

# Vietnam war assignment

[History](#)



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In 1971, an extensive collection of classified documents relating to United States policy in Vietnam was turned over to the press by certain private individuals formerly in government service who were opposed to the American involvement in that embattled country.

Government efforts to prevent publication of the documents were unsuccessful; and the Pentagon Papers, as they are now universally known, have become an important source of information on US policy in Vietnam down to 1968. Admittedly an incomplete record, the Pentagon Papers “ were written almost exclusively from the files in the Department of Defense, and did not involve interviews with the key decision makers or consideration of documents in the files of the White House, the State Department, or other government agencies. Nevertheless, the Papers have been eagerly seized upon by opponents of the Vietnam involvement as providing voluminous and conclusive proof of the mission -?? or worse-?? of official policy over the preceding two decades. One wonders whether the critics have really bothered to read through the Pentagon Papers in reaching this conclusion. The author of the monograph published in this issue of Southeast Asian Perspectives, after a careful study of the documents, himself concludes that it is “ difficult ... O read the Pentagon Papers without being impressed with how frequently the government has been right about Vietnam, especially during the earlier days of our involvement ... When one examines the record,

.. The government Ares better than most of its critics. ” In the monograph that follows, Robert F. Turner considers some of the major myths about the Vietnam War that have been spread so assiduously by the opponents of official policy, and which have so widely influenced public opinion on the issue.

He then uses the resources of the Pentagon Papers to evaluate the historicity of these myths. His conclusion is that the documents “ thoroughly discredit” most of them. The reader is invited to formulate his own judgments. The author, Robert F. Turner, is a 28 year-old Research Associate at the Hoover Institution n War, Revolution and Peace, Stanford, California. Formerly a Captain in the US Army, he has been in South Vietnam three times, twice with the North Vietnamese/Viet Congo Affairs Division of SOAP (Ioin LIST Public Affairs Office of the American Embassy in Saigon).

He has published a number of articles in such publications as the Intercollegiate Review, New Guard, and the Yearbook on International Communist Affairs; and is at present working on a book about communism in Vietnam. September 1972 William Henderson Introduction The author’s initial encounter with the myths of the Vietnam War came in early 1965, when he participated in a Vietnam debate at Indiana University. During the years that followed, he took part in scores of similar debates and teach-ins, confronting the same basic myths each time.

For the most part, the proponents of this mythology are sincere in their acceptance of the myths. They have heard them often enough -?? frequently from the mouths of academicians and national figures whose backgrounds

entitle them to a respectful hearing. Certainly the government has done little to dispel the myths; and unfortunately, few supporters of the US involvement in Vietnam are sufficiently versed in the relevant history to counter them effectively. What are these myths?

They are a collection of historical and factual inaccuracies and half-truths which, in the aggregate, provide the foundation for almost all of the most widely used arguments against US policy in Vietnam. In their simplest form, they run something like this: " The United States first became involved in Vietnam to restore French colonialism. Ho Chi Minh, the ' George Washington' of Vietnam, was leading a nationalist movement to win independence from the French.

In spite of US efforts to impose colonialism, Ho Chi Minh defeated the French militarily at the battle of Dien Bien Phu. Although the United States accepted the Geneva Agreements of 1954, it began to violate them from the day they were signed. After importing Ngo Dinh Diem from the United States to serve as a puppet President, the US refused to allow free elections to take place in July 1956 because, as even President Eisenhower admitted, Ho Chi Minh would have won the elections by at least eighty percent of the vote.

Because the United States and its puppet government in Saigon violated their commitment at Geneva to hold elections, the people of South Vietnam were forced to resort to armed struggle again to regain their independence and to reunite their country, which had a thousand year-old tradition of unity. The United States intervened militarily to prevent Vietnamese

independence, justifying its action on the ground that a few leaders of the nationalist movement were also Communists.

The US failed to realize that Vietnamese communism is not the expansionist inter-national communism of Lenin or Stalin, but rather a strongly nationalistic movement comparable to communism in Tito's Yugoslavia. It is, therefore, necessary for the United States to recognize its mistakes and to withdraw immediately so that peace can be restored to Indochina. "

Although there are many others, these are the basic myths of the Vietnam War. They are more widely accepted today than they were in 1965, and have in fact been granted the status of " given" assumptions in much of the discourse on the topic.