

The Vietnam War



President Dwight D. Eisenhower continued Truman’s foreign policy of **containment**. However, Eisenhower was worried that defense spending would bankrupt the country so he came up with new ideas for military spending. Eisenhower and his **Secretary of State John Foster Dulles** created a “new plan” that focused more using **air power and nuclear weapons** while reducing the number of ground troops. This policy meant that the United States was no longer afraid to use nuclear weapons if attacked, resulting in **brinkmanship**, the nation being on the brink of war.

Asia was a major area of concern for the United States foreign policy during this time period. America worried about the **Domino Theory** and the spread of communism throughout the region. One method to create more American allies in Asia was created by John Foster Dulles with **SEATO (Southeast Asia Treaty Organization)** in 1954. The original members of the United States, Pakistan, Thailand, the Philippines, Australia, New Zealand and Great Britain all pledged to meet any “**common danger**” from communist aggression.

Unrest in Asia 1945-1960

September 1945	When World War II ended in Asia, Ho Chi Minh , a member of the Communist Party since 1920 proclaimed the Democratic Republic of Vietnam
1946 to 1949	France , which had controlled Vietnam since the 19 th century, appointed a “puppet leader” Bao Dai, who was ineffective against the rise of communism
1949	Mao Zedong ruled The People’s Republic of China and recognized the Vietnamese government of Ho Chi Minh in 1950
1950 to 1953	American fought the Korean War and gave financial aid to France to help them try and keep control over Vietnam
1954	Ho Chi Minh defeated the French at Dienbienphu . The Geneva Accords divided Vietnam at the 17 th Parallel. Both the North and South agreed to hold elections. The formation of SEATO supported democratic South Vietnam
1955	President Eisenhower increased aid to South Vietnam
1956	South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem refused to hold the elections stated in the Geneva Accords fearing he would lose to the communists
1960	Ho Chi Minh recognized the Vietcong , communist guerillas in South Vietnam as the National Liberation Front (NLF) . President John F. Kennedy sent Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson to Vietnam to study the crisis.

President John F. Kennedy shared Eisenhower's **Domino Theory** and he continued to support the Diem regime. By 1963 there were about 17,000 American "advisers" in South Vietnam who helped the government repel the Vietcong. That same year, 489 Americans died in the fighting.

Ngo Dinh Diem ruled as a dictator and suppressed all opponents. On November 2, 1963, the South Vietnamese military, with the approval of the United States, overthrew Diem. The White House then announced that it was going to withdraw its "advisers" by 1965 but the promise was not kept as Kennedy was assassinated on November 22, 1963, and the crisis had escalated by this time.

Lyndon B. Johnson was sworn in after Kennedy's death, and on August 4, 1964, the Vietnamese situation changed dramatically. American destroyers had been the victim of an "unprovoked attack" by North Vietnamese gunboats. (It later appeared that the ships might have been protecting South Vietnamese vessels heading into North Vietnamese waters). The next day, Johnson asked Congress to approve air strikes against North Vietnam. With only two dissenting votes, Congress passed the **Gulf of Tonkin Resolution** allowing the President and Commander-in-Chief to use necessary measures to protect any acts of aggression against U.S. forces. Johnson used the resolution to justify expansion of the war and by April 1965, U.S. planes regularly bombed North Vietnam.



The United States believed that its superior technology and manpower would guarantee victory but they soon found themselves fighting a **guerilla war** in the jungles, swamps, and rice paddies of Southeast Asia. The enemy, the **Vietcong**, did not wear uniforms and there was no clear battlefront. American dropped more bombs on Vietnam than on Nazi Germany and thousands of Vietnamese died.



The government argued that the United States was involved to prevent the fall of Vietnam to communism, to stop the rise of aggressor governments, and to protect the nation's position as a superpower and defender of democracy. However, the war dragged on and many Americans began to question these motives.

By 1965, an antiwar movement had formed in America. In Congress, **Hawks and Doves** appeared. Hawks were those who stood behind the president and wanted victory at any cost. The **Doves** were those members who wanted an immediate withdrawal and an end to the war.

Student protests on college campuses began with the **University of California, Berkeley** campus being the forefront. The strongest antiwar student movement was the **SDS (Students for a Democratic Society)** who were antiestablishment and against big business and government. By 1969, the organization had collapsed into a number of splinter groups but their legacy against authority lasted into the 1970's.



People of all ages joined in antiwar protest marches. The first major march took place in Washington, D.C. in 1965 and in 1967, some 300,000 people marched in New York City against the war. The same year, 50,000 protestors tried to shut down the Pentagon.

In 1967, **Cassius Clay (Muhammad Ali)** the gold medal Olympic heavyweight champion, refused to take the oath of induction after being drafted into the army. He was found guilty of **draft evasion** but remained free on appeal until 1971, when the Supreme Court overturned his case. By 1968, some 10,000 draft resisters had fled the country to Canada.

Wealthier American students were allowed exemption from the draft under the college deferment rule but a large number of minorities who could not afford college, were drafted and sent off to Vietnam to fight.



Young men burning their draft cards in public

Key Events of 1968

January	North Vietnam launched the Tet Offensive using Soviet made jets and weapons
March	Eugene McCarthy , a peace candidate and leading “dove” won the Democratic presidential primary in New Hampshire Robert Kennedy announced his candidacy for the presidency President Johnson announced he would not seek re-election and that he would devote the remainder of his term to ending the war The war had drastically hurt Johnson’s approval rating
April	American forces in Vietnam reached 549,000, combat deaths at 22,951 North Vietnam announced it was willing to start peace talks Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated
May	Preliminary peace talks began with North Vietnam but any serious negotiations were many years away,
June	Robert Kennedy was assassinated after his victory in the California Democratic Primary
August	The Democratic National Convention nominated Hubert Humphrey (Johnson’s Vice President) amid political rioting and demonstrations at the convention. The Republican National Convention nominated Richard Nixon , whose only serious challenger was Ronald Reagan. The American Independent Party nominated George Wallace of Alabama, hoping that it could attract white voters who opposed the Civil Rights Movement.
November	Richard Nixon won the 1968 election with 43.4% of the popular vote, Humphrey claimed 42.7% and Wallace took 13,5%

Richard Nixon and the End of the Vietnam War

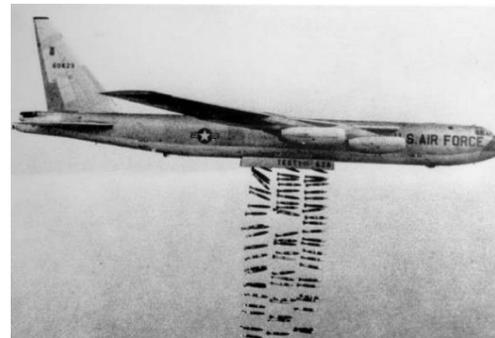
By 1969, the war had created a **national crisis** and American support for the war was at an all-time low. Nixon did not bring an end to the war right away; in fact he increased the conflict by having U.S. forces attack Vietnamese supply routes in Laos and Cambodia.

Nixon called for the **Vietnamization** of the war, a takeover of the ground fighting by South Vietnamese soldiers. At the same time, Nixon escalated the bombing of Cambodia which he claimed was a base for North Vietnamese guerillas.

These bombings triggered a large-scale student protest at **Kent State University** in Ohio. The National Guard was called in to break up the demonstration but the protest turned deadly when they fired on the students, leaving four dead and many wounded.



More and more Americans questioned the role of the United States in Vietnam but throughout 1970 President Nixon only increased the bombing raids on North Vietnam.



Kissinger and North Vietnamese leaders

In an attempt to find Peace with Honor, Nixon sent his chief foreign policy adviser, **Henry Kissinger** to meet with North Vietnamese officials in an attempt to end the war. The talks remained in deadlock until January 15, 1973, when Nixon announced that a **cease-fire** had been reached and would soon take effect.

The War Powers Act

In November 1973, Congress passed the **War Powers Act** (over Nixon's veto) that helped reverse the powers of the President set by the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution.

- **The President now had to notify Congress within 48 hours of sending troops into a foreign country and at that time he had to give Congress a full accounting for his reason**
- **The President had to bring the troops home within 60 days unless both Houses voted for them to stay**

When the United States finally withdrew from Vietnam, **the North Vietnamese invaded and overran South Vietnam**. On April 30, 1975, the government of South Vietnam collapsed. When Nixon asked Congress for funds to help evacuate those South Vietnamese who helped America, they refused. Some 100,000 South Vietnamese managed to flee the country, many coming to the West Coast to live.



Conclusion

- In the conflict **58,000 Americans died, over 300,000 were wounded**
- The U.S. Government spent **over \$150 Billion on the war**
- **Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos fell to communism**
- Modern war technology could not defeat those who fought with nationalistic ideals
- The American political system responded to a variety of public pressures
- The United States questioned its role as police officer to the world
- Military spending on the Vietnam War negatively affected domestic programs
- The President of the United States must learn from the Vietnam War regarding the tragic loss of American lives and the great financial cost of such foreign policies



Coming home from the Vietnam War in two different perspectives