

CHAPTER 9:

Inquiry Question: How far did the Cold War cause the escalation of the Vietnam War in the 1960s?

1:

Vietnam to the End of WWII [pp.100-101]

- Vietnam had been ruled by France since the 19th century.
- The majority of Vietnamese did not benefit from French colonial rule and this led to the early beginnings of Vietnamese anti-colonialism and nationalism.
- In 1940, France was defeated by Germany. Its ally Japan took control of the main resources of Vietnam.
- The Japanese Occupation further encouraged the development of nationalism.
- To fight off both Japanese occupiers and the French colonial administration, political leader Ho Chi Minh—inspired by Chinese and Soviet communism—formed the Viet Minh, or the League for the independence of Vietnam.
- The Viet Minh received money, weapons and supplies from the US, the USSR and the Guomindang government in China to fight the Japanese.
- Following its 1945 defeat in World War II, Japan withdrew its forces from Vietnam, leaving the French-educated Emperor Bao Dai in control.
- Seeing an opportunity to seize control, Ho's Viet Minh forces immediately rose up, taking over the northern city of Hanoi and declaring a Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) with Ho as president on 2 September 1945.

First Indochina War (1946 – 1954) [pp.102-106]

- France refused to recognise Vietnam's independence.
- British and French forces re-occupied South Vietnam in 1946 and this led to the outbreak of the First Indochina War.
- The Viet Minh had considerable popular support in the rural, agricultural regions, and the French strongholds were in the urban areas, making for a long bloody struggle.
- The Viet Minh continued to use the same guerilla warfare tactics they had used against the Japanese in WWII.
- It also implemented reforms that helped improve the lives of the Vietnamese. Land was confiscated from the landlords and re-distributed to the villagers. There were also education campaigns to increase the literacy of the Vietnamese Villagers.
- These actions won the hearts and minds of the villagers, who became an important support base for the Viet Minh and provided supplies, intelligence reports and manpower to fight the French.

Involvement of External Parties:

- 1949: China became Communist. Communist China provided military aid to the Viet Minh. It equipped the Viet Minh with machine guns, large amounts of ammunition and communication equipment.

- It also taught the Viet Minh the importance of a 'people's war'.
- The French in turn received support from the US who granted millions of dollars in military aid as well as economic and technical assistance.
- The US believed that the Viet Minh was controlled by the USSR and China. It felt that if Vietnam was allowed to fall to Communism, other parts of Southeast Asia would fall too.

French defeat at Dien Bien Phu

- In November 1953, the French launched an attack on the Viet Minh at Dien Bien Phu.
- The French had hoped to cut the Viet Minh's supply lines and establish a foothold with a large French force there.
- Instead, the French were surprised by General Vo Nguyen Giap whose 40,000 Viet Minh troops surrounded the 13,000 French troops and broke their lines.
- 7 May 1954: the French Surrendered.

Geneva Accords [pp.106-107]

The French government decided that the conflict in Indochina was too costly and negotiated a settlement:

- Establishment of a ceasefire in Vietnam along the 17th Parallel (a Communist-dominated North Vietnam under Ho and a non-Communist South Vietnam under Prime Minister Ngo Dinh Diem).
- National elections to be held by July 1956 to reunify Vietnam.
- Evacuation of foreign troops – except military advisors. Vietnam was now free of colonial rule.

Attendance at the Geneva Accords [pp.106-107]

In attendance at the Geneva Conference were representatives from:

- Cambodia, China, France, Laos, USSR, Britain, USA, Viet Minh (North Vietnam) and State of Vietnam (South Vietnam).

> Why were Americans, British, Chinese and Soviet representatives present? What did they hope to achieve in the negotiations?

Discontentment over the Geneva Accords [p.108]

- At the signing of the Accords, the Viet Minh controlled nearly three-quarters of Vietnam. Understandably, Ho Chi Minh was dissatisfied and felt he was forced to accept the division of Vietnam.
- The Viet Minh was also disbanded.
- Ho worked quickly to consolidate his hold of North Vietnam:
 - He introduced land reforms to re-distribute land from landowners to the peasants. This garnered a lot of popular support among the peasant farmers.
 - Show trials against landlords, rich peasants, intellectuals and religious leaders were organised. Thousands of opponents were executed.
 - These measures ensured that North Vietnam was largely politically stable.

South Vietnam in the 1950s [p.109-111]

- The USA, with its fears of Communist expansion, assumed the position of patron of South Vietnam.
- It supported Ngo Dinh Diem, a fervent anti- Communist and Catholic, to be the Prime Minister, and later President of South Vietnam.
- Diem reversed the land reforms of the Viet Minh: He required peasants to pay rent again. In 1956, peasants were expected to purchase the land they farmed.
- His reforms alienated the peasants and made him extremely unpopular.
- In July 1955, Diem refused to hold the elections stipulated in the Geneva Accords. In October, he ousted the Head of State Bao Dai in a rigged referendum and became the President.
- His regime became increasingly corrupt and brutal, leading eventually to the renewal of war in Vietnam.
- He practised nepotism by assigning the majority of important government positions to close friends and family members. He also gave preference to fellow Catholic believers for government jobs.
- Opposition to his rule, including Viet Minh supporters, Buddhists and intellectuals, were suppressed. Many fled to the North.
- The USA was frustrated but could not find anyone better. It helped to establish the South Vietnamese Army (SVA) against possible invasions from the North. The USA also provided economic aid to prop up the Diem government.

The South Vietnam Insurgency, 1954 – 1960 [p.111-112]

- By 1959, the Communist government in North Vietnam authorised armed struggle to overthrow Diem's regime. One group was known as the Viet Cong (comprising North Vietnamese communists and South Vietnamese opponents, which was the military arm of the newly formed National Liberation Front.
- The Viet Cong carried out political assassinations against government officials and anyone suspected of collaborating with the government.
- Between 1959 and 1961, the number of assassinations soared from 1200 to 1400 a year.
- Reinforcement and supplies to the Viet Cong was transported from the North to the South via a trail known as the Ho Chi Minh trail.
- Diem's response was to place peasants into Strategic Hamlets – 'protected villages' – to prevent peasants from supplying to the Viet Cong.

Failure of the 'Strategic Hamlet' Programme [p.113]

- Peasants were forced to dig moats, implant bamboo stakes and erect fences against an enemy that did not threaten them but directed its sights against government officials.
- Corrupt officials embezzled funds set aside for seed, fertilizer as well as medical care, education and other social benefits.

- This further alienated the peasantry, who became even more anti- Diem.
- Despite negative appraisals, the USA continued to support the programme.

Support from China for North Vietnam [p.114]

China's Motivations:

1) Mao was keen to extend Communist influence and control in Southeast Asia:

"Please convey our greetings to Comrade Ho Chi Minh... We sincerely congratulate Vietnam's joining the anti-imperialist and democratic family headed by the Soviet Union."
(1 February 1950)

2) Mao viewed the USA as China's greatest threat:

- He was concerned about a possible invasion by US allies, backed by US forces.
- American build-up in Japan, the Philippines, Korea and Vietnam had solidified American military might terribly close to China's borders. By the end of 1963, 16,000 American military personnel were stationed in South Vietnam.
- Mao was thus eager to support any state that created an anti-US buffer in Vietnam.

'Best turn it into a bigger war. I'm afraid you really should send more troops to the South.'
Don't be afraid of US intervention, at most it's no worse than having another Korean War.
The Chinese army is prepared, and if America takes the risk of attacking North Vietnam, the Chinese army will march in at once. Our troops want a war now.'
Mao speaking to the North Vietnamese in 1964.

3) Sino-Soviet Split:

- The Soviet leader after Stalin, Nikita Khrushchev, suggested that 'peaceful co-existence' with the USA was possible. Khrushchev had also delivered a speech denouncing the personality cult, despotism, show trials, purges and violence that occurred Stalin's reign.
- This put Mao in an awkward situation, as he had always praised Stalin publicly.
- This led to China supporting North Vietnam more as part of the competition with the USSR for Communist leadership in Asia.

Support from the USSR for North Vietnam [p.115]

Soviet Motivations:

1) Initial Lukewarm Support for North Vietnam:

- Stalin and Khrushchev were careful not to get too involved as they were managing tense relations with the USA.
- Relations between the USSR and China had also deteriorated, and the USSR was less willing to co-operate with China over Vietnam.

2) Change in Leadership:

- The new leader of the USSR, Leonid Brezhnev, began to contest China for leadership of the communist world. He also wanted to prevent a loss of Soviet influence in Southeast Asia.
- By 1960s, the USSR began providing more support to North Vietnam than China, particularly in the form of aircraft and air defences.

Support from the USA for South Vietnam [p.115]

Containment Policy:

- The USA was convinced that China and the USSR were planning to spread Communism throughout Asia.
- This was known as the Domino Theory, first spoken by US President Dwight Eisenhower on 7 April 1954.
- The USA was alarmed by Diem's brutality. However, the USA was so determined to contain communism that it would support any anti-communist governments:

'I have seen no one with the strength of character of Diem, at least in fighting the Communists. Clearly, there are no generals qualified to take over ... We have backed Diem for eight long hard years. To me it seems incongruous now to get him down, kick him around and get rid of him.'

General Paul Harkins, commander of US forces in Vietnam, October 1963.

- In 1961, John F. Kennedy assumed office as the new President of the USA. He sent military advisors to train the South Vietnamese army and supplied military equipment.
- In November 1963, Diem was assassinated, leaving no strong leader to succeed him.
- Kennedy was assassinated soon after.
- The new US President, Lyndon B. Johnson, became more committed to contain communism in Vietnam.
- In October 1964, China exploded its first atomic bomb. At the same time, Brezhnev showed little inclination in peaceful co-existence with the West.
- Johnson was determined to preserve the independence of South Vietnam as an anti-communist state.
- He increased the number of military advisors and economic assistance.

Outbreak of the Vietnam War [p.117]

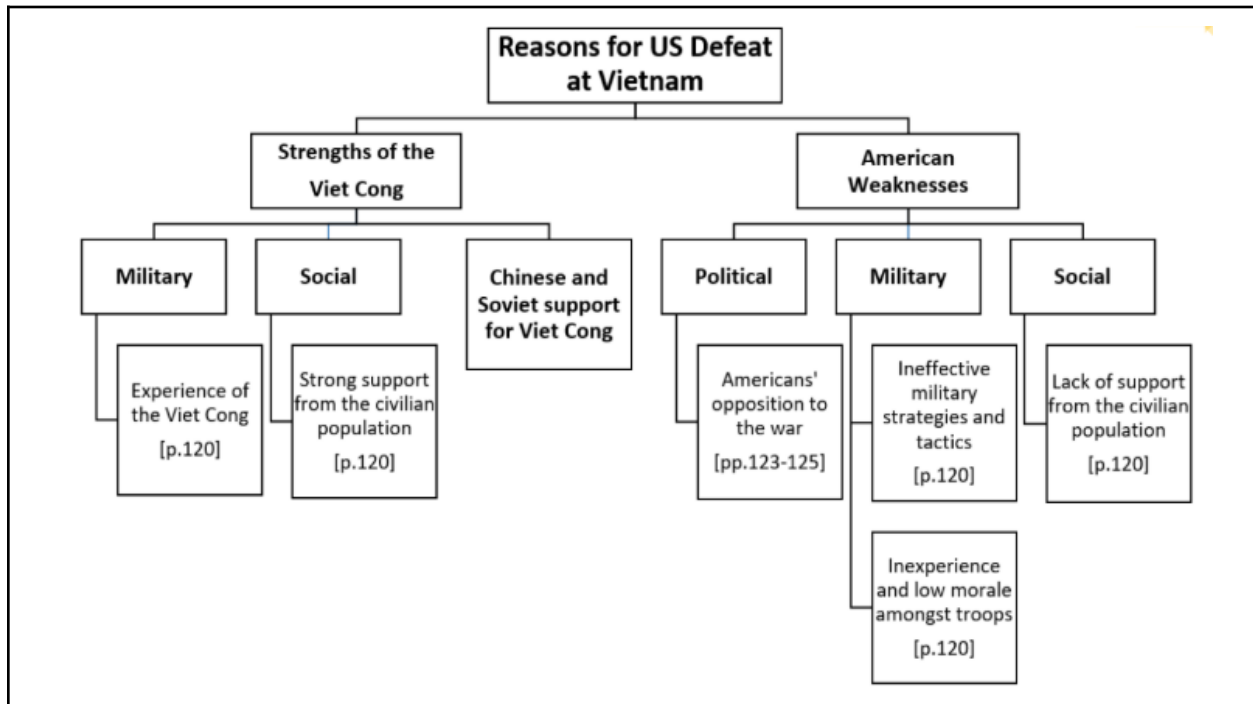
- Johnson sent his Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, to Vietnam to assess the situation.
- McNamara reported that the South Vietnamese regime's hold over the countryside was deteriorating:
 - The Viet Cong controlled 'larger percentages of the population, greater amounts of territory and have destroyed or occupied more strategic hamlets than expected.'
 - The South Vietnamese army was losing more weapons to the Viet Cong than it was capturing, and its casualties were also rising.

Gulf of Tonkin Incident, 1964 [p.117]

- On 2 August 1964, North Vietnamese patrol boats attacked the USS Maddox, an American destroyer in the Gulf of Tonkin.
-
- The US passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, giving Johnson the power to 'take all necessary measures to prevent further aggression and achieve peace and security'.
 - Opinion polls showed that 85% of the American public stood behind the Johnson administration.
 - US marines and combat troops were deployed in battle in Vietnam.
 - US allies such as Australia, Britain, New Zealand and South Korea also contributed soldiers.
 - This phase of the war is known as the Vietnam War, or the Second Indochina War.
-

Inquiry Question: Why did the US lose the Vietnam War?

2:



Military Strategies and Tactics [pp.119-120]

North Vietnam	United States
- Favoured guerilla warfare because it had less equipment. - Disguise was emphasised: the Viet Cong dressed in black peasant pyjamas and were hard to detect.	- Increased the number of troops deployed in Vietnam from 23,000 at the end of 1964 to 184,300 by the end of 1965. - 13 Feb 1965: 'Operation Rolling Thunder' - Switched to bombing military bases, industrial areas, transportation networks and ports to disrupt North Vietnamese supply lines. - This extended to towns and cities and the use of napalm and cluster bombs. - The US Air Force dropped more bombs on North Vietnam than all the bombs dropped during WWII.

Limitations of US Military Strategies and Tactics

- Despite the US having the benefit of artillery and air support, it was unable to defeat the Viet Cong.
- Because of their disguises, the Viet Cong could not be easily found and destroyed.
- To evade the bombing raids, the communist forces dug deeper tunnels and used these as air-raid tunnels.
- American troops settled on searching out villages and destroying those instead. This turned the villagers against the US.

Support from the Civilian Population [p.120]

North Vietnam:

Nationalism and Anti-Colonial Sentiment:

- Ho Chi Minh and the VC were seen as part of the nationalist movement fighting for Vietnamese independence.
- The VC were perceived as liberators who opposed foreign intervention, particularly the American presence, which many Vietnamese saw as another form of colonialism.

Land Reforms and Economic Policies:

- The VC made sure that in areas under their control land was taken from the rich landowners and given to poor peasants.
- This made them very popular as the rulers of South Vietnam did not carry out this policy.

Integrating into Local Communities:

- The Viet Cong was expected to respect and help peasants:
 - E.g. when rice supplies dwindled, Ho ordered everyone, regardless of rank, to plant 1200 cassava plants.
-
- The Viet Cong was prepared to kill those who opposed them.
 - Between 1966 and 1971, the Viet Cong killed an estimated 27,000 civilians.

Lack of Support from the Civilian Population [p.120]

United States:

- The Americans failed to win the 'hearts and minds' of the Vietnamese people.
- The aim of the US infantry was to get high enemy 'body count'.
- The US used defoliants such as Agent Orange to kill off vegetation to prevent the Viet Cong from using the jungle as cover and destroy crops to stop them from getting supplies.
- The use of these chemical weapons and 'Search and Destroy' missions turned the Vietnamese against American troops.

Morale [pp.119-120]

North Vietnam	United States
- The greatest strength of the Viet Cong was its refusal to give in to anything except the complete removal of US from Vietnam. - The North Vietnamese saw the war as answering 'the call of the south' – the responsibility of every North Vietnamese to rescue their brothers in the south.	- Many US troops were young and experienced. - Of all those killed in combat, 43% died within the first three months. Their average age was 19. - 'Fragging' (the killing of an officer by his own men) happened – 3% of all officers who died were killed by their own troops. - US troops took drugs such as marijuana, cocaine and heroin. - Morale of US troops decreased steadily as the war carried on.

The Tet Offensive, 1968 [pp.122 – 125]

- On 31 Jan 1968, around 80, 000 Viet Cong and North Vietnam Army troops launched a massive attack on 100 towns and cities in South Vietnam.
- It was launched during the Vietnamese New Year (Tet) holiday.
- The Americans and South Vietnamese were taken by surprise – the Viet Cong had abandoned the guerilla war style of fighting and took on these troops through conventional battles.

Aims of the Viet Cong:

- The Communists had hoped that the South Vietnamese would rise up and overthrow the government.
- They also hoped the US would realise they could not win the war and withdraw from Vietnam.

'The Tet Offensive had been a total failure for the communists. Of the 84,000 troops committed to Tet, nearly 58,000 had been killed, almost wiping out the Viet Cong as an effective fighting force. The communists had expected that the South Vietnamese government forces would crumble, but it had fought hard and well. Tet had been a rash and demoralising defeat but surprisingly it would turn the tide of the war in favour of the communists.'

A historian on the Tet Offensive, 2002.

'The North Vietnamese government dreamed that their great offensive would cause the government of South Vietnam to collapse. At the very least it hoped to demonstrate such strength that America would give up. The Tet Offensive was one of those rare battles lost by both sides. The communists had suffered serious losses.'

Another historian on the Tet Offensive, 2002.

- The Tet Offensive was a military disaster for the Viet Cong.
- It was estimated that the Viet Cong suffered between 40,000 and 50,000 deaths and they never managed to regain their strength.
- The attack had also killed many civilians. At the city of Hue, the Viet Cong had executed about 3,000 civilians for alleged links to the South Vietnamese government.
- The people of South Vietnam did not rise up and join the Viet Cong as hoped.
- However, the Tet Offensive proved to be a turning point in turning American public opinion against the Vietnam War.
- The Tet Offensive was a propaganda victory for the Viet Cong and North Vietnam.
- Weeks before Tet, General Westmoreland had assured the American public that the Vietnam War was going well and the Communists were in retreat.
- The Tet Offensive exposed Westmoreland's optimism as unrealistic and misguided.
- The Tet Offensive showed that the American mission in Vietnam, if it was to continue, would require several more years, billions more dollars and thousands more of American lives.

The Tet Offensive and the Media [pp.123 – 125]

- US media was initially supportive of the Vietnam War. Gradually the tone of reporting on Vietnam changed.
- The Tet Offensive convinced many journalists that the US could not win the war.
- One image that shook the American public was the Viet Cong attack on the US Embassy in Saigon: The embassy was the symbol of the American presence in Vietnam and it was not safe from the enemy.
- Walter Cronkite, one of the more respected journalists in the US, publicly criticised the US war effort in Vietnam on national television: 'What the hell is going on? I thought we were winning this war?'
- One day later, an American news cameraman filmed a tied-up Viet Cong suspect being shot in the head by the Chief of the Saigon Police. This was known as the 'Saigon Execution'.

My Lai, March 1968 [p.124]

- Rising anti-war sentiments were worsened with additional media coverage of US atrocities.
- Another example was the My Lai Massacre. US soldiers entered a village on a 'search and destroy' mission to search for Viet Cong.
- They killed between 347 and 504 unarmed South Vietnamese civilians, including children and babies. Some of the women had been raped first.
- The killings at My Lai divided the US – Americans were used to seeing themselves as the 'good guys', who were decent and upright. Many wondered how true this was now.

Official Army photographer Ron Haeberle traveled with Charlie Company into My Lai on March 16, 1968. The Charlie Company would be responsible for the My Lai Massacre. Haeberle took these photographs on his personal camera. These photos would help to shift public perception against the Vietnam War.

Impact of the Tet Offensive [pp.126-127]

Burning of Draft Cards:

- American men who were conscripted or drafted into the army burnt their draft orders in public.
- Others refused to report for training.
- By the end of 1969, there were 34,000 draft-dodgers wanted by the police.
- Many young men fled to Canada to evade the draft.

Anti-War Movement:

- Americans began marching to protest against the Vietnam War.
- These included Martin Luther King Jr., a civil rights leader.
- On November 15, 1969, the largest anti-war demonstration in American history took place in Washington, D.C., as over 250,000 Americans gathered peacefully, calling for the withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam.

Withdrawal of the US [pp.126-127]

- US President Johnson realised that he would not have any chance of being re-elected. In March 1968, Johnson announced that he would not be standing for re-election.
- In November 1968, Richard Nixon was elected as the President of the US.
- He began the policy of Vietnamisation – the gradual withdrawal of US troops from Vietnam, by transferring responsibility for the war to the South Vietnamese forces.
- On 27 January 1973, the US, North Vietnam and South Vietnam signed the Paris Peace Accords.
- By March 1973, the last US forces had left Vietnam.

Fall of Saigon, April 1975 [pp.127-128]

- Fighting between the Communists and the South Vietnamese army resumed in 1973.
- Without US support and without the support of the population, the South Vietnamese government was unable to survive.
- In April 1975, North Vietnam forces entered Saigon.
- On 30 April 1975, the last Americans were lifted out of Saigon in Operation Frequent Wind.
- North Vietnamese forces declared victory in Saigon and renamed it Ho Chi Minh City.
- Vietnam was finally reunified as a Communist state, and became known as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in 1976.

Aftermath of the Vietnam War [pp.130-132]

Impact on the US' subsequent conduct of the Cold War:

i) Bankrupt Ideology

- The US had portrayed its involvement in the War as a moral crusade against Communism.
- US withdrawal from Vietnam demonstrated that its ideology was not superior.
- Atrocities committed by US soldiers, like the My Lai Massacre, and the use of chemical weapons such as Agent Orange had also damaged its reputation.

ii) Failure of Containment:

- The US had failed to enact containment in Southeast Asia.
- As feared by supporters of the Domino Theory, after the fall of South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia turned Communist by 1975.

iii) Weakening of the American Presidency:

- In response to concerns over presidential overreach, the War Powers Act was enacted in 1973.
- This Act states that the president must consult with Congress "in every possible instance" before committing U.S. forces to armed conflict.

Détente [pp.130-131]

Following the Vietnam War, both the US and USSR tried to improve relations with each other:

- The US had spent more than \$120 billion on the conflict in Vietnam from 1965-73; it needed to **relax tensions with the USSR** so that it could cut down on its military spending from the arms race.
- The relationship between China and USSR had soured. This was known as the **Sino-Soviet split**.
- The USA found it easier to establish relations with China. In February 1972, Nixon made a symbolically important visit to China, which demonstrated that he was trying to improve relations with Communist China. The US also dropped its objection to China joining the United Nations.
- Nixon's visit to China altered the global balance of power. With the USA now closer to China, the Soviet Union was anxious and keen to improve relations with the USA.
- In May 1972, the US President, Richard Nixon, made a historic trip to Moscow to meet the Soviet leader, Leonid Brezhnev. Nixon's visit to Moscow was a hugely symbolic moment.
- Photos of Nixon shaking hands with Brezhnev signalled the beginning of a new, more peaceful relationship between the two superpowers.
- In May 1972, the US and USSR held Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) to attempt to limit, and later reduce the number of nuclear weapons.
- This was followed by the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty.
- In 1975, the new US President Gerald Ford (Nixon had resigned in 1974 following the Watergate scandal) signed the Helsinki Final Act on military issues, political borders.
- It also advanced opportunities for increased trade and scientific cooperation and promoted cultural exchanges, human rights and freedom of the press.

At the end of the lesson, can you:

- Identify the key historical actors and explain their roles in the outbreak and development of the Vietnam War?
 - Explain the reasons for the outbreak of the Vietnam War in 1964?
 - Explain the reasons for the US defeat at Vietnam?
 - Evaluate the impact of the Cold War on Vietnam from 1945 to 1975?
 - Evaluate the impact of the Vietnam War on Cold War developments?
-