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## **Introduction**

The Vietnam War will always be remembered throughout much of the history of the United States (US) as a mighty assertion by the nation of its status as a reckonable political and moral influence in the international community. Democracy has since been the driving force of the US in its pursuance of goals in the Asia-Pacific region – an area the nation sought to contain against communism by the former Soviet Union (USSR). Indochina, geopolitically adjacent to communist-led China through its location in mainland Asia, stands as perhaps the area in the Asia-Pacific region that is most affected by communism. Under the power of the Truman Doctrine, the US has gained the entitlement to conduct the Vietnam War in order to drive communists away from Indochina, specifically from South Vietnam as it came under attack from communist North Vietnam. Yet, the Vietnam War ended up a logistical failure, the withdrawal of US troops from South Vietnam having become imminent as then-US President Richard Nixon grew to concede the inability of the US to fight the communists in the area coming from North Vietnam. The perceived indestructibility of the US during the Cold War has been utterly shattered during the Vietnam War. Thus, one may not avoid to think too much about the real extent of the power of the US behind the moral politics it has sought to propagate, which has led it to become a leader in international relations. Given that, the focus of this study stands very fitting – The Nightmare of Vietnam by George Herring is reviewed through a thorough analysis that answers this question: why did the US was unable to suppress the Communist insurgency in South Vietnam? Indeed, one could think of the

Vietnam War as a nightmare for the US, and it is important in that light to emphasize on its full extent being such through the outcome of this study.

## **Analysis**

Foremost to the circumstances that led to the onset of the Vietnam War is the fact that it is done by the US to contain the growth of Communism in the Asia-Pacific region. Specifically, the US wanted to contain China given its growing influence, alongside the USSR, in spreading communist virtues throughout the Asia-Pacific region. The domino theory, which assumed that the USSR would direct the spread of Communism in surrounding nations that, in turn, would eventually succumb to communist ideologies, was the prevailing thought that prompted the US to engage in combat in Indochina, specifically in South Vietnam. With the rise of the Communist regime led by Ho Chi Minh through popular elections in North Vietnam (Ho Chi Minh 278-281), the US disregarded its legitimacy and instead installed a puppet regime in South Vietnam as its initial foundation for containment – a move that deliberately contradicted the Geneva Conference held in 1954 that ended the First Indochina War. From there, fears that Communism would soon follow through adjacent nations with the rise of communist North Vietnam has urged the US to continue assisting South Vietnam as part of its containment strategy (Grantham 108-109). John F. Kennedy, the President of the US at the time when containment was in its initial stages, eventually had his views changed over the viability of such an intervention, henceforth leading him to plan for disengagement (Grantham 227; Herring 410-411). Yet, when Kennedy was assassinated in 1963, Vice-President Lyndon B. Johnson succeeded him as President and opted to continue engagement in

Vietnamese affairs, albeit without immediately opting for an armed conflict. From that time, it appeared that containment was a serious concern of the US as it seeks to challenge the power of the USSR and China by eliminating the further spread of Communism throughout the Asia-Pacific region premised by the domino theory (Grantham 108-109). Therefore, the US thought that it would be best to keep its presence in Indochina via its puppet regime in Saigon (Herring 410-411).

What compelled the US to make a seeming U-turn on such a decision not to utilize armed conflict in Vietnam, however, was the rise of the Vietcong – South Vietnamese guerillas sympathetic to North Vietnam. The slaughter of American officials by the Vietcong sent alarm bells ringing in Washington, and alongside the fact that the United Nations (UN) was somewhat complacent to act on such a matter, Johnson and the rest of his administration grew increasingly agitated and at the same time, confident that the military power of the US – regarded as the best in the world that time, would easily thwart all harmful offensives perpetrated by both North Vietnam and the Vietcong. Such a confidence, however, would later prove misplaced and ineffective at best, as the US failed to carefully consider precedents and opted to initiate the Vietnam War without a proper strategy by relying on the undisputed strength of its military, mainly through air bombing and eventually via poorly-planned ground offensives (Herring 412-413).

Given the foregoing, it is reasonably interpretable that the US has given itself ample space for failure by taking the power of its military for granted, without even considering all the proper options that could provide then with

an appropriate platform for victory (Grantham 294; Verrone & Caulkins 101). As in the case of every nation failing in warfare, sheer reliance on military strength alone without considering all the distinct circumstances of the setting where war is set to take place is, in itself, a strong impetus for failure. Technically, the Vietnam War may have ended up as a stalemate – both the sides experienced massive damages most evident in the number of military, guerilla and civilian casualties and massive property damages, but the degrading effects that brought the US in great disrepute both at home and abroad, which increased as the war escalated and culminated with the eventual takeover of South Vietnam by the communist regime in North Vietnam, provided reflections of its failure to stand by its promises. In fact, the US vowed to sweep both North Vietnam and the Vietcong towards instant defeat through a quick offensive heavily reliant on the assumption of its military strength – a promise that it terribly failed to keep the fact warfare went beyond 1965. North Vietnam, noted by Herring (414) for its “dogged perseverance” in responding to US attacks during the Vietnam War, held on to its resolve not to succumb defeat at the hands of the US (Grantham 294; Verrone & Caulkins 101). At the same time, North Vietnam was well aware that the status of the US as a global superpower, alongside the USSR, would be brought down by moral turpitude arising from its inhumane attacks during the Vietnam War. As correctly predicted, the Vietnam War became a source of national frustration against the US, as it since grew as the main subject of anti-war protests that grew throughout the 1960s and 1970s (Grantham 296; Herring 419-420).

Moral turpitude, as discussed in the foregoing, became a cause of the US to

fail in its objectives for the Vietnam War, not only in terms of its botched attempt to defeat both North Vietnam and the Vietcong by taking its military strength for granted, but also in terms of establishing the foundations that would make South Vietnam a state that truly represents the interests of the people therein. Containment, in that sense, turned out to be an obsession of the US to direct South Vietnam as its lackey state in its numerous failures to diminish both North Vietnam and the Vietcong, which in turn made it a hotbed for corruption and American economic exploitation (Herring 417). Internally, the Vietnam War collapsed for the US mainly because it allowed the culture of corruption to thrive in South Vietnam through black markets in retail products and real estate, all of which meant to strengthen its hold in the nation during the Vietnam War. Consequently, the South Vietnamese economy went down and further resentment against the US fomented within refugee camps in South Vietnam, which were established as a result of rampant takeover of lands in the nation by US military forces (Herring 418). Furthermore, containment became an inadequate reason in itself mainly because both the USSR and China have experienced discords against one another – a seeming defiance of the domino theory that came when the Vietnam War was taking place (Herring 425).

## **Conclusion**

One could therefore see the Vietnam War as a failure for the US from the get-go, given that it is founded on a lopsided platform with no concrete plans to meet properly defined objectives. Verily, the US clearly wanted to thwart the threat of Communism by containment based on the domino theory, which was eventually defied by tense issues between the USSR and China.

Moreover, the US failed to take into account that by taking its military strength for granted, it has caused into itself great disrepute by the outcomes of incessant air bombings and ground offensives against North Vietnam – a nation to which it is contrastingly backward. The mere assertion that North Vietnam and the Vietcong can be eliminated by US military might is, in itself, indicative of mercilessness and lack of consideration from one of the two most powerful nations at the time. Peculiar features of both North and South Vietnam were also not taken into due consideration by the US in its engagement in the Vietnam War, henceforth its failure to keep its promise to conduct it with immediate success on its part. The failure of South Vietnam to establish itself as a nation that can counter North Vietnam also played a key part in the demise of the US campaign in the Vietnam War. Taken together, the foregoing factors all contribute to the failure of the US to contain Communism in South Vietnam, henceforth culminating in its takeover by North Vietnam in 1975.

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