

## Reasons for and Nature of Involvement of U.S. in the Vietnam War at different stages of it

To understand the United States involvement in the Vietnam War, it's important to understand both the political climate of Vietnam as well of the nature of the relationship between the U.S. and the Soviet Union.

Prior to the United States becoming involved with Vietnam, there had been many important events that had shaped the political climate of the country. Originally, Vietnam was a portion of the French colony of Indochina. Made up of present day Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. However, in 1941, a politician by the name of Ho Chi Minh and the Indochinese Communist Party revived an inactive national independence group known as the Viet Minh. In 1945, part of Indochina declared itself the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, and proceeded to fight with the French from 1946 to 1954. In 1954, after French troops had suffered an enormous defeat against the Viet Minh, France was forced to give up the fight. Following that defeat, France allowed the Viet Minh to take control of North Vietnam and form their own government there. It's important to note that due to the Viet Minh being revived by a communist party, they established a communist government. However, as North Vietnam was being established, a rival government had begun in South Vietnam created by anti-communist politicians. This was of course eventually supported by the U.S.

The United States relationship with the Soviet Union was far more blunt. They were two superpowers with vastly different ideologies. The Soviets had Communism, and the United States had Capitalism. Both hated the other's views of how to run a country and tried to fight. Both kept heavily armed in case of an attack by the other, but due to the fact that if one attacked, the other would retaliate and millions would die, their war, the Cold War, was fought mainly through proxy wars. The Vietnam War was one such proxy war.

John F. Kennedy was, of course, in strong support of the South Vietnamese government. Being fervently against communism, he believed if South Vietnam fell to communism, other countries would soon follow. He both financed the South Vietnamese army to increase their troop size as well as sent advisors to help. Kennedy implemented the Strategic Hamlet Program. While the policy was an attempt to isolate rural South Vietnamese citizens from the Viet Cong, it actually resulted in many people actually joining the North Vietnamese. Eventually, Kennedy decided that the South Vietnamese president could not unify the South Vietnam and actually plotted with the CIA to overthrow him.

This South Vietnam government had many issues, one of which was its unpopularity with many civilians. Within 10 years of its conception, the president was killed in a military coup

d'état (as a result of the CIA supplying military leaders with money to do so.) 20 days later, on November 22nd, 1963 John F. Kennedy was assassinated, and that same day, Lyndon B. Johnson was inaugurated.

Prior to his death, Kennedy was not heavily involved with Vietnam, (although one aspect of his involvement is the deforestation of Vietnam through use of a powerful herbicide) but Johnson was. Almost immediately after his inauguration, he declared that South Vietnam needed to be helped in its fight against communism.

On August 2, 1964 the USS Maddox, a naval vessel was attacked by a North Vietnamese vessel in the Gulf of Tonkin. 5 days later, the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution was passed. This resolution was not a declaration of war on North Vietnam, yet it authorized military force in the region that was formerly Indochina. Initially, the extent at which military force was used was only air bombings. But quickly, this escalated.

The U.S. felt that the South Vietnam government was useless when helping to defend the air force that was stationed there, so on March 4, 1965, 3,500 U.S. Marines were sent to South Vietnam as defensive measures. However, by December, that number had increased by nearly six times the original amount. From there on, troops numbers consistently increased until the Nixon administration.

By 1969, despite being 4 years into the war, and with 31,000 dead, there had been little progress in defeating the Viet Cong. The Nixon administration attempted a new policy known as Vietnamization. Vietnamization was a policy whereby the U.S. essentially attempted to better strengthen South Vietnamese forces as well as withdraw U.S. troops. This is not to say that the U.S. didn't continue fighting. Though there was a steady withdrawal of troops over the next few years, airstrikes and bombings were continued and were quite severe.

On January 15, 1973, the Paris Peace Accords were signed by the U.S., South Vietnam, North Vietnam, and the Viet Cong. This began an immediate ceasefire, required the U.S. to withdraw all troops, as well as the release of all war prisoners. Finally, it required that North and South Vietnam settle their "reunification" differences peacefully.

While all troops were withdrawn and all prisoners were released, the North and South progressively attacked each other over the course of the next two years until 1975 when the North Vietnamese overran South Vietnam and reunified the country. However, in this case, the U.S. refrained from involving itself.

## Citations

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