling dominoes" and "credibility" showed to be indefinite concepts on which justifies a war and to sustain an army's momentum.

A great discrepancy among American and North Vietnamese power was balanced by Hanoi's ability to gain support from the Soviet Union and China, which placed limitations on U. S. warfare, and became the superior dedication of the North Vietnamese cause. For the United States the Vietnamese war was important, but given its global commitments and the uncertainty of its interests in Vietnam, it cannot become "everything". It was the people and the army who fought to liberate their nation and survive a superpower fighting to save the first "domino" and to sustain "credibility". Defeat came hard for the Americans. The enduring lesson of the Vietnam War is that power, no matter how great, has its limits. The American power in Vietnam was constrained by the Cold War, which ironically the war was fought.

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It was limited by the America support over South Vietnam, which America was willing and determine the price of South foes, North Vietnamese and the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam. Based on these circumstances the war could not have been won in sense of material or moral price in which the Americas were willing to pay. The war cost the Americans 58, 000 dead, and for the Vietnamese millions of dead, as many as 300, 000, North Vietnamese and NLF missing in action, these casualties which even today are being paid from both sides.