

Ideological crusade against communism



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The growing involvement of the US in Vietnam in the years 1950-1968 can be seen as an ideological crusade against communism for various reasons. The main reason being the quagmire theory which increased involvement for presidents and got them further into the 'mud'. Stalemate was also an important factor as it rejected any thought of withdrawal as the US did not want to lose respect/face. The commitment trap made the US become increasingly involved.

However, it can be seen that the Cold war caused the US to 'crusade' against communism. US intervention in Vietnam was stimulated by their hatred of communism which was a belief that went against freedom, free trade and democracy, everything the US said they stood for. The US refused and hated communism for many years as it was a threat to security, enterprise and liberty. The particularly disliked the idea of communism spreading even before it's rising.

Furthermore, McCarthy's 'red scare' enforced US's very strict capitalist views and its fear of communism spreading and forced a crusade against it. Therefore, in order to ease the threat of communism to the superpower status of the US, the presidents had to seem strong. At the Geneva conference, Eisenhower showed he was taking an independent, hard line to fight communism by refusing to cooperate with the communists. Vietnam was the USSR's and China's puppet as Southeast Asia was in danger.

Truman lost China which furthered their commitment in Vietnam and deepened their ideology that they didn't want to lose Vietnam to communism. Truman therefore helped the French to be a barrier against

communism in Europe. Additionally, in his 'Truman Doctrine' speech he said that the US would help any country that resisted communism. Furthermore, Johnson thought Ho was becoming another Hitler, therefore saying it was an ideological crusade and that communism and fascism is the same danger for the world. All the US presidents were therefore anti-communist. All of these points show that it was an ideological crusade and it put forward the idea that the US were not going to negotiate with the communists by any means.

The Cold War caused the US to 'crusade' against communism. The domino theory showed how high communism spreading was on the US's agenda and it implied that the US planned to solve it. The domino theory was what all the presidents believed in and they feared being alone in a red sea, where they are unable to trade. As China fell to communism under Truman, this proved the domino theory could be taking place and the US had to make sure other countries around China (i.

e. Vietnam) did not fall to communism. The losses in Cuba and Laos obligated the US to fight against communism, otherwise they would be seen as weak and the US did not want to lose face. To avoid communism from spreading, Kennedy was prepared to support a corrupt south. This emphasised how far the US were willing to go to stop communism spreading. This overall shows that instead of a battle of ideologies, the US was taking on a fight against the spread of communism.

The Cold War was a reason for US 'crusade' against communism says the revisionist view as the US wanted to safeguard trade and economic interests in Southeast Asia. The US feared the takeover of Vietnam by the USSR

because if this was to happen, the USSR would recruit all resources to benefit them and go against America in the Cold war. The US could not let their trading economical interests be jeopardised as the USSR would become increasingly powerful. Each president took one step after another, thinking each step would solve the Vietnam problem. However, the US then got deeper in and therefore it became impossible to leave. Truman was committed to help the French, but as the French could not fight guerrilla tactics, this help kept on increasing as time went on.

Therefore, Truman took a step in the ‘ mud’. Eisenhower continued the commitment without looking into it by setting up SEATO (Southeast Asia treaty organisation). This was to protect South Vietnam; however this created a reliance on American aid, rather than allowing the South Vietnamese to effectively fight the north alone. Kennedy further committed by increasing the number of advisors sent to Vietnam from 3, 000 to 12, 000, hoping to improve the morale of the ARVN and fortunes, but made them rely further on US help.

They sent in helicopters but AP BAC only showed that this led to the ARVN being less active. After Kennedy died, Johnson promised to keep up US commitment as he was not elected as president. He put in troops to protect those sent in previously to improve Southern morale and also to protect against advancing North Vietnamese due to the decision of the previous president. As the reform and democratic negotiations had not worked, this was the only practical step. Without superpower rivalry, the US would not have felt trapped or become involved.

They also would not have feared losing respect in the world. US commitment of Vietnam was deepened by successive presidents and their belief of staying in the war and not withdrawing as they feared Vietnam becoming communist. Due to Kennedy's losses in Laos and Cuba, there was much pressure on the US to win the Vietnam War. In Cuba, Castro had communist links with the USSR therefore; the US made an invasion at the Bay of Pigs in 1961 which was a secret operation to kill Castro and the communists.

Kennedy was humiliated as this failed and made him look bad. Furthermore, Kennedy feared a communist triumph in Laos which was part of Indochina. Kennedy managed to 'neutralise' Laos therefore it was going to be governed by a coalition. The communist element was uncooperative which was good for HO and this confirmed Kennedy's fears that communism must be stopped.

As well as Kennedy's losses, Truman's reputation suffered after losing China which further deepened US commitment as they did not want to be seen as giving up. Election campaigning played a huge part in the Vietnam War as it showed how much candidates wanted to win and avoid losing face by looking weak. It also showed that they wanted to avoid looking non-committed to foreign policy. In the US presidential elections, Goldwater and Johnson opposed each other on what should be done in Vietnam. Goldwater was seen as 'ruthless reactionary' and Johnson was seen as a 'peacemaker'.

Overall, the stalemate theory required the US to fight against communism and get further involved in Vietnam. The US became increasingly involved in

South Vietnam as they could not withdraw and South Vietnam could not continue without outside aid helping them. It was difficult to turn back once Truman had committed the US to aid Vietnam through France as it would damage their credibility. By refusing the Geneva Accords and setting up MAAG and SEATO, Eisenhower further committed the US to Vietnam.

As he sent in more military advisers, once they are in South Vietnam, it is difficult to come out. The ARVN were lacking motivation and were bad fighters who needed to be supported or they wouldn't be able to defend US advisers. More and more Americans became actively involved as Kennedy sent in Green Berets and helicopters. Furthermore, as Johnson sends in troops to protect the advisers, this further makes the US become increasingly committed. Overall, there were various steps that made the US involved and committed in Vietnam but they were trapped in the end anyway.

To conclude, the growing involvement of the US in Vietnam was highly due to the ideological crusade against communism. The US were committed to Vietnam even though they knew they were not going to win, but wanted to avoid being seen to lose by American voters. Also, due to their ignorance of the situation, each successive president made decisions that furthered their commitment. The cold war shows that the US was adopting a battle against the spread of communism, rather than a battle of ideologies.