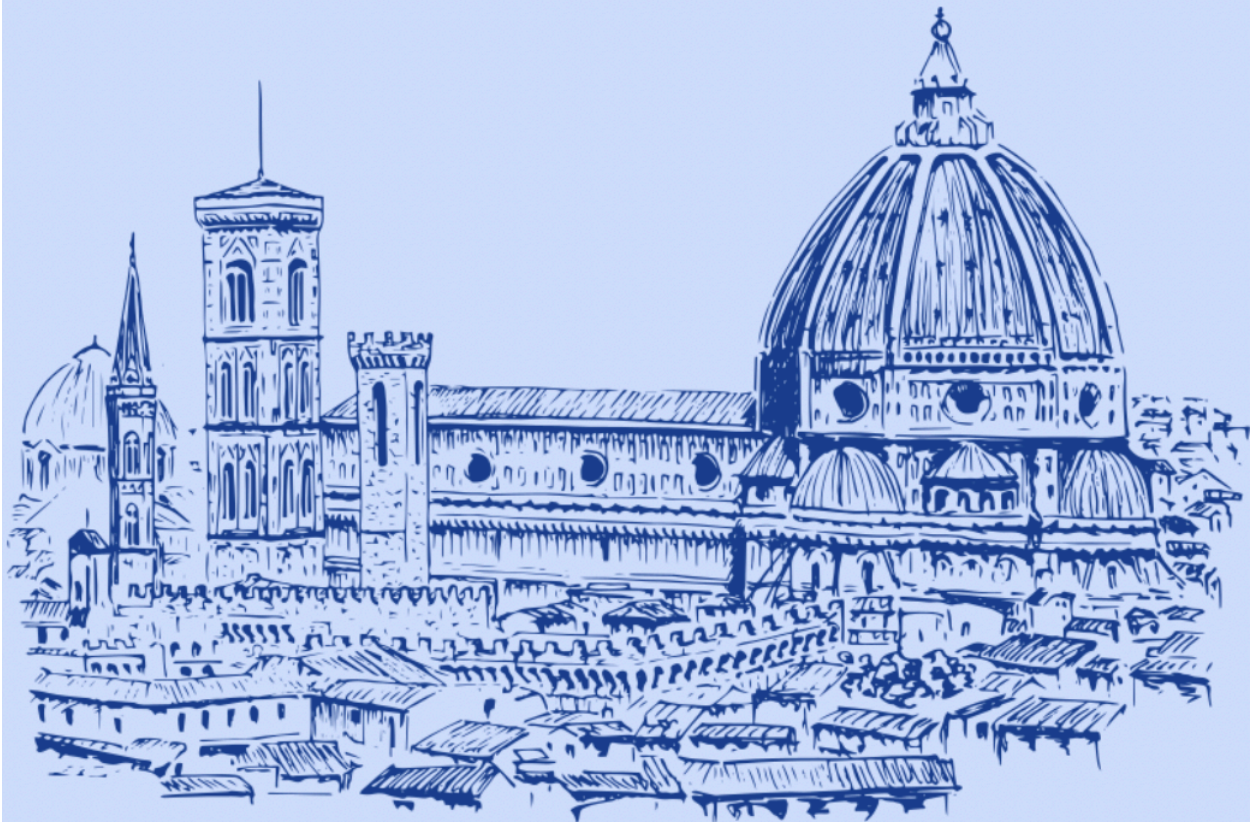


# RESEARCH GUIDE

## Historical



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**Committee:** Historical Security Counsel (HSC)

**Topic:** (1) The issue of US involvement in the Vietnam war (Dec. 31, 1969)

**Chairs:** Raya Gupta and Luisa Eldridge

# Table of Contents

- I. Introduction..... 2**
- II. Definition of Key Terms and events..... 2**
- III. General Overview.....3**
- IV. Timeline.....3**
- V. Major Parties Involved and their Views.....10**
- VI. Relevant UN Documents and Articles..... 12**
- VII. Questions to consider..... 12**
- VIII. Conclusion..... 13**

## I. Introduction

\*A reminder to delegates that any information unavailable or events yet to occur in January 1970 are not valid topics of debate and will not be considered by the committee. The research guide includes such information to give delegates a well-rounded view of the history, however delegates are expected to present information as if they were living on the 31st of December, 1969 .

The Vietnam War officially began in the 1950s, beginning as part of the wider Indochina wars, according to most historians, though the conflict in Southeast Asia had its roots in the French colonial period of the 1800s. The United States, France, China, the Soviet Union, Cambodia, Laos and other countries would over time become involved in the lengthy war, which finally ended in 1975 when North and South Vietnam were reunited as one country. The following Vietnam War timeline is a guide to the complex political and military issues involved in a war that would ultimately claim millions of lives.

## II. Definition of Key Terms and events

- a) **Guerilla warfare** - a strategy used usually by civilians or people that are not part of a typical military unit. Guerrilla combat often involves surprise attacks such as ambushes and raids, or sabotage of a vulnerable target. Many times, guerrilla warriors are fighting in their homeland or they have the support of the local population. Therefore, guerrillas are usually familiar with the terrain and landscape, and they use this to their advantage in their attacks: the enemy has no idea what's happening until the guerilla attack is underway.
  
- b) **Mỹ Lai massacre** - mass killing of as many as 500 unarmed villagers by U.S. soldiers in the hamlet of My Lai on March 16, 1968, during the Vietnam War. Word of this event did not reach the public until 1969

- c) **Agent orange** - a biological weapon that U.S. forces sprayed over the rural landscape in Vietnam from 1961 to 1971 to defoliate trees and shrubs and kill food crops that were providing cover and food to opposition forces.

### **III. General Overview**

Since the late 19th century, Vietnam had been ruled by France, and was referred to as Indochina. French rule was relatively unchallenged until 1940 when the Japanese took control of the main resources in Vietnam. During the remainder of WW2, a strong anti-Japanese resistance movement was built (called the Viet Minh), which emerged under the leadership of communist Ho Chi Minh. When the second world war ended, the Viet Minh controlled the north of the country and were determined to take control of the entirety. However, in 1945, the French returned to regain their control, sparking conflict. In 1949, when the communists took over China, they began to help Ho Chi Minh, prompting the USA to pour 500 million dollars a year into the French war effort, and to help the French set up a non-communist government in the south of Vietnam.

### **IV. Timeline**

- **1887**: France imposes a colonial system over Vietnam, calling it French Indochina. The system includes Tonkin, Annam, Cochin China and Cambodia. Laos was added in 1893.
- **1923-25**: Vietnamese nationalist Ho Chi Minh is trained in the Soviet Union as an agent of the Communist International (Comintern).
- **February 1930**: Ho Chi Minh founded the Indochinese Communist Party at a meeting in Hong Kong.

- **June 1940:** Nazi Germany takes control of France.
- **September 1940:** Japanese troops invade French Indochina and occupy Vietnam with little French resistance.
- **May 1941:** Ho Chi Minh and communist colleagues establish the League for the Independence of Vietnam. Known as the Viet Minh, the movement aims to resist French and Japanese occupation of Vietnam.
- **August 1945:** Japan is defeated by the Allies in World War II, leaving a power vacuum in Indochina. France begins to reassert its authority over Vietnam.
- **September 1945:** Ho Chi Minh declares an independent North Vietnam and models his declaration on the American Declaration of Independence of 1776 in an (unsuccessful) effort to win the support of the United States.
- **July 1946:** Ho Chi Minh rejects a French proposal granting Vietnam limited self-government and the Viet Minh begins a guerrilla war against the French.
- **March 1947:** In an address to Congress, President Harry Truman states that the foreign policy of the United States is to assist any country whose stability is threatened by communism. The policy becomes known as the Truman Doctrine.
- **June 1949:** The French install former emperor Bao Dai as head of state in Vietnam.
- **October 1949:** Following a civil war, Chinese Communist leader Mao Zedong declared the creation of the People's Republic of China.
- **January 1950:** The People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union formally recognize the communist Democratic Republic of Vietnam and both begin to supply economic and military aid to communist resistance fighters within the country.

- **February 1950:** Assisted by the Soviet Union and the newly Communist China, the Viet Minh step up their offensive against French outposts in Vietnam.
  
- **June 1950:** The United States, identifying the Viet Minh as a Communist threat, steps up military assistance to France for their operations against the Viet Minh.
  
- **March-May 1954:** French troops are humiliated in defeat by Viet Minh forces at Dien Bien Phu. The defeat solidifies the end of French rule in Indochina.
  
- **April 1954:** In a speech, U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower says the fall of French Indochina to communists could create a “domino effect” in Southeast Asia. This so-called domino theory guides U.S. thinking on Vietnam for the next decade.
  
- **July 1954:** The Geneva Accords establish North and South Vietnam with the 17th parallel as the dividing line. The agreement also stipulates that elections are to be held within two years to unify Vietnam under a single democratic government. These elections never happen.
  
- **1955:** Catholic nationalist Ngo Dinh Diem emerges as the leader of South Vietnam, with U.S. backing, while Ho Chi Minh leads the communist state to the north.
  
- **May 1959:** North Vietnam forces begin to build a supply route through Laos and Cambodia to South Vietnam in an effort to support guerrilla attacks against Diem’s government in the south. The route became known as the Ho Chi Minh Trail and was greatly expanded and enhanced during the Vietnam War.
  
- **July 1959:** The first U.S. soldiers are killed in South Vietnam when guerrillas raid their living quarters near Saigon.
  
- **September 1960:** Ho Chi Minh, facing failing health, is replaced by Le Duan as head of North Vietnam’s ruling communist party.

- **December 1960:** The National Liberation Front (NLF) is formed with North Vietnamese backing as the political wing of the anti government insurgency in South Vietnam. The United States views the NLF as an arm of North Vietnam and starts calling the military wing of the NLF the Viet Cong—short for Vietnam Cong-san, or Vietnamese communists.
  
- **May 1961:** President John F. Kennedy sends helicopters and 400 Green Berets to South Vietnam and authorizes secret operations against the Viet Cong.
  
- **January 1962:** In Operation Ranch Hand, U.S. aircraft start spraying Agent Orange and other herbicides over rural areas of South Vietnam to kill vegetation that would offer cover and food for guerrilla forces.
  
- **February 1962:** Ngo Dinh Diem survives a bombing of the presidential palace in South Vietnam as Diem’s extreme favoritism toward South Vietnam’s Catholic minority alienates him from most of the South Vietnamese population, including Vietnamese Buddhists.
  
- **January 1963:** At Ap Bac, a village in the Mekong Delta southwest of Saigon, South Vietnamese troops are defeated by a much smaller unit of Viet Cong fighters. The South Vietnamese are overcome despite their four-to-one advantage and the technical and planning assistance of U.S. advisers.
  
- **May 1963:** In a major incident of what becomes known as the “Buddhist Crisis,” the government of Ngo Dinh Diem opens fire on a crowd of Buddhist protesters in the central Vietnam city of Hue. Eight people, including children, are killed.
  
- **June 1963:** A 73-year-old monk immolates himself while sitting at a major city intersection in protest, leading other Buddhists to follow suit in coming weeks. The United States’ already declining confidence in Diem’s leadership continues to slide.

- **November 1963:** The United States backs a South Vietnam military coup against the unpopular Diem, which ends in the brutal killing of Diem and his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu. Between 1963 and 1965, 12 different governments take the lead in South Vietnam as military coups replaced one government after another.
- **November 1963:** President Kennedy is assassinated in Dallas, Texas. Lyndon B. Johnson becomes president.
- **August 1964:** USS Maddox on an espionage mission is attacked by North Vietnamese patrol torpedo boats in the Gulf of Tonkin. A second attack on the Maddox and another U.S. ship in the Gulf is alleged, but likely never occurred, according to National Security Agency documents declassified in 2005. The incidents lead President Johnson to call for air strikes on North Vietnamese patrol boat bases. Two U.S. aircraft are shot down and one U.S. pilot, Everett Alvarez Jr., becomes the first U.S. airman to be taken prisoner by North Vietnam.
- **August 1964:** The attacks in the Gulf of Tonkin spur Congress to pass the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which authorizes the president to “take all necessary measures, including the use of armed force” against any aggressor in the conflict.
- **November 1964:** The Soviet Politburo increases its support to North Vietnam, sending aircraft, artillery, ammunition, small arms, radar, air defense systems, food and medical supplies. Meanwhile, China sends several engineering troops to North Vietnam to assist in building critical defense infrastructure.
- **February 1965:** President Johnson orders the bombing of targets in North Vietnam in Operation Flaming Dart in retaliation for a Viet Cong raid at the U.S. base in the city of Pleiku and at a nearby helicopter base at Camp Holloway.
- **March 1965:** President Johnson launches a three-year campaign of sustained bombing of targets in North Vietnam and the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Operation Rolling Thunder. The same



month, U.S. Marines landed on beaches near Da Nang, South Vietnam as the first American combat troops to enter Vietnam.

- **June 1965:** General Nguen Van Thieu of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam Governmental Military (ARVN), becomes president of South Vietnam.

- **July 1965:** President Johnson calls for 50,000 more ground troops to be sent to Vietnam, increasing the draft to 35,000 each month.

- **August 1965:** In Operation Starlite, some 5,500 U.S. Marines strike against the First Viet Cong Regiment in the first major ground offensive by U.S. forces in Vietnam. The six-day operation diffused the Viet Cong regiment, although it would quickly rebuild.

- **November 1965:** Norman Morrison, a 31-year-old pacifist Quaker from Baltimore, sets himself on fire in front of the Pentagon to protest the Vietnam war. Onlookers encourage him to release his 11-month-old baby daughter, whom he is holding, before he is engulfed in flames.

- **November 1965:** Nearly 300 Americans are killed and hundreds more injured in the first large-scale battle of the war, the Battle of Ia Drang Valley. At the battle, in South Vietnam's Central Highlands, U.S. ground troops are dropped onto and withdrawn from the battlefield by helicopter, in what would become a common strategy. Both sides declare victory.

- **1966:** U.S. troop numbers in Vietnam rise to 400,000.

- **June 1966:** American aircraft attack targets in Hanoi and Haiphong in raids that are among the first such attacks on cities in North Vietnam.

- **1967:** U.S. troop numbers stationed in Vietnam increase to 500,000.

- **February 1967:** U.S. aircraft bomb Haiphong Harbor and North Vietnamese airfields.

- **April 1967:** Huge Vietnam War protests occur in Washington, D.C., New York City and San Francisco.
  
- **September 1967:** Nguyen Van Thieu wins the presidential election of South Vietnam under a newly enacted constitution.
  
- **November 1967:** In the Battle of Dak To, U.S. and South Vietnamese forces resist an offensive by communist forces in the Central Highlands. The United States forces suffer some 1,800 casualties.
  
- **January 1968:** The Tet Offensive begins, encompassing a combined assault of Viet Minh and North Vietnamese armies. Attacks are carried out in more than 100 cities and outposts across South Vietnam, including Hue and Saigon, and the U.S. Embassy is invaded. The effective, bloody attacks shock U.S. officials and mark a turning point in the war and the beginning of a gradual U.S. withdrawal from the region.
  
- **February-March 1968:** Battles at Hue and Saigon end with American and ARVN victory as Viet Cong guerillas are cleared from the cities.
  
- **March 16, 1968:** At the U.S. massacre at Mai Lai, more than 500 civilians are murdered by U.S. forces. The massacre happens amid a campaign of U.S. search-and-destroy operations that are intended to find enemy territories, destroy them and then retreat.
  
- **March 1968:** President Johnson halts bombing in Vietnam north of the 20th parallel. Facing backlash about the war, Johnson announces he will not run for reelection.
  
- **November 1968:** Republican Richard M. Nixon wins the U.S. presidential elections on the campaign promises to restore “law and order” and to end the draft.
  
- **May 1969:** At Ap Bia Mountain, about a mile from the border with Laos, U.S. paratroopers attack entrenched North Vietnamese fighters in an attempt to cut off North Vietnamese

infiltration from Laos. U.S. troops eventually capture the site (temporarily), which would be nicknamed Hamburger Hill by journalists due to the brutal carnage of the 10-day battle.

- **September 1969:** Ho Chi Minh dies of a heart attack in Hanoi.
- **December 1969:** The U.S. government institutes the first draft lottery since World War II, prompting ever more young American men—later disparaged as “draft dodgers”—to flee to Canada.
- **March 1969-May 1970:** In a series of secret bombings known as “Operation Menu,” U.S. B-52 bombers target suspected communist base camps and supply zones in Cambodia. The bombings are kept under wraps by Nixon and his administration since Cambodia is officially neutral in the war, although The New York Times would reveal the operation on May 9, 1969.

## V. Major Parties Involved and their Views

- a) United states** - major party in the war, providing military aid to the southern vietnam forces. Their involvement in the war was prompted by their fear of communism spreading to the rest of Asia.
- b) The Soviet Union** - From the late 1960s onwards, the Soviet Union provided the vast majority of the military and economic aid that North Vietnam received. They supplied their communist allies with food, petroleum, transport vehicles, iron, steel, fertilizer, arms, and ammunition.
- c) China** - throughout the course of the war, China provided North Vietnam with military equipment, supplies, and training.
- d) North Vietnam** - The People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN), also known as the North Vietnamese Army (NVA), engaged in more conventional warfare with U.S. and Army of

the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) forces in the hopes of uniting North and South Vietnam under a communist government.

- e) Viet Cong** - The Vietnamese Communists, or Vietcong, were the military branch of the National Liberation Front (NLF), which operated using guerilla combat techniques against the U.S army and the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) in Southern Vietnam.
- f) Southern Vietnam** - The South Vietnamese government, under the leadership of Nguyen Van Thieu, fought to preserve a Vietnam more closely aligned with the West.
- g) France** - After World War II, France reoccupied Vietnam as part of its attempt to reclaim its prewar empire. However, after Ho Chi Minh successfully dislodged the French colonial power, they largely stayed away from the conflict.
- h) Laos** - Laos was originally neutral in the conflict, but the North Vietnamese moved troops through the country and supported a communist insurgency. That insurgency drew heavy U.S. bombing.
- i) Cambodia** - North Vietnamese moved troops and supplies through neighboring Cambodia, which, though officially neutral, tolerated the communist intrusions.
- j) Republic of Korea and other US allies** - South Korea was the main U.S. and South Vietnamese partner, providing over 300,000 troops, while other US allies also sent troops and supplies, including the service of 60,000 Australians, about 40,000 Thais, and over 3,000 New Zealanders served (37 of whom died) in the war effort. The Philippines, Taiwan and Spain likewise aided the U.S. war effort, whereas on the communist side North Korea and Cuba purportedly sent token support.

## **VI. Relevant UN Documents and Articles**

1. The Geneva Accords in 1954 separated the country in two temporarily with a promise of democratic elections in 1956 to reunite the country.

[https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/KH-LA-VN\\_540720\\_GenevaAgreements.pdf](https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/KH-LA-VN_540720_GenevaAgreements.pdf)

## **VII. Questions to consider**

- Why did the Vietnam war expand to such a widespread conflict?
- What was the original purpose of the USA's involvement in Vietnam and does it support the views of the country that you are representing?
- Is US involvement in Vietnam a noble effort to protect the interest of the Southern Vietnamese people, or an unprecedented invasion to further a political agenda?

## **VIII. Conclusion**

In conclusion, the United States of America has been involved in Vietnam since November 1, 1955- when President Eisenhower deployed the Military Assistance Advisory Group to train the Army of the Republic of Vietnam. At the point we are discussing, an estimated 500,000 U.S. military personnel were stationed in Vietnam. The Vietnam War was a complex political and military issue involved in a war that would ultimately claim millions of lives.

## **IX. Bibliography/Further Reading**

<https://www.britannica.com/event/Vietnam-War/French-rule-ended-Vietnam-divided>

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