

# Key Topic 3: US Involvement in the Vietnam War, 1954-75

## 1) Reasons for US involvement in the Conflict in Vietnam, 1954-63.

- **The Battle of Dien Phu** and the end of French rule in Vietnam.
- Reasons for greater US involvement under Eisenhower, including the Domino Theory and weaknesses of the Diem government.
- Greater involvement under Kennedy, including the overthrow of Diem and the strategic Hamlet Programme

# Title: US Involvement in Vietnam



## Revision session 1

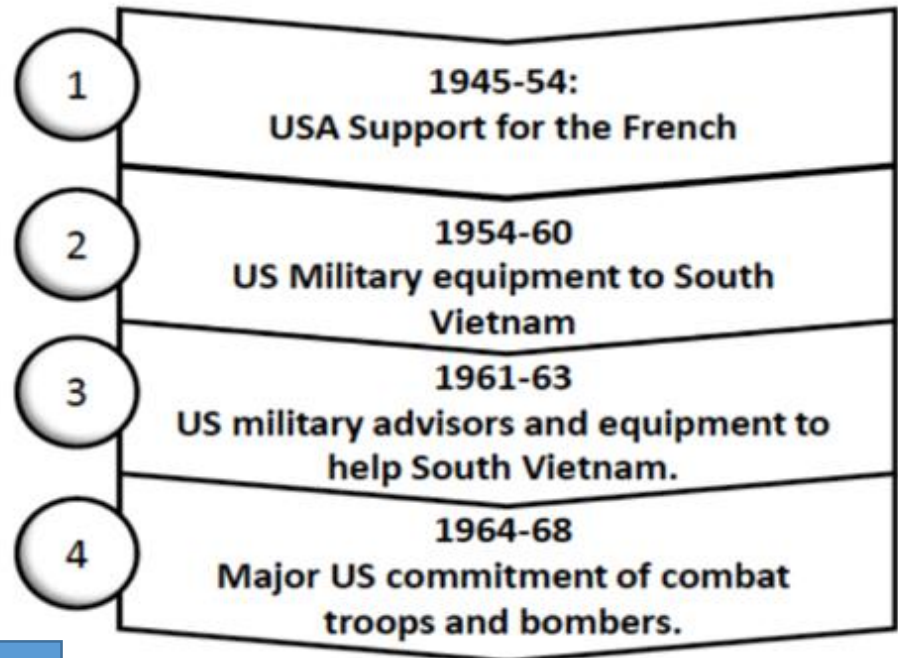
Why did America get involved in the situation in Vietnam?

4-Apr-19

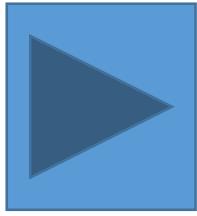
## The Growth of US involvement in Vietnam – 1945-1967

1945 - 1954	After the Second World War, the French tried to retake control Vietnam. Vietnamese Communists try to stop them. USA sends weapons and money to help France.
1954	French were defeated and Vietnam is divided into two – North Vietnam was communist and South Vietnam was supported by the USA. President Eisenhower agreed to send some military equipment and a small number soldiers to train the South Vietnamese Army
1959 -60	North Vietnam created the National Liberation Front or <b>Viet Cong</b> . They were a guerrilla groups which wanted to overthrow the South Vietnamese government. They used jungle paths (known as the <b>Ho Chi Minh trail</b> ) to move supplies.
1961	The Viet Cong were doing well. President Kennedy gets the USA sends 16000 American military “advisors” to help train the disorganised and weak South Vietnamese Army.
1962 - 1963	Viet Cong used guerrilla tactics to fight the South Vietnamese Army. The South Vietnamese could not cope and the USA had to send more advisors and equipment.
1964	North Vietnamese patrol boats fired on a US Navy ship in the Gulf of Tonkin off Vietnam. President Johnson asks the US Congress (Parliament) for powers to fight the North Vietnamese. They gave him whatever powers he needed.
1965 Feb	President Johnson committed US bombers to Vietnam. He then authorised a massive bombing campaign - <b>Operation Rolling Thunder</b> . The USA bombed the North’s factories, army bases and the capital city, Hanoi. They also bombed the Ho Chi Minh trail.

1965 Mar	The Viet Cong attacked the US bomber bases. Johnson sent 3500 US combat troops to South Vietnam to defend the bombers – the first official US fighting soldiers.
1965 Summer	Viet Cong launched a major attack on the South. The Viet Cong suffered major losses,
1966	The USA started to build huge military camps. They had control of most major towns in the South. The Viet Cong had control of most of the countryside.
1967	Continuous battles between the two sides. The North Vietnamese Army and Viet Cong against the South Vietnamese Army and the USA.



Colour code the timeline according to the 4 categories...



**Questions- Use your timeline to ensure you can answer these questions....**

Who used to rule over Vietnam and what did they gain?

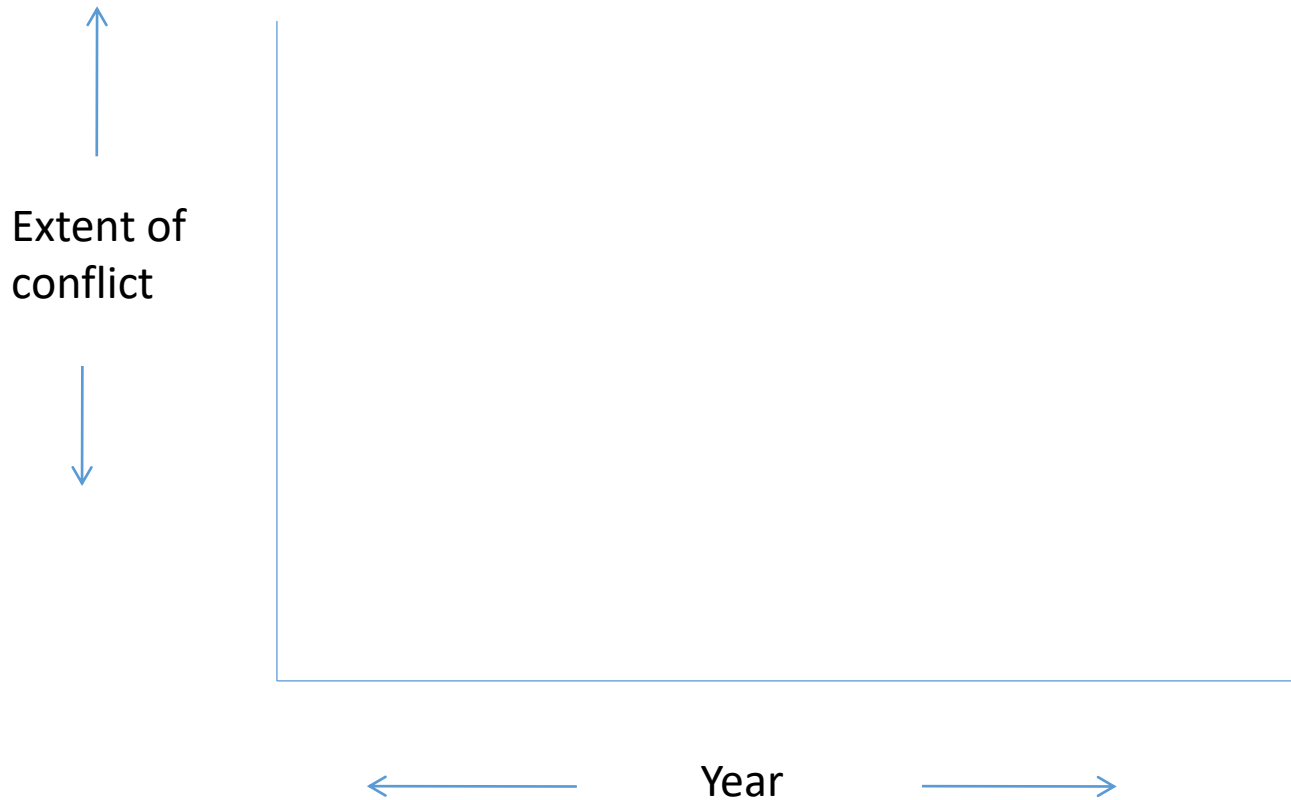
How did Vietnamese people feel about French rule? Why?

Why did the USA support France against Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh?

How was Vietnam split?

When did American troops become involved in Vietnam?

# Create a Timeline of the conflict using the main event cards



1967: 0.5 million US soldiers are in Vietnam costing \$30 billion and 300 deaths a week

1949- In response to the Chinese support, the USA started to send the French, supplies, military advisers and troops but the soldiers were ordered not to fight. USA paid 80% of the French's costs.

1969: peace talks begin and US troops start leaving

1954: Vietnam defeat the French at the battle of Dien Bien Phu. The French withdrew and at the Geneva Conference, the country is divided into Communist North and non-communist South

1955- Ngo Dinh Diem became president of South Vietnam

1975: North Vietnam defeats the South and unites the country

Before 1945: Vietnam was part of the French Empire

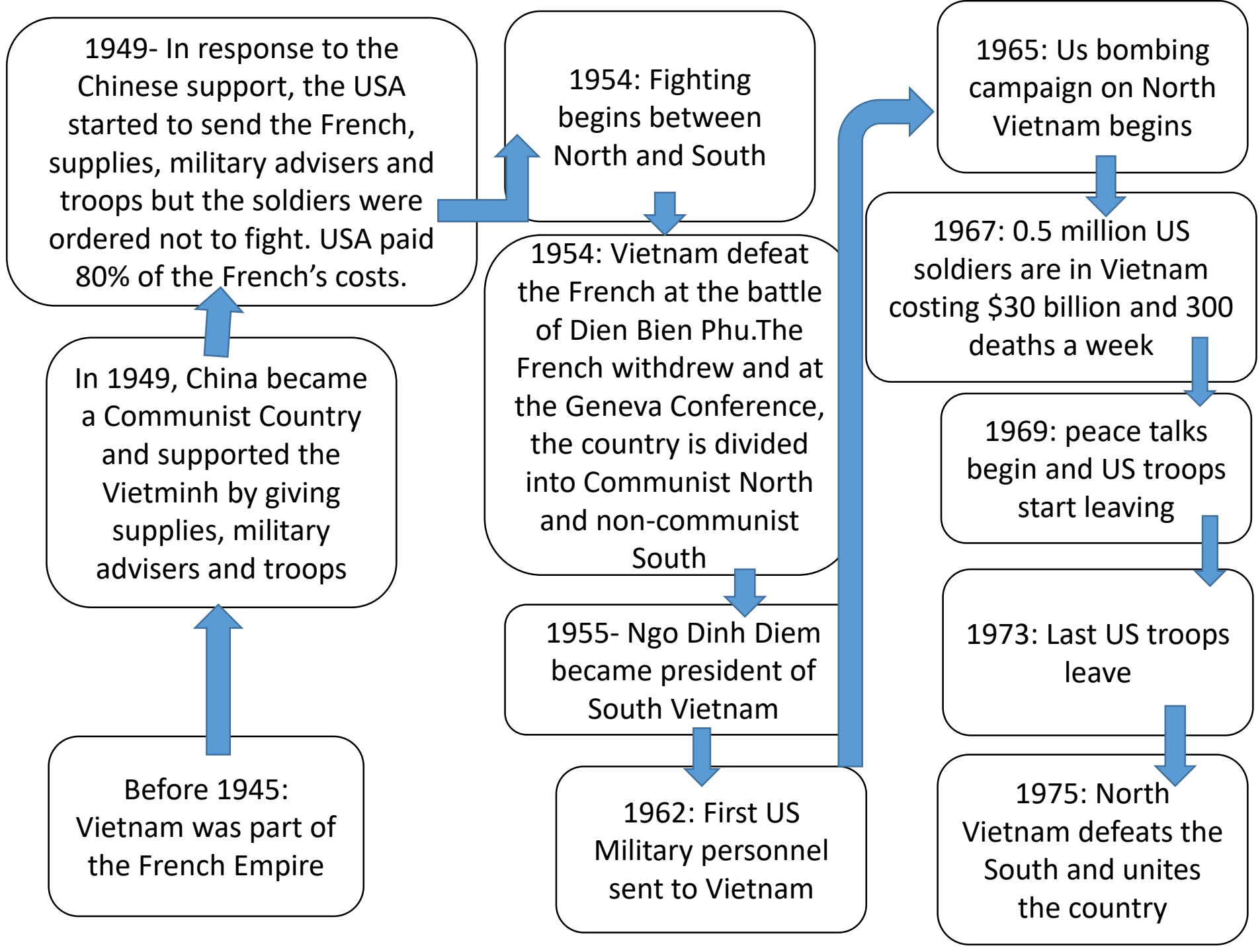
1965: US bombing campaign on North Vietnam begins

In 1949, China became a Communist Country and supported the Vietminh by giving supplies, military advisers and troops

1954: Fighting begins between North and South

1973: Last US troops leave

1962: First US Military personnel sent to Vietnam





The Democratic Republic North Vietnam was set up by Ho Chi Minh. (communist country)

The South Vietnamese government was led by Ngo Dinh Diem (anti-communist country)



## *So... Why did America get involved?*

### Domino Theory

You have a row of dominoes set....What will happen to the last is the certainty that it will go over very quickly. Asia has already lost some 450 million peoples to communist dictatorship. We simply cannot afford greater losses.

If the whole of Vietnam became Communist, what did the US fear would happen?

4-Apr-19



Watch this clip about the  
Domino Theory!

# The Geneva Agreement – May 1954



## Agreed by major powers that;

- Vietnam would be split in half
- Ho Chi Minh in North (Communist)
- Ngo Dinh Diem South (Non-communist)
- There would be elections by July 1956 to elect a government for the whole of Vietnam

## The North

- Ho Chi Minh
- Wanted a united Communist Vietnam
  - Was supported by Russia and China
- Very popular as he fought against the French
- Would have won a national election

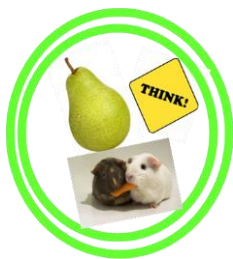
## The South

- Ngo Dinh Diem
  - Was Catholic and majority of Vietnamese are Buddhists
- Was unpopular in the South as very harsh towards the poor workers
  - Was anti-communist

A Buddhist monk, Thich Quang Duc, protesting about the treatment of South Vietnamese people by Ngo Dinh Diem in 1963



Diem's government was corrupt and had little respect for the rural population and Buddhists (South Vietnam was mostly Buddhist but Diem was Catholic).



It was greatly agreed that , had an election been held, Ho Chi Minh would have been elected president of Vietnam. Potentially, 80% of the population would have voted for the communist as their leader.

A US Government advisor



I am worried that..

We need to break the Geneva treaty because..

I need to persuade the American public that



Top tip:  
Use ideas from the Domino Theory

We must support South Vietnam because...

If the North take control of the whole country then...

We must promote Capitalism because...

Russia...

Write two things Eisenhower might have said to the American people.

Write two things that he might have been thinking.





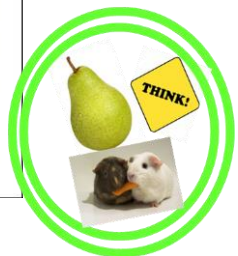
Under the terms of the cease fire, elections were to be held within two years to reunite the country.

However the USA prevented the elections from taking place because it feared that the Communists would win.

WHY?

President Eisenhower was convinced that China and the USSR were planning to spread Communism throughout Asia. The idea was often referred to as the Domino Theory. - If Vietnam fell to Communism, then other Asian countries might also - like a row of dominoes.

The USA saw Vietnam first in the line of the dominoes and were determined not to let it fall.



America at this time was worried because...

America was trying to stop the spread of...  
Because...

Who are the people in this picture and what are they doing?

I can see...

B



I can see...

An American cartoon showing the *Domino Theory*

I can see...

The people of North  
Vietnam were...

The religion of most people in  
Vietnam was...

The source is saying that America needs to get involved in Vietnam because...

Do you think that the people of Vietnam wanted American support?

Key words

Vietcong, USA, force, soldiers, control, Communist, Buddhism



*Describe the Domino Theory*

P: The Domino Theory was...

E: The idea of the Domino Theory worried America because...

*Explain why the USA became involved in Vietnam*

PEEL 1: Explain what Russia was doing after WW2 and how this led to the issue in Asia.

PEEL 2: Explain why Vietnam being Communist was a problem with reference to the Domino Theory



**IF THIS IS ANSWER  
WHAT IS THE  
QUESTION?**

# President Eisenhower





# Kennedy and Vietnam, 1961-63

Under President Kennedy (1961-63), there was greater US involvement in the conflict in Vietnam. Kennedy used a range of tactics to win the war but these had limited success.

Kennedy became US President in 1961. He agreed with the domino theory.

He wanted to avoid direct military action in Vietnam.

He recognised the Vietcong (VC) were gaining ground.

He sent more advisers to South Vietnam (around 16 000 more by late 1963).



President Kennedy, 1961-63

He authorised use of chemical sprays, such as Agent Orange, to kill crops and jungle areas the VC were hiding in from 1961 (Operation Ranch Hand).

He changed tactics to searching for VC fighters, not just trying to draw them into battle.

In 1961, Kennedy requested a report on the feasibility of sending in US soldiers for active service in Vietnam.

## US concerns leading to Diem's overthrow

Kennedy had concerns about Diem's effectiveness as leader of South Vietnam.

- Kennedy believed that the VC were being beaten, but in January 1963, the ARVN lost the Battle of Ap Bac, even though it had US air support and five times as many soldiers as the VC.
- The US media reported the battle as a defeat, despite government attempts to present it positively; Kennedy worried about the negative publicity of Diem's leadership.
- On 6 May, Diem's government troops fired on a Buddhist procession, killing nine, which added to Diem's unpopularity among the Vietnamese people.
- On 11 June, a Buddhist monk burned himself to death (self-immolated) in protest about Diem's government. His protest generated worldwide publicity.
- Kennedy put pressure on Diem's government to make peace with the Buddhists, but Diem continued to persecute them.
- Kennedy did not want to publicly depose Diem, despite knowing how unpopular he was, but he made it obvious that he had withdrawn all support for his leadership. He now knew Diem's government would never be democratic.
- In November 1963, ARVN generals overthrew and assassinated Diem; the USA did not intervene to prevent this.

Kennedy felt the US government had a responsibility to help protect the new South Vietnam government from the spread of communism. He considered greater US military involvement in Vietnam, but wanted to help build a new democracy there. He wanted the new government to persuade the population to support its aims, rather than use repression.

## The Strategic Hamlet Program, 1962

Diem and the USA built new villages to house locals away from the Vietcong, so the VC could not recruit them to fight. The aim was to provide security for the villagers and create support for the government. The hamlets were also supposed to have schools and medical centres. The ARVN forcibly removed and relocated villagers. However, the villagers did not want to leave their ancestral homes. Also, there was not enough food or basic provisions in some of the new villages and many villagers starved to death. The program made Diem and the USA more unpopular in South Vietnam.



A fortified Vietnamese hamlet, 1963

### Now try this

Describe three methods used by Kennedy to prevent the spread of communism in Vietnam.

# Key Topic 3: US Involvement in the Vietnam War, 1954-75

## 2) Escalation of the conflict under Johnson

- The increasing threat of the Vietcong
- The Gulf of Tonkin Incident, 1964, and increased US involvement in Vietnam



# Escalation Under Johnson

Under President Johnson (1963–69), the conflict in Vietnam escalated dramatically for a number of reasons. The Gulf of Tonkin incident in 1964 was central to increased US involvement in Vietnam.

## Johnson becomes president, 1963

Johnson's aims	Johnson's problems
Stop the spread of communism.	The communists in Vietnam were getting stronger and harder to defeat.
Establish democratic government in South Vietnam supported by the people.	The government of South Vietnam was very weak and unpopular.
Ensure that the situation did not deteriorate into a nuclear war.	The USSR was a superpower with nuclear capability.

## The Gulf of Tonkin incident, 1964

In August 1964, two US naval ships reported attacks by North Vietnamese torpedo boats off the North Vietnamese coast.

Causes	Consequences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased build-up of US advisers in South Vietnam under Johnson.</li> <li>Regular US patrols by ships, such as <i>Maddox</i> and <i>C. Turner Joy</i> in Gulf of Tonkin.</li> <li>US involvement in ARVN raids on North Vietnam.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Johnson ordered air strikes against North Vietnam.</li> <li>Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, allowing Johnson to use armed force to defend South Vietnam and US troops already stationed there.</li> <li>In response, the North Vietnamese expanded their involvement in South Vietnam.</li> </ul>

## Increasing threat of the Vietcong

- The Vietcong (VC) became more organised and effective, and their numbers increased.
- Some of the VC's ideas were popular among ordinary Vietnamese, who sympathised with their view of Americans as imperialists wanting to control Vietnam for their own ends.
- Many South Vietnamese were angry with the government for its dealings with the USA and policies such as the Strategic Hamlet Program.
- They received support from North Vietnam, which sent supplies and weapons to them (mostly provided by the USSR and China).
- Many rural South Vietnamese supported the VC. The increased support from civilians made the threat of the VC more extensive.

## The Ho Chi Minh Trail

The North Vietnamese with China's help supported the VC in South Vietnam by sending troops and weapons via the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

The trail was a network of paths and smaller trails, which connected North and South Vietnam (often passing through Laos and Cambodia). It took about a month to get from one end to the other.

Over time the paths on the trail became wider and easier to use to send more support. By 1974, some parts of the trail were properly paved and dotted along the route there were underground hospitals, and fuel and weapons stores.

While the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution stopped



President Johnson signing the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, 10 August 1964. This gave him power to escalate the war in Vietnam without consulting Congress following the Gulf of Tonkin incident. This meant that the lack of support for the war from Congress could be overcome.

While the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution stopped short of being an official declaration of war, it had the same outcome.

Remember that this is a summary: focus on the key points.

### Now try this

Create a flowchart to sum up why the war in Vietnam escalated under President Johnson.

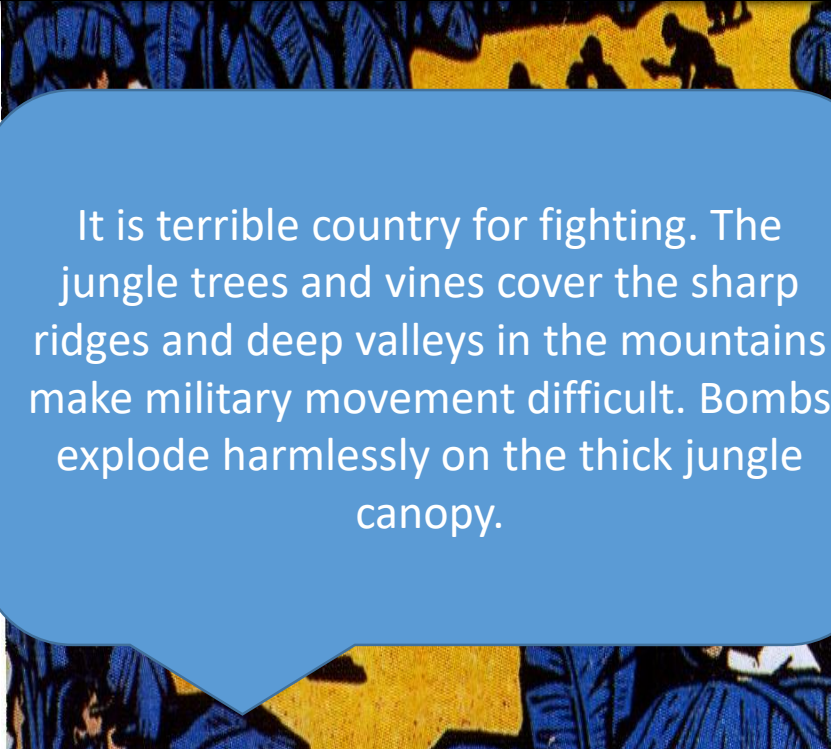
# Key Topic 3: US Involvement in the Vietnam War, 1954-75

## 3) The nature of the Conflict in Vietnam 1964-1968

- The guerrilla tactics used by the Vietcong.
- The methods used by the USA, including Search and Destroy, Operation Rolling Thunder and chemical weapons.
- The key features and significance of the Tet Offensive, 1968.

## Title: Comparing military tactics

*LO: To compare the different tactics of America and the Vietcong.*



It is terrible country for fighting. The jungle trees and vines cover the sharp ridges and deep valleys in the mountains make military movement difficult. Bombs explode harmlessly on the thick jungle canopy.

How would you attack and defend a country like this?

4-Apr-19



# Video Source

- The video is from an American movie on the Vietnam war.
- What can you learn about the tactics that the USA used in Vietnam?
- From the movie clip, what do you think US public opinion was towards to the war?



# American tactics

Tactic	What was it?	Impact?
Operation Rolling Thunder		
Search and Destroy		
Agent Orange		
Napalm		

# Viet Cong tactics

Tactic	What was it?	Impact?
Booby Traps		
Tunnel system		
Ho Chi Minh Trail		

**2. Explain why, in spite of their technological advantage, the Americans could not win in Vietnam**

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## Explain why the USA's tactics were to blame for their failure in Vietnam

**1) Point:** One main difference between the tactics used by North Vietnam and America was...

**Evidence:** Use key words and ideas to explain differences in detail

**Explain:** The Vietcong were always likely to win the war because...

**2) Point:** Another major difference was...

### Key words

Technology, operation rolling thunder, napalm, agent orange, tunnels, secret trails, booby traps  
guerrilla warfare

## Why were the USA unsuccessful in the Vietnam War? [6]

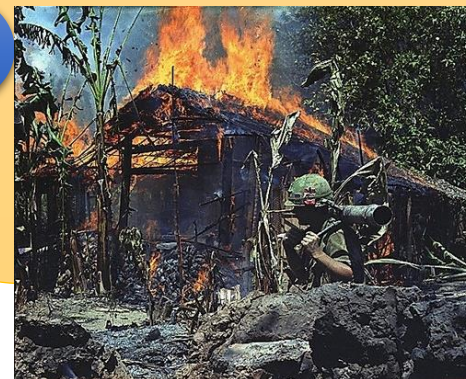
Use quotes, inferences and your own knowledge to support your arguments

A

My conscience won't let me go shoot my brother, or some darker people, or some poor hungry people in the mud for big powerful America. And shoot them for what? They never called me nigger. They never lynched me. They never put no dogs on me. They never robbed me of my nationality or raped and killed my mother and father. What am I going to do? Shoot them for what?...How can I shoot them poor people?...just take me to jail...

*Muhammad Ali, World Heavyweight Boxing Champion, on why he refused to fight in Vietnam. He was fined \$10,000 for refusing to fight, stripped of his boxing title (he later won this back) and sentenced to 5 years in jail (although he never spent a day in prison as his won his appeal against conviction).*

B



An image showing the US search and Destroy tactics

# Info sheet: tactics in the Vietnam War

## • American

America had superior resources and technology. The main problem for the US was that their guerrilla enemy, the Viet Cong, hid out among the thick, dense forest, and stayed in villages among the ordinary folk.

In the attempt to find the Viet Cong fighters, the US launched an operation called **Search and Destroy**: they searched Vietnamese villages for Viet Cong fighters and, if they suspected there were any there, destroyed the village. This often led to deaths of innocent civilians including women and children. The missions made ordinary people hate the Americans: as one marine said of a search and destroy mission – *“If they weren’t Viet Cong before we got there, they sure as hell were by the time we left”*. The Viet Cong often helped the villagers re-build their homes and bury their dead.

When the Americans suspected that they had found a Viet Cong base, they would drop **Napalm** on the site. Napalm was a very flammable fluid, that would burn through almost anything. It often hit civilians.

The Americans attempted to force the Vietnamese to surrender through **Operation Rolling Thunder**. These were bombing raids on Vietnamese towns, intended to destroy morale.

The thick forest was a real problem for the Americans, because this was how the Viet Cong hid. Determined to find the Viet Cong bases and supply routes, the Americans sprayed a chemical called **Agent Orange** onto the forests from aeroplanes. It killed the trees, so that the Americans could find their enemy. But the chemical caused much more harm than this. It killed crops, causing people to go hungry. It also caused birth defects in children borne to people who were exposed to the chemical.

## • Viet Cong

The Viet Cong were a guerrilla branch of the North Vietnamese army. They used a range of tactics to beat the Americans. The tactics were not high-tech: they relied on knowing the landscape and having the backing of the ordinary folk.

**Booby traps** are an example of a Viet Cong tactic. For example, the Viet Cong would place trip wires or dig holes filled with spikes, sometimes coated in human excrement, and then would cover the hole with leaves to deceive the enemy. Markers like broken sticks would be left on the path to warn fellow Viet Cong about the locations.

**Tunnels** were used by Viet Cong guerrillas as hiding spots during combat, as well as serving as communication and supply routes, hospitals, food and weapon caches and living quarters for numerous guerrilla fighters. This frustrated Americans who could not locate the tunnels.

The **Ho Chi Minh Trail** was a network of paths that served as hidden route through the jungle for Viet Cong soldiers and Vietnamese civilians. The Viet Cong used it to move troops, weapons and other supplies into and around the country without being detected by the Americans. The Americans constantly tried to find the trail, but it was too well hidden and frequently changed. It was essential in allowing the north Vietnamese to beat the Americans.

# American Tactics

# Why did the Americans think they would win?



# American tactics

- **Operation Rolling Thunder**

- Bombing N. Vietnamese towns to destroy morale



- **Search and Destroy**

- Looking for the Vietcong in villages. If Vietcong presence was suspected, the village was destroyed



# American tactics continued...

- Chemical weapons



**Napalm**



**Agent Orange**

# napalm



- A fluid that burns through almost anything. The Americans hoped it would hit Vietcong bases. In fact, it often hit civilians.

"Napalm is the most terrible pain you can imagine," said [Kim Phúc](#), a napalm bombing survivor known from a famous Vietnam War photograph. "Water boils at 100 degrees Celsius (212°F). Napalm generates temperatures of 800 (1,500°F) to 1,200 degrees Celsius (2,200°F)."

# Agent Orange

- Destroyed crops and trees
- Attacked the human body and led to birth defects





# Vietcong Tactics

# How did the North Vietnamese fight back?

- Viet Cong
- Guerrilla tactics
- [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0\\_Sji90hAul&feature=fvuwrel](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0_Sji90hAul&feature=fvuwrel)

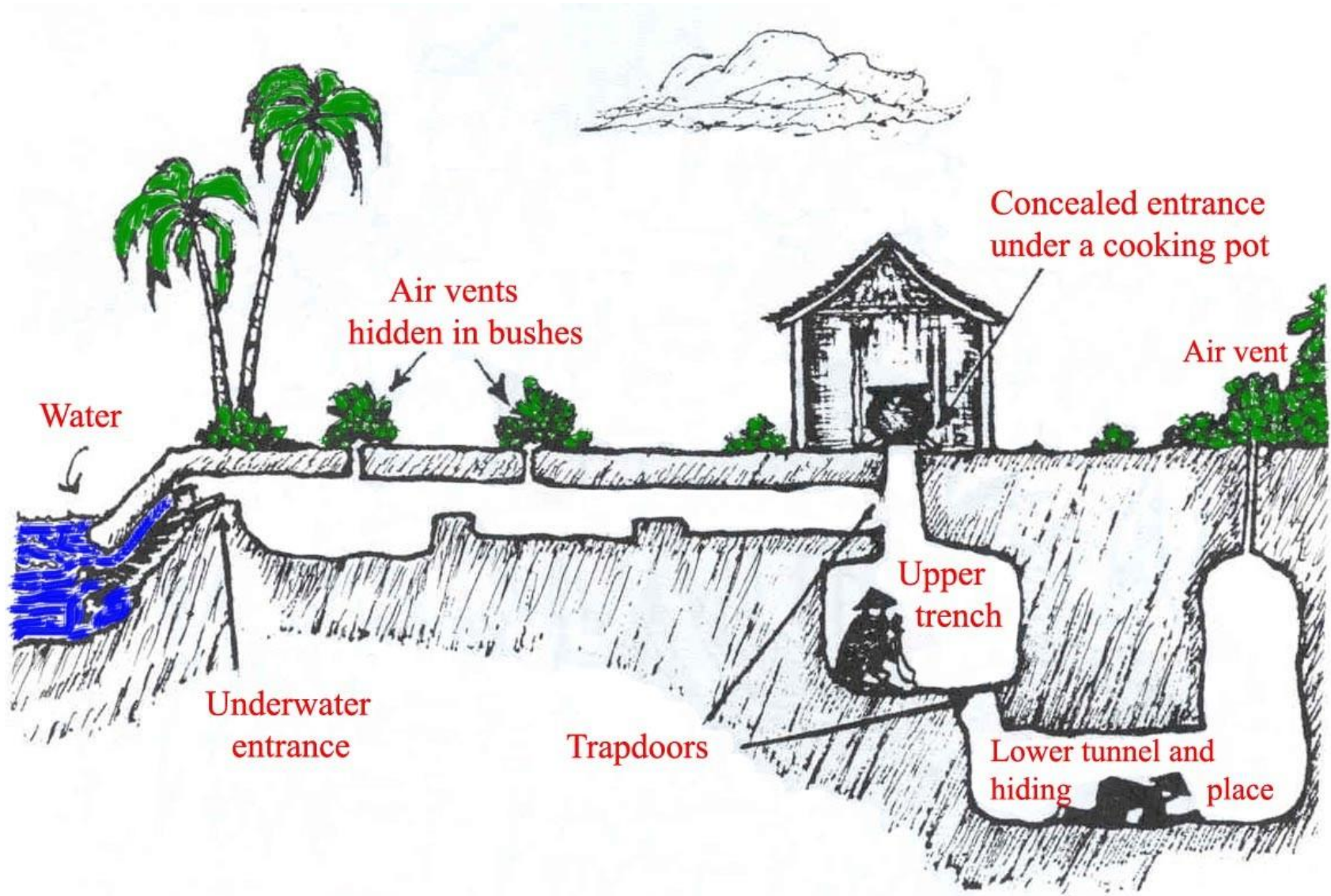


# Vietcong tactics

- Booby traps were cheap and effective
- Aimed to kill and injure Americans
- Spikes covered in excrement



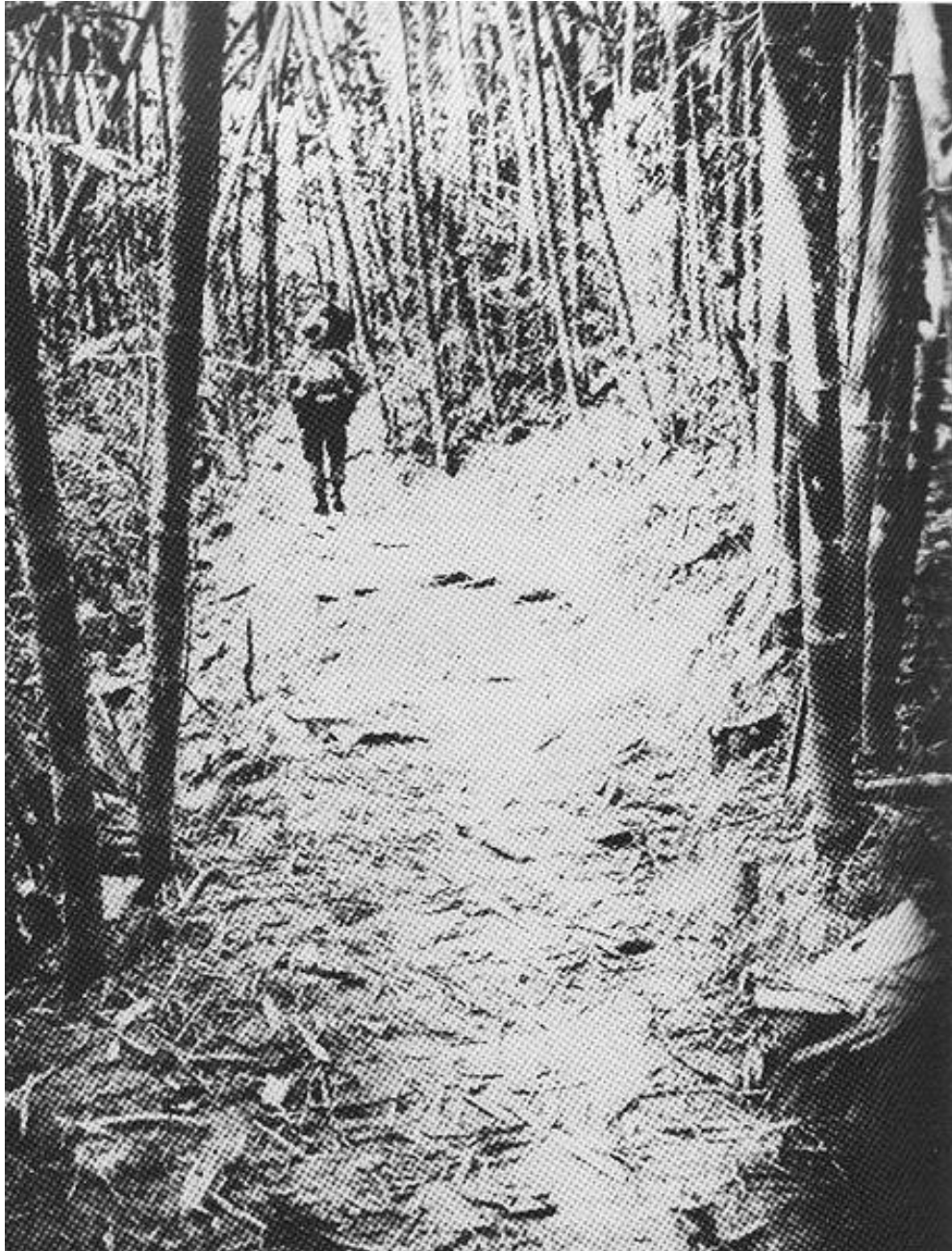
# The tunnel system



# Ho Chi Minh Trail

- A jungle path
- 60 tonnes a day carried to the Vietcong in the south.
- Essential to Vietnamese Victory







Link to last lesson:

Why did America use chemical weapons?

From the source I can infer that chemical weapons...

What might the long term effects of chemical weapons be on Vietnam and the people?

# Documentary Source

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cgOXApURmCY>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M3GQdZjBMpc>

## Key Words

Agent Orange

Napalm

Justified



Between 1962 and 1977, 77 million litres of chemical defoliants were sprayed over South Vietnam, the most widely used being Agent Orange. The logic behind its use was simple – to deny the North Vietnamese cover on the ground as they transported supplies and personnel around thus making them more easy to be spotted from the air and attacked by US forces.



US planes spraying chemicals on North Vietnam.

**US Army Photographer**



Vietnam doctors believe the effects of Agent Orange are ongoing still today

**Vietnamese Health Department,  
2013**

Since the North Vietnamese were fighting their own land, they could wait and hide. It was costing the USA \$14 billion a year, so they had to do something radical to win the war quickly.

**US Historian**

There was no concern about Vietnamese casualties. It didn't matter if North or South Vietnamese people died, it was our country and our troops that mattered.

**US General Ramsey Clark, 1980**

The Vietcong perfected various ambush techniques, such as setting booby traps and trip wires linked to grenades and camouflaged pits with bamboo stakes hidden at the bottom. These tricks terrified the US troops and killed 200 soldiers a day.

**History Textbook, 2000**



American troops pulling a troop from a Vietnamese trap during the war.

From 1966 scientist and doctors around the world were raising their concerns about the impact of Agent Orange of the Vietnamese people and land. It wasn't until December 1970 that the US decided to stop using chemicals in Vietnam

**British Historian, 1990**

# Title: The Tet Offensive

4-Apr-19

**LO: To explore why the American public turned against the Vietnam War**

**Tet, or the Vietnamese new year, is the most important day of the Vietnamese calendar. Tet is a time for family reunions and for visiting the temple.**

**What might the USA and the South Vietnamese expect to happen on the night before Tet in 1968?**

**(remember that the British and the Germans had played football on Christmas day during WW1)**

1965

US military involvement in the Vietnam War

1975

- ✚ In **1968**, the CIA started Operation Phoenix, arresting, interrogating and killing suspected Vietcong activists.
- ✚ Despite this, the Americans could not succeed in driving the Vietcong out of the rural areas

- ✚ In **January 1968**, the NVA launched the **Tet Offensive**, capturing a number of towns in South Vietnam.
- ✚ The North Vietnamese lost 45,000 men, including many officers. Their morale was damaged - the offensive proved that they could not defeat the Americans by direct attack.
- ✚ It took the Americans a month to recover the towns. Their confidence was badly shaken. They won the Tet Offensive, but realised that they would never defeat the Vietcong.

## Tet Offensive, 1968

- Led by the North Vietnamese and VC in January–February 1968. Over 100 cities and US bases in South Vietnam were attacked.
- Initially, the North Vietnamese and VC drew US and ARVN troops away from cities and military bases by attacking the demilitarised zone.
- The North Vietnamese also suggested a negotiated settlement, which made the US think the communists were losing.
- On 30 January, North Vietnamese troops and the VC attacked high-profile places in Saigon, such as the US embassy, airport and radio station.
- The attack in Saigon was defeated, but US citizens were shocked at events.
- Eventually, US and ARVN troops recaptured the cities and bases that were attacked and the communists suffered very heavy losses (the VC were almost wiped out). However, the American public saw the Tet Offensive as a terrible failure.

## Chemical weapons



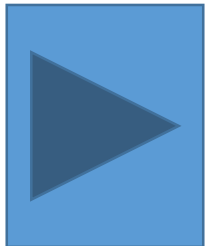
The US sprayed large areas of Vietnam with chemicals, such as napalm, to destroy jungle and crops. The chemicals caused birth defects and widespread starvation.

### Now try this

List the different tactics used by the Vietcong. Describe one positive or negative effect of each.

# The Tet Offensive

- 1) What was the Vietcong target?
- 2) How successful was the Vietcong attack?
- 3) How might the Americans retaliate?



## My Lai Massacre Questions

- 1) When did the My Lai Massacre happen?
- 2) How could the My Lai Massacre be seen as immoral?
- 3) How would people in America have felt about the My Lai Massacre?
- 4) How would President Johnson's reputation suffer because of this event?
- 5) How might this event have led to the USA losing the Vietnam War?

# The US Response to the Tet Offensive - My Lai

The My Lai massacre is probably one of the most infamous events of the Vietnam War. The My Lai massacre took place on March 16<sup>th</sup> 1968.

My Lai was a village of about 700 inhabitants some 100 miles to the southeast of the US base of Danang. Shortly after dawn on March 16<sup>th</sup>, three platoons of US troops from C Company, 11<sup>th</sup> Brigade, arrived in the Son My area having been dropped off by helicopters. 1 Platoon was commanded by Lieutenant William Calley and was ordered to My Lai village. They were part of Task Force Barker – the codename for a search and destroy mission. They had been told to expect to find Vietcong soldiers in the village.

When the troops from 1 Platoon moved through the village they started to fire at the villagers. These were women, children and the elderly as the young men had gone to the paddy fields to work. Sergeant Michael Bernhardt, who was at My Lai, was quoted in 1973 as stating that he saw no one who could have been considered to be of military age. He also stated that the US troops in My Lai met no resistance. An army photographer, Ronald Haeberle, witnessed a US soldier shoot two young boys who he believed were no more than five years of age. Other photos taken at the scene of the massacre show bodies of what can only be very young children.

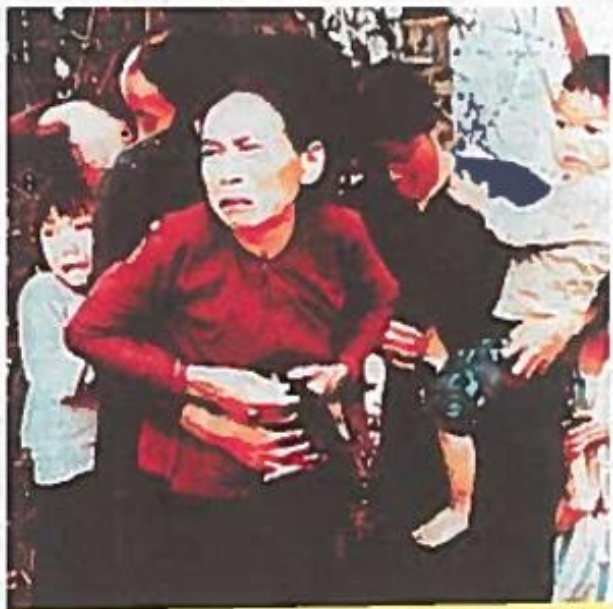
Those who returned to the village claimed that it took three days to bury the bodies. They were later to report that some of the children had their throats cut and that some of the bodies had not just been shot but had also been mutilated.



## My Lai Massacre, 1968

On 16 March 1968, US troops were sent to the village of My Lai in South Vietnam, where they were told they would come under Vietcong fire. They found only women, children and old men in the village. They killed everyone they found (at least 347, and possibly over 500, civilians) as well as their animals. After stopping to eat lunch, they returned to base.

Sergeant Ron Haeberle, a war photographer, accompanied the soldiers and took photos of what happened.



Women and children in My Lai, March 1968, just before US soldiers shot them dead.

## Public reaction to the massacre

People in the USA were not sure what to believe about what had taken place. The government was accused of withholding information. Photos of the massacre were released to CBS News in December and the public saw this as evidence of a serious cover-up. The US public was horrified.

### Trial of Lt Calley

Lt Calley led the military action at My Lai on the day of the massacre. He claimed that he had been acting on direct orders from his seniors when the massacre was carried out.

The Peers Enquiry later found that Calley was indeed following orders and that high-level army officials, including generals, were involved in the cover-up.

Lt Calley was found guilty of 22 murders and sentenced to life imprisonment – although his sentence was later reduced to three years. Controversially, even though 18 further officers had charges brought against them, no other soldier faced trial.



These are the dead civilians after an American attack on the Village of My Lai in 1968. This photograph was released in the U.S press

4) **Purpose:** (why do you think it was created?)

I can see...

American people would have felt...

I think that the photographer took this photograph because...

I can see

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These are the dead civilians after an American attack on the Village of My Lai in 1968. This photograph was released in the U.S press

The image would make Americas feel

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The reason why the image focuses on

..... is

because

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I think that people I America would have wanted

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because

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**Key words:** dirty bodies poor desperate weak  
terrible harsh children work pointless cruel



## Title: Lyndon Johnson and Vietnam

LO: To explore how the war in Vietnam affected Johnson's popularity.



**“Flower Power” Photographed by Bernie Boston on October 21, 1967 for the *Washington Star* (Bernie Boston had been in the army before the Vietnam War in 1958)**

What is the message of this source?

What is the purpose of this source?

4-Apr-19

# What is the message of the cartoon?

## Evidence from the source

The protestor is \_\_\_\_\_

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He is trying to say that \_\_\_\_\_

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“Flower Power” Photographed by Bernie Boston on October 21, 1967 for the *Washington Star* (Bernie Boston had been in the army before the Vietnam War in 1958)

## Link to own knowledge

Young people in America felt \_\_\_\_\_

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because \_\_\_\_\_

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The draft also made African American people feel \_\_\_\_\_

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because \_\_\_\_\_

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Overall, the message of this source is \_\_\_\_\_

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# The War at Home



The anti-war movement began as a relatively idealistic movement with faith that government would respond to their concerns. By 1968 there was much anger and rising militancy resulting from frustration with LBJ's war policies. However, as captured by this photo, the peace movement also included many who believed that one must demonstrate love and peace in order to change the world.

- The Tet Offensive of January 1968 weakened Johnson's credibility and led the media to take a more skeptical view of LBJ's actions.
- By the 1960s the mass media, especially TV, was a major force in shaping American public opinion.
  - More than 60 million Americans watched the nightly TV news, and the television spin became somewhat critical of the war by 1968.
- After the Tet Offensive, about half of all Americans opposed the war. The Democratic Party especially was divided over war policies. Some wanted an immediate pull out, others wanted a gradual pull out, and others wanted the U.S. to remain committed to maintaining South Vietnam.



# LBJ bows out in March, 1968



LBJ's March announcement stunned the country. Before the Tet Offensive, most considered him the frontrunner for re-election. However, 1968 brought frequent and dramatic changes every week. By March, the credibility gap and anti-war sentiment was too great for LBJ to overcome. His announcement created much speculation about who might win the Democratic nomination.

- President Johnson was deeply affected by the Tet Offensive and his own staff had become polarized over the war. Clark Clifford, a member of his inner circle, had shifted against the war.
- Johnson could see that he had lost his popularity.
- On March 31, 1968, LBJ announced that he would seek a real peace in Vietnam through negotiation, he would suspend the bombing campaign, and he would not run for re-election.
  - Johnson did not want to participate in the bloody combat of a polarized election campaign.

# Key Topic 3: US Involvement in the Vietnam War, 1954-75

## 3) Changes under Nixon, 1969-73

- The key features of Vietnamisation. Reasons for its failure.
- The Nixon Doctrine and the withdrawal of US troops.
- Attacks on Cambodia, 1970, and Laos, 1971, and the bombing of North Vietnam, 1972.

# After Johnson stepped down Nixon had to make a decision on Vietnam

If you were Nixon would you:

1) Pull all troops out of Vietnam and admit defeat



2) Keep all troops in Vietnam and try to win the war



3) Train the South Vietnamese to fight the Vietcong and withdraw the US troops slowly



# Nixon and Kissinger



President Nixon with Henry Kissinger on the Air Force One.

- Nixon had chosen Henry Kissinger as his primary foreign policy advisor.
  - Like Nixon, Kissinger was a “tough” hawk on Vietnam. But they were also pragmatic and flexible in their foreign policy deliberations.
- Both Nixon and Kissinger privately felt that the Vietnam War was not winnable by 1969.
- But they also felt that a unilateral withdrawal would be **too costly politically** and in American world prestige.
- Nixon and Kissinger decided on a plan for **slow withdrawal**.

Name: Henry Kissinger

Political Stance: **Hawk** – liked aggressive foreign policy which made America look militarily strong.

Hates: Compromise with countries and having to make peace or surrender during war.



Name: Tim L Carter

Political Stance: **Dove** – liked peaceful solutions to conflict and to avoid putting soldiers into other countries.

Hates: Aggressive macho foreign policy and believes that good communication can resolve issues.



# Nixon's policies

Name of policy	What was it? (L4/5)	How effective was it? Give it a score out of 10 (10 being very effective) and explain your rating. (L6)
Vietnamisation		
Madman strategy	Vietnamisation was when...	<b>3/10</b> I think that Vietnamisation was extremely ineffective because...
<u>Dentente</u> Policy		

Complete the following chart using the information sheets provided

<b>Name of policy</b>	<b>What was it? (L4/5)</b>	<b>How effective was it? Give it a score out of 10 (10 being very effective) and explain your rating. (L6)</b>
Vietnamisation		
Madman strategy		
Detente Policy		

# The Nixon Doctrine - Vietnamisation

By the summer of 1969, he outlined the foreign policy known as the Nixon Doctrine.



ARVN troops rush to the scene of a Viet Cong attack on the outskirts of a town in 1972. Note the reliance on conventional vehicles using major highways. The Viet Cong, relying on guerilla tactics, controlled the conditions of battle and it is likely that they were long gone by the time the ARVN troops arrived.

The Nixon Doctrine declared that the U.S. would supply equipment and aid, but not troops to fight against the Vietcong.

Nixon's policy of turning the war over to the South Vietnamese was called "Vietnamisation." However, it was probably doomed from the start for reasons that were apparent as far back as the Kennedy administration.

- The Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN), with a few exceptions by the early 70s, were not the motivated army needed to fight against the Vietcong. Furthermore, most Vietnamese people did not support the Americans anyway!



# Vietnamisation



ARVN firebase, nine miles inside Laos, 1971. Nixon's approval of the invasion of Laos outraged the antiwar advocates and helped de-stabilize this region of Southeast Asia.

By the late 60s, the ARVN had improved significantly as a fighting force, especially in the Catholic and southernmost regions of Vietnam. However there were several problems in relying upon the ARVN:

- the ARVN were mostly conscripts and their desertion rate was high.
- ARVN officers were generally appointed for political loyalties rather than professional competence.
- When called upon to perform solo operations, the ARVN did not perform well, as evidenced by the 1971 invasion of Laos in which the ARVN (without direct U.S. troop backing) were routed by the communists.
- Meanwhile Nixon set about trying to convince the American public that the ARVN were ready to defend South Vietnam on their own. Most serious observers understood the flaw in this argument, but what most Americans wanted by now was U.S. troop withdrawal, regardless of the fate of South Vietnam.

# Nixon's Madman Strategy

- Another aspect of Nixon's Vietnam policy was the so-called **"madman" strategy**. Nixon allowed Henry Kissinger to informally reveal during secret negotiations with North Vietnam that President Nixon himself was unstable and liable to go to extreme lengths (escalating the war, new invasions and bombings, hinting at using nuclear weapons) if North Vietnam did not agree to peace talks.
- This approach was not very successful in a direct way, but Nixon and other hawks believed that his heavy bombing of the North – perhaps a form of this "madman" rage - ultimately drove the North Vietnamese to the peace talks.



Nixon points to a reporter during a press conference.

# Nixon's Detente (peace) Policy



This photo captures Nixon's visit to China. Détente helped Nixon persuade the Chinese and Soviets to be less rigid in their support for North Vietnam, and this aided his efforts to get a treaty with the North Vietnamese.

- While Vietnamization and his madman strategy were not very effective, Nixon did have one foreign policy strategy that was highly successful – and which helped his Vietnam policy. This was the policy of triangulation: pursuing **détente** (peace talks) with both the Soviets and (Red) China.
- Nixon was approached privately by the Red Chinese soon after his election to see if he was interested in a U.S. - Chinese détente. The Soviets were already working on détente with the U.S.
  - In détente, both sides work toward reducing Cold War tensions. They do this by establishing communication lines, securing nuclear arms limitation treaties, establishing trade, and emphasizing diplomacy over military posturing.
- With rising détente, Nixon could perhaps get the Chinese to help him secure a peace agreement with the North Vietnamese.
- Nixon visited China in 1972, signaling an end to the old-style Cold War era, and bringing Nixon his greatest foreign policy achievement.

# The Nixon Doctrine - Vietnamisation



ARVN troops rush to the scene of a Viet Cong attack on the outskirts of a town in 1972. Note the reliance on conventional vehicles using major highways. The Viet Cong, relying on guerilla tactics, controlled the conditions of battle and it is likely that they were long gone by the time the ARVN troops arrived.

The Nixon Doctrine said that the U.S. would supply equipment and aid, but not troops to fight against the Vietcong.

Nixon's policy of turning the war over to the South Vietnamese was called "Vietnamisation."

**BUT: the South Vietnamese army, the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN), were not a very good army!**

# Nixon's Madman Strategy

- Another aspect of Nixon's Vietnam policy was the so-called **"madman" strategy**.
- Kennedy's advisors pretended that the President was a bit crazy and was thinking about using nuclear weapons if North Vietnam did not agree to peace.
- Many people think that this made the North Vietnamese want to have peace.



Nixon points to a reporter during a press conference.

# Nixon's Detente (peace) Policy



This photo captures Nixon's visit to China. Détente helped Nixon persuade the Chinese and Soviets to be less rigid in their support for North Vietnam, and this aided his efforts to get a treaty with the North Vietnamese.

- Détente just means peace.
- A major part of Nixon's policy towards North Vietnam was talking to Russia and China and trying to get them to stop supporting North Vietnam.
- This was a main reason why North Vietnam had peace talks with America in the end.

# Changes under Nixon, 1969–73

President Nixon worked on several different approaches to get the USA out of Vietnam. However he still wanted to ensure that South Vietnam did not become a communist-led country.

## The Nixon Doctrine

On 25 July 1969, President Nixon put forward his ideas about Vietnam, Southeast Asia and the USA – known as the Nixon Doctrine.

- The USA would follow through on any existing support it had promised its allies and help them against nuclear attacks.
- However, from now on the United States would only provide financial help and training against threats from countries that did not have nuclear capacity – it would not provide soldiers.

In the USA, public opinions differed about Vietnamisation. Some supported the aims of the war and wanted to continue with active involvement. Others wanted American withdrawal as soon as possible.

## Key features of Vietnamisation

Putting the ideas behind the Nixon Doctrine into practice was called Vietnamisation.

- Nixon wanted US troops to withdraw from Vietnam, while also giving the appearance the USA had not lost the war.
- The South Vietnamese army (ARVN) was to take over more of the actual fighting, thus reducing the number of US military deaths.
- The US government's focus was now to send money and advisers, not soldiers.
- The US government's aim was to ensure South Vietnam remained an independent, non-communist country – in this way the USA would not lose face over the outcomes in Vietnam.

Vietnamisation failed because US training and equipment was not enough to ensure the ARVN was ready to take over the fighting. The ARVN also suffered from corruption and desertion.

## US troops withdraw from Vietnam

Most Americans wanted US troops to come home. Troops began to be withdrawn from 1968 onwards. Once soldiers knew they would soon be leaving, their desire to fight was severely reduced. Many tried to avoid battle and some killed their officers to stop them leading them into situations where their lives were at risk. Drug use also rocketed among US troops.

## Attacks on Cambodia, 1970, and Laos, 1971

In 1970, despite creating public hostility, Nixon sent US troops to Cambodia to stop the North Vietnamese from helping Cambodia's communists to power there. Congress was outraged and cancelled the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. Congress also reduced money for war and demanded faster troop reductions from Vietnam.

Turn to page 18 for more information on the Gulf of Tonkin incident and resolution of 1964.

In 1971, the USA gave air support for a South Vietnamese invasion of Laos, to stop the spread of communism there. There was bloody fighting between North and South Vietnamese soldiers in Laos. The South Vietnamese did not fight well, increasing doubts about their ability to hold back communism in South Vietnam after US troops went home.

## Bombing of North Vietnam, 1972

- In April 1972, the USA bombed North Vietnam in heavy air raids to weaken it.
- All areas were targeted and mines were dropped into Haiphong harbour to stop supplies from China and the USSR coming by sea.
- Radio and communications were destroyed.
- The North Vietnamese war industry was severely damaged.
- The bombing led to calls from the USSR and China for North Vietnam to sign a peace deal.

Go to page 24 for details of the peace deal.

### Now try this

Summarise key information about Nixon's approach in Vietnam from 1969 to 1972 on a timeline.



# Reasons for the Growth of Opposition

## The student movement

Initial approval for the war declined as US involvement escalated over time. The period saw a growth in student anti-war organisations.

Many young people rejected the attitudes of previous generations and wanted social change.

A new 'counter culture' was emerging and students were a central part of it.



Anti-war demonstration in New York, 1967, outside the United Nations building.

Many students were opposed to the draft.

Student numbers increased to 0.5 million in 1970 from about 6 million five years earlier.

In 1967, ex-soldiers formed Vietnam Veterans Against the War. They held protests and some publicly threw away their medals.

## TV and media coverage of the war

Unlike earlier wars, Vietnam was the first conflict where reporters were able to travel with the troops into the war zone and report back on what they saw. This brought the Vietnam War into people's homes via television; indeed, the Vietnam conflict has been described as a 'media war' because media coverage was so important to public perceptions of the conflict. The media also reported on the large-scale anti-war protests that were spreading across the USA.

You need to be able to explain why media coverage of the war had an impact on public opinion of the Vietnam conflict.

## Impact of media images and footage on opinion at home

Many Americans started to believe the TV reporters were being more honest than the politicians about what was really going on in Vietnam. The news reports inspired the American public to get involved in understanding and debating the issues. There was a growing feeling that the government could not be trusted to keep the public properly informed about what was happening. Many Americans also felt the government was misrepresenting how the war was progressing.

## Vietnam and the draft system

- The draft forced men aged 18–25 years to serve in the military forces. Men who were chosen for military service were sent draft cards telling them where to report for duty.
- In 1966, the first men were drafted; they were chosen on the grounds that the US authorities viewed them as 'delinquent', i.e. they did not behave in socially acceptable ways, for example being involved in petty crime. Next, volunteers were used. Finally, men aged 18 to 25 years were called up.
- In 1969, a lottery system replaced the old process for the draft. Men born between 1944 and 1950 were issued a number and called up at random.
- Of the 2.6 million US soldiers who served in Vietnam, 650 000 were draftees.

## The impact of increased conscription

The draft system led to widespread public criticism about unfairness, especially as the poorest were hardest hit. Some men burned their draft card or refused to join up. This was a criminal offence so 'draft dodgers' had to go into hiding to avoid arrest. Some fled to Canada. Men from wealthier families avoided or postponed being called up by going to college or by studying abroad.

A man burns his draft card at an anti-draft demonstration in Washington D.C., 1970.



## Now try this

List five reasons why the anti-war movement grew in the USA, especially among young people.

## Timeline

### Kent State University shootings, 1970

**2 May** There were several demonstrations and a military training building on campus was set ablaze.

**4 May** Officials stopped a planned demonstration but 2000 people protested anyway. Tear gas did not break up the crowd and they hurled empty canisters and debris at the National Guardsmen. The National Guard opened fire on the students, killing four and injuring nine.

**1 May** In Ohio, a group of Kent State University students buried a copy of the US Constitution in protest at Nixon's decision to send US troops into Cambodia.

**3 May** The numbers of protesters swelled to over 1000 and the mayor declared an emergency. 900 members of the National Guard were called out, armed with rifles and tear gas. Tear gas was used to disperse several demonstrations.

## Significance of the Kent State University shootings

- Photos of the shootings of the students were published across the USA and the world.
- The public was shocked and outraged in the USA and worldwide by what had happened.
- The white middle-class students were unarmed and two of the dead students had been simply bystanders, not even involved in the protests.

*Remember to include different causes when explaining why.*

### Now try this

Write one paragraph to explain why there was an increase in opposition to the Vietnam War.

# Title: Support for the Vietnam War



The Silent Majority

Many working class people



The older generation who had witnessed or served in WW2



Hard Hats

Which groups supported the Vietnam war?

4-Apr-19

# Why did people support the war?

## Support for the Vietnam War

Many different groups in the United States supported the Vietnam War, despite the opposition and negative media coverage that the war generated. Different Americans had a range of reasons for believing the war in Vietnam had to be fought and won.

### Fear of communism

- The Cold War made Americans paranoid about the 'communist threat'.
- By 1954, the fear of communism spreading to other countries was still very strong, although domestically the fear of communism had lessened.
- Eisenhower first used the phrase 'falling domino' at a news conference in 1954, to express his concerns about the spread of communism.
- President Kennedy, in his inaugural (first) speech as president, argued that US security would be undermined as result of the domino effect.

To find out more about the domino effect, turn to page 16.

Eisenhower argued that to lose in Vietnam would inevitably lead to a far-reaching spread of communism in the region. He maintained that countries in Southeast Asia were under threat as well as ultimately Japan and Australia.

'Hard hats': the nickname for construction workers who actively supported the Vietnam War. At a protest in May 1970, a group wearing hard hats beat up anti-war protesters. The police made little attempt to protect the anti-war demonstrators.

### Patriotism

Many Americans were concerned to keep the USA's standing in the world as high as possible. They did not want a defeat in Vietnam to lead to their country 'losing face'. Some Americans were very patriotic and saw it as their utmost duty to accept the authority of the government and to do their part in supporting their country, whatever the cost to them. They believed that fighting communism in Vietnam was their patriotic obligation. Many working-class people broadly supported the aims of the war.



Pro-war protesters at a demonstration in support of escalating the Vietnam



Nixon sitting among stacks of supportive telegrams sent to the White House after his 'silent majority' speech on 3 November 1969.

## The silent majority

In a televised speech on 3 November 1969, Nixon argued that 'the great silent majority' of Americans supported his Vietnam policy. He was right. A survey showed 77 per cent of Americans backed his plans for the Vietnam War and this support meant:

- that Congress passed resolutions approving Nixon's approach in Vietnam
- Nixon could show North Vietnam that he had strong support, helping him to persuade them to reach a settlement
- Nixon could hold out for an exit from Vietnam that, in theory, allowed the USA to withdraw with 'honour'.

### Now try this

Imagine you are a supporter of the war in Vietnam. Write a telegram of no more than 100 words to President Nixon, explaining the reasons for your support.

# Title: Why did the war end?

## Reasons for the peace negotiations up to 1972

USA's reasons	Shared reasons	North Vietnam's reasons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Victory in Vietnam no longer seemed possible, especially after the problems with the Tet Offensive</li><li>• Growing opposition to the war</li><li>• Congress was reluctant to finance the continuation of the war</li><li>• Nixon was keen to appear the peacemaker in Vietnam for political gain at home</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• High numbers of dead and wounded</li><li>• Costs of the war</li><li>• The war could drag on for years to come</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• China and the USSR wanted North Vietnam to make peace and might withdraw help</li><li>• North Vietnam was being bombed heavily</li></ul>

## Features of the negotiations, 1973

- After negotiations had broken down in 1972, further talks began in Paris on 8 January 1973.
- All parts of the peace agreement were to be supervised by an international body.
- The USA would pay for reconstruction across Vietnam.

The North Vietnamese and South Vietnamese thought the war had not actually ended, seeing 'the peace' as temporary while the Americans withdrew.

## Key agreements

- All countries would accept Vietnam as a single reunified country through independent negotiation (with no outside interference).
- There would be an immediate ceasefire.
- US troops, equipment and advisers would be withdrawn and military bases removed.
- There would be no US government intervention in Vietnamese politics or militarily.
- The government of a new unified Vietnam would be chosen in fair and independent elections.

## The Paris Peace Agreement, 1973

The Paris Peace Agreement, signed by the USA, North Vietnam, South Vietnam and the Provisional Revolutionary Government of Vietnam on 27 January 1973, brought an end to the war and peace to Vietnam.

### How was it significant?

The Paris Peace Agreement gave the USA an opportunity to withdraw from Vietnam. Yet in the long run it failed to secure the future of an independent non-communist South Vietnam. South Vietnam's economy crashed due to bad harvests, and a large reduction in US aid and investment. This contributed to the unpopularity of the new South Vietnamese government, and the Vietcong were soon popular in the village communities once more.

North Vietnam continued to seek a united, communist Vietnam and became impatient with the refusal of the President of South Vietnam, President Thieu, to talk. They resumed combat with South Vietnam in late 1974. The ARVN could not fend off the attack but Congress would not approve funds for the USA to intervene. The South Vietnamese capital, Saigon, fell in April 1975.

## The economic and human costs of the Vietnam War for the USA

- The war cost the US economy \$167 billion. The expense led to cutbacks in federal spending on domestic issues and caused economic problems.
- Over 58 000 US soldiers died; 75 000 were left with a serious permanent disability; 850 000 suffered severe mental health problems, including post-traumatic stress. There was a high rate of suicide among veterans of the war.

After the fall of Saigon in 1975, North and South Vietnam merged on 2 July 1976 to form the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

### Now try this

List three consequences of the Paris Peace Agreement, 1973.

# Impact of US opposition to the war

The Vietnam War affected the USA in a number of ways: in terms of the lives lost and destroyed, the financial cost of the war and how American society was changed by the experience.

## Impact of war opposition: a deeply divided society

- 1 The war led to a growing gulf between the public and previously trusted institutions, such as the government and armed services.
- 2 Returning soldiers were sometimes met with real hostility. As the anti-war movement grew, veterans could be targeted as 'baby killers'. Sometimes they were verbally or physically attacked. Some veterans found it difficult to find work.
- 3 There was a high suicide rate among returning soldiers. After the Second World War, veterans were treated as heroes, yet men returning from Vietnam were sometimes outcasts who felt that US society had let them down. They had been made to fight a war that US society, as a whole, did not support, and they carried the responsibility and guilt for this.



Vietnam War veterans, wearing 'Vets for Peace in Vietnam' hats, march to Washington, D.C., 1969, as part of a 600000-strong demonstration. Many veterans joined the anti-war movement because they were disillusioned with the war's aims and methods.

## Financial impact

As well as the war expenditure, US society was affected by the lack of resources to address the problems they had domestically. For example, Johnson's 'Great Society' agenda, which aimed to reduce inequality and racial divisions, lost money that was spent on the war instead.



## Pressure on US government of anti-war movement

- The reputation of the USA was diminished as a result of the war in Vietnam.
- The US government was concerned that involvement abroad should not lead to similar problems to those encountered in Vietnam.
- By the end of 1975, the whole of Vietnam was under a communist government, so the war seemed to have been pointless.
- In the 1950s, the American public had respect for its government but 20 years later the general feeling was that people should be more questioning of the power of, and decisions made by, government. The Vietnam War played a big part in this shift in attitude towards the government.

Anti-war protest outside the city hall in San Francisco, 1973.



### Now try this

List three ways in which US society was affected by opposition to the Vietnam War.

# Why did the USA lose in Vietnam?

## The strengths of North Vietnam

US failure in the war can be explained by understanding the range of advantages – cultural, political and geographical – the North Vietnamese had. The USA found these difficult to match.

### Strengths of North Vietnam

- 👍 Vietnam had previously been one country so the North had a good geographical and cultural understanding of the South.
- 👍 Many people in North and South Vietnam wanted to be reunited as a single country.
- 👍 The North Vietnamese, unlike the Americans, had a good knowledge of the natural environment in South Vietnam.
- 👍 They shared a language with the South Vietnamese.
- 👍 The North Vietnamese expected full commitment to the war from the oldest to the youngest citizen.
- 👍 Children were given military training and performed support roles, like carrying messages.
- 👍 The North Vietnamese believed that fighting and dying for their country was a matter of honour.
- 👍 Opposing the aim of the war – to reunify their country with the South Vietnamese people – was not an option in North Vietnamese political culture. Open political opposition to the government was not allowed.



A US marine carries a Vietnamese woman who was suspected of being a Vietcong. She is blindfolded.

## Significance of Soviet and Chinese support

North Vietnam had financial help from other communist countries – China and the USSR. They sent over \$3 billion in aid to North Vietnam between 1954 and 1967.

**Soviet support:** From 1965, after the US military escalation took hold, the USSR became North Vietnam's main source of economic aid.

**Chinese support:** From the start of the war against the French, China gave technical military and financial help to North Vietnam. After the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin incident, which marked a turning point for US involvement in Vietnam, the Chinese dramatically increased their support for North Vietnam and the Vietcong in South Vietnam. Between 1965 and 1971, over 320 000 Chinese troops were sent to North Vietnam.

## Vietcong tactics and commitment

The guerrilla tactics of North Vietnam's allies, the Vietcong (VC), were difficult to undermine. The VC were used to fighting in jungle conditions and were well organised and equipped for guerrilla-style warfare.

The strong commitment of the VC and North Vietnamese troops was also difficult to challenge, as they had a clear ideology about why they needed to win the war and the reasons they were fighting. In comparison, the ARVN received poor training and did not have the same levels of belief in what they were fighting for.

## How did the Ho Chi Minh Trail help North Vietnam win the war?

Laos and Cambodia allowed the Ho Chi Minh Trail to operate in their countries. This was a vital supply route for the North Vietnamese to reach the VC in South Vietnam. Militarily it caused the USA a lot of difficulty. It was about 1000 km long and some sections of it were made-up trails to trick the enemy. Thousands of Vietnamese were involved in keeping the route open and workable. The Americans used biological weapons to deforest the jungle and expose the trail, yet despite this the route was kept going throughout the war.

### Now try this

Complete a table to summarise the different types of advantages the North Vietnamese had. Head the columns 'Political advantages', 'Geographical advantages' and 'Cultural advantages'.

# The weaknesses of US armed forces

The Americans lacked an understanding of the Vietnamese culture, geographical environment and political landscape, which made it difficult for them to win in Vietnam despite their military strength.

## Lack of knowledge and awareness

- 1 Vietnam was very 'alien' to most Americans, who did not understand anything about the country they were at war with. US soldiers found the war more difficult as a result.
- 2 Many Americans underestimated their enemy and held ignorant and racist views, about their inferiority as an opponent.
- 3 US military leaders and strategists did not try to understand the conflict from the viewpoint of the Vietnamese people and this put them at a real disadvantage.

The geographical distance between the USA and Vietnam is over 13 500 km.

## Political and economic weaknesses

- For the first time, the USA fought a war for which there was no clear public agreement about whether the conflict was justified.
- Also for the first time in US history, war veterans wanted the war to stop and even handed in their medals in protest.
- There was a lot of media criticism about the war aims and the methods used.
- The US government ignored public opposition to the war but ultimately had to listen to the anti-war movement, as presidents and members of Congress relied on public support to be elected.
- When Congress restricted funding of the war after 1971 there were shortages of equipment for US troops.

## Failure of US tactics

The US army benefited from superior military technology, including helicopters and advanced weaponry. However, in this context it did not help the US military to secure a victory. The USA:

- failed in its tactics, mistakenly believing that victory could be won by deploying more troops and ordering more bombing of North Vietnam
- over-estimated its successes, basing calculations on how many villages they destroyed or Vietcong they killed rather than how much territory they controlled.

US troops were young and inexperienced and lacked relevant training in guerrilla warfare. The failures bred low morale. This in turn led to fragging (the intentional killing of officers by troops) and drug abuse. Many soldiers used alcohol and marijuana. When the US army clamped down on this, soldiers turned to other drugs, including heroin.

Now try this

## Failure to win Vietnamese hearts and minds

While propaganda claimed the USA wanted democracy for South Vietnam, the South Vietnamese saw the USA as simply a foreign power interfering in their country. So the US-backed South Vietnamese government was very unpopular. It was also hated for its ties to French colonial interests of the past that were seen as anti-Vietnamese.

Many local people in South Vietnam had far more sympathy with the ideas and values of the Vietcong and North Vietnam than with a government imposed on them by the USA.



US chart for training soldiers, to help them understand the enemy.

Explain why the USA lost the war in Vietnam.