

# HISTORICAL SECURITY COUNCIL

## AGENDA

VIETNAM WAR 1965

CHAIR  
SOUMYA BASU

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RAUNAK KURANI



## **Letter From The Executive Board**

Dear Delegates, Congratulations on getting the opportunity to participate in CENMUN 2017. To the veterans of MUN, we promise you a very enriching debate that you've never experienced before and to the newcomers, we are really excited to be a part of your maiden voyage.

What we desire from the delegates is not how experienced or articulate they are. Rather, we want to see how they can respect disparities and differences of opinion, work around these, while extending their own foreign policy so that it encompasses more of the others without compromising their own stand, thereby reaching a unanimously acceptable practical solution.

The following pages intend to guide you with the nuances of the agenda as well as the Council. The Guide chronologically touches upon all the different aspects that are relevant and will lead to fruitful debate in the Council. It will provide you with a bird's eye view of the gist of the issue. However, it has to be noted that the background guide only contains certain basic information which may form the basis for the debate and your research.

You are the representative of your allotted country and it is our hope that you put in wholehearted efforts to research and comprehensively grasp all important facets of the diverse agenda. All the delegates should be prepared well in order to make the council's direction and debate productive. After all, only then will you truly be able to represent your country in the best possible way. We encourage you to go beyond this background guide and delve into the extremities of the agenda to further enhance your knowledge of a burning global issue.

Soumya Basu

(Chairperson)

Raunak Kurani

(Vice-Chairperson)

## Committee Overview: Historical Security Council

The historical Security Council, not being a conventional committee, doesn't convene to discuss and pass resolutions on a pre-decided agenda, but rather is the simulation of the UNSC during a historical crisis and the delegates are expected to propose solutions to and handle crisis situations as they arise. The committee is more dynamic, having draft resolutions/ directives that are to the point that directly address the issue focusing mostly on short term actions and decisions that may result in consequences in real time. For the HSC at CENMUN'17, the HSC is convened due to the Vietnam War. The committee shall debate upon major historic events and incidents but the course of debate shall not be restricted to what is proved to be the historical chain of events, since the decision made by the members as delegates of the country they represent during the course of the committee session shall give rise to consequences resulting in events unravelling differently from history. However, the foreign policy of the state being represented remains paramount. Given the SC's role, it is important to understand the structure, rules, and governing principles that define its unique responsibilities and mandate.

*Article 24( 1) To ensure prompt and effective action by the United Nations, its Members confer on the Security Council primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security and agree that in carrying out its duties under this responsibility the Security Council acts on their behalf.*

The Security Council is widely regarded as the most influential and far-reaching of all UN bodies. Created in Chapter V of the original United Nations Charter and ratified in October 1945, the SC is granted extended powers and a wide purview, including the primary responsibility of "maintaining peace and security" in the international community. This makes the Security Council the de facto deliberating body when violent political or economic crises arise.

The SC is relatively small, consisting of fifteen member states, two-thirds of whom are elected for two-year terms. The remaining five countries comprise the P5, or Permanent Five members: The United States, the United Kingdom, France, China, and the Russian Federation. Made up of the victors of World War II, the P5 is unique in that its members hold veto power in all substantive Security Council decisions. Without the approval or abstention of all permanent members, no resolutions can pass in the Security Council. Most importantly, the UN Charter requires its member states to adhere to all decisions of the Security Council, affirming the authority of the body. This, along with the outlined duties of the SC, empowers the body to both "demand" and "condemn" in its resolutions, language that is unavailable to other organs.

The accomplishments of the Security Council are numerous, and almost every major multilateral UN achievement has come through the actions of the SC. Most notably, the SC has established dozens of peacekeeping missions (as the only body with the authority to do so, considering its focus on international security) with the purpose of acting as a buffer zone between the parties of a conflict, or to aid in rebuilding efforts following a conflict. As the organ entrusted with the maintenance of international peace and security, the Security Council has the complex task of addressing both traditional and evolving threats, all while keeping within its decades-old mandate. Conflict mediation, the establishment of peacekeeping operations, the application of sanctions, and the authorization of military force are a few of the tools it has used throughout its history to fulfil this responsibility. In this context, the Council has allowed itself to innovate and evolve in a certain degree by addressing "new threats." In the future, it will surely face issues multidimensional in nature and of growing complexity. The Charter of the United Nations (1945) provides the Security Council with several powers to guarantee international security.

- **Sanctions:** Pursuant to Article 41 of the Charter, the Council can call its members to apply economic sanctions and other measures not involving the use of force to prevent or end violence. These include travel bans, severance of diplomatic relations, economic sanctions, financial penalties and restrictions, blockades, among others. It may further mandate arms embargos, enforce disarmament, or call upon international criminal mechanisms to become active.
- **Diplomatic Tools:** The Council has the mandate to investigate any dispute or situation that might lead to aggressions between states or other non-state groups or within states' national territories. To do so, it may "recommend methods of adjusting such disputes or the terms of settlement; formulate plans for the establishment of a system to regulate armaments; work toward the determination of the existence of a threat to the peace or an act of aggression and to recommend what action should be taken."
- **Military Action:** Besides the above-mentioned diplomatic instruments, the Council can also take military action against any state or other entity that is threatening international peace and security and may further decide on the deployment of troops or observers. The Security Council also can make the decision regarding the deployment of new UN peacekeeping operations to be led by DPKO, as well as the extensions of its mandate and subsequent modification or drawdown of any troops.
- **Partnerships:** The Council also cooperates with several international and regional organisations as well as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to implement its decisions. Cooperation between UN-related organizations and the Security council, as for example, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the African Union (AU), and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) are of paramount importance for addressing a broad range of menaces such as terrorism, extreme violence from non-state actors, disarmament, nuclear non-proliferation, et cetera. Furthermore, collaboration between the SC and local actors as well as partnerships with NGOs are paramount for the deployment of peacekeeping operations.

#### Peacekeeping and peace building

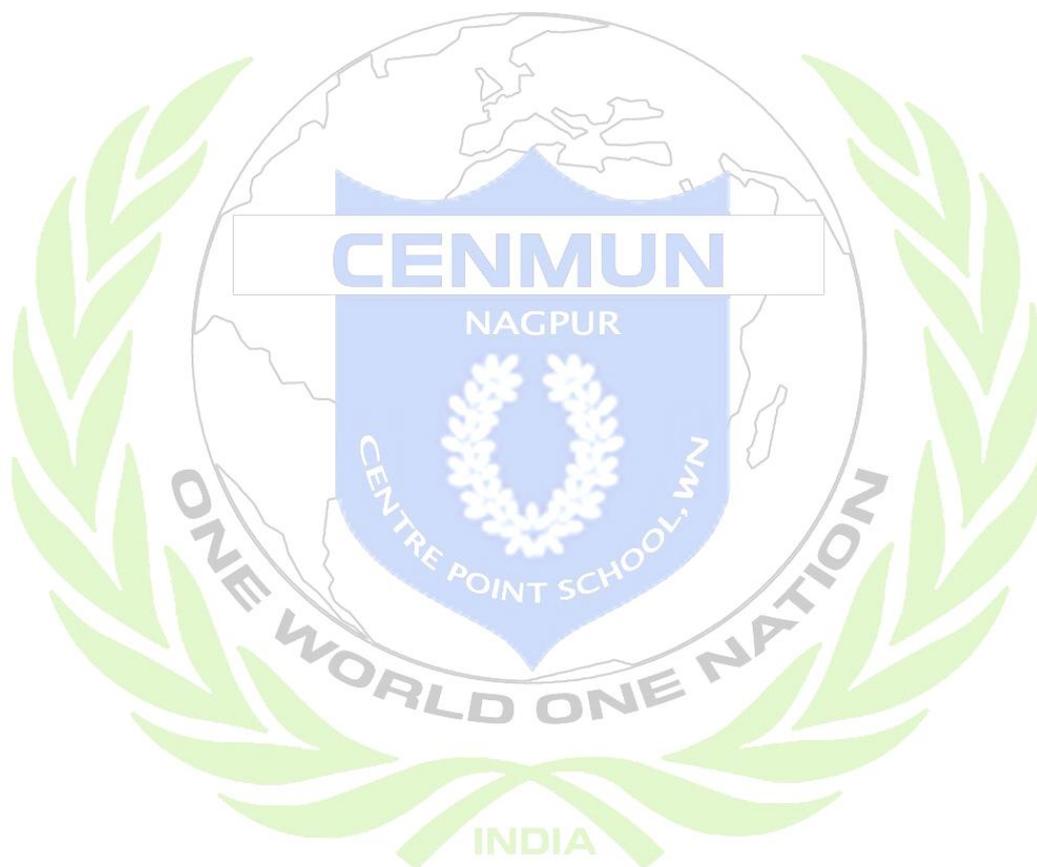
The difference between peacekeeping and peace building lies in their mandates, powers and institutional frameworks. While "peace making generally includes various measures to address and discuss on conflicts in progress and usually involves constructive diplomatic action to bring hostile parties to a negotiated agreement, peace building aims to lessen the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by the method of strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management."

Contrary to other missions, peacekeeping operations have a military or international police presence in the field. Conflict prevention is among the Security Council's highest priorities. The Council may stop the outbreak of a conflict through agenda-setting, fact-finding missions, diplomatic initiatives, sanctions, peace operations, and peace enforcement. However, if a conflict breaks out, the Security Council may establish mission mandates and authorise the level and nature of resources for conflict prevention to the UN Secretariat.

#### Conflict Prevention

As the international community faces increasing varying threats from non-state actors and transnational organised crime, the Security Council has tried to adapt to new working methods. The Security Council represents the only body within the UN that has the power to adopt binding resolutions, it is still of utmost importance for the maintenance of international peace and security. The interlink age between issues previously addressed in silos is an important one to recognise and address – as the world grows more complex, so too, must the Security Council understands of the world and actions are taken to maintain peace and security. The Council must use all the tools in its

repertoire - peacekeeping and peacebuilding activities, conflict prevention efforts and diplomatic and coercive enforcing instruments – as part of a comprehensive approach, are key to addressing traditional and emerging global threats and therefore assuring a secure world.



## TIMELINE OF EVENTS

**1954**

**May 7, 1954**

Vietnamese forces occupy the French command post at Dien Bien Phu and the French commander orders his troops to cease fire. The battle had lasted 55 days. Three thousand French troops were killed, 8,000 wounded. The Viet Minh suffered much worse, with 8,000 dead and 12,000 wounded, but the Vietnamese victory shattered France's resolve to carry on the war.



Vietnamese forces celebrate their victory over the French

**1959**

**During 1959**

A specialized North Vietnamese Army unit, Group 559, is formed to create a supply route from North Vietnam to Vietcong forces in South Vietnam. With the approval of Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia, Group 559 develops a primitive route along the Vietnamese/Cambodian border, with offshoots into Vietnam along its entire length. This eventually becomes known as the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

**1961**

**Late 1961**

President John F. Kennedy orders more help for the South Vietnamese government in its war against the Vietcong guerrillas. U.S. backing includes new equipment and more than 3,000 military advisors and support personnel.



President John F. Kennedy

**December 11, 1961**

American helicopters arrive at docks in South Vietnam along with 400 U.S. personnel, who will fly and maintain the aircraft.

**1962**

**January 12, 1962**

In Operation Chopper, helicopters flown by U.S. Army pilots ferry 1,000 South Vietnamese soldiers to sweep a NLF stronghold near Saigon. It marks America's first combat missions against the Vietcong.



U.S. Army helicopter on an Operation Chopper mission

## Early 1962

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Operation Ranchhand begins. The goal of Ranchhand is to clear vegetation alongside highways, making it more difficult for the Vietcong to conceal themselves for ambushes. As the war continues, the scope of Ranchhand increases. Vast tracts of forest are sprayed with "Agent Orange," an herbicide containing the deadly chemical Dioxin. Guerrilla trails and base areas are exposed, and crops that might feed Vietcong units are destroyed.

## 1963

### January 2, 1963

At the hamlet of Ap Bac, the Vietcong 514th Battalion and local guerrilla forces ambush the South Vietnamese Army's 7th division. For the first time, the Vietcong stand their ground against American machinery and South Vietnamese soldiers. Almost 400 South Vietnamese are killed or wounded. Three American advisors are slain.



The victory at Ap Bac raised morale and drove recruitment for the Vietcong

## 1964

### April - June 1964

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American air power in Southeast Asia is massively reinforced. Two aircraft carriers arrive off the Vietnamese coast prompted by a North Vietnamese offensive in Laos.

### July 30, 1964

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On this night, South Vietnamese commandos attack two small North Vietnamese islands in the Gulf of Tonkin. The U.S. destroyer Maddox, an electronic spy ship, is 123 miles south with orders to electronically simulate an air attack to draw North Vietnamese boats away from the commandos.

### August 4, 1964

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The captain of the U.S.S. Maddox reports that his vessel has been fired on and that an attack is imminent. Though he later says that no attack took place, six

hours after the initial report, a retaliation against North Vietnam is ordered by President Johnson. American jets bomb two naval bases, and destroy a major oil facility. Two U.S. planes are downed in the attack.

### August 7, 1964

The U.S. congress passes the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, giving President Johnson the power to take whatever actions he sees necessary to defend southeast Asia.



President Johnson signs the Resolution

### October 1964

China, North Vietnam's neighbor and ally, successfully tests an atomic bomb.

### November 1, 1964

Two days before the U.S. presidential election, Vietcong mortars shell Bien Hoa Air Base near Saigon. Four Americans are killed, 76 wounded. Five B-57 bombers are destroyed, and 15 are damaged.



American aircraft burn on the ground at Bien Hoa

## 1965

### January 1 - February 7, 1965

Vietcong forces mount a series of attacks across South Vietnam. They briefly seize control of Binh Gia, a village only 40 miles from Saigon. Two hundred South Vietnamese troops are killed near Binh Gia, along with five American advisors.



The South Vietnamese lost 200 men at Binh Gia

### February 7, 1965

A U.S. helicopter base and advisory compound in the central highlands of South Vietnam is attacked by NLF commandos. Nine Americans are killed and more than 70 are wounded. President Johnson immediately orders U.S. Navy fighter-bombers to attack military targets just inside North Vietnam.

### February 10, 1965

A Vietcong-placed bomb explodes in a hotel in Qui Nonh, killing 23 American servicemen.



One of the American dead is carried to a waiting transport

## February 13, 1965

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President Johnson authorizes Operation Rolling Thunder, a limited but long lasting bombing offensive. Its aim is to force North Vietnam to stop supporting Vietcong guerrillas in the South.

## March 2, 1965

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After a series of delays, the first bombing raids of Rolling Thunder are flown.

## April 3, 1965

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An American campaign against North Vietnam's transport system begins. In a month-long offensive, Navy and Air Force planes hit bridges, road and rail junctions, truck parks and supply depots.

## April 7, 1965

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The U.S. offers North Vietnam economic aid in exchange for peace, but the offer is summarily rejected. Two weeks later, President Johnson raises America's combat strength in Vietnam to more than 60,000 troops. Allied forces from Korea and Australia are added as a sign of international support.

## May 11, 1965

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Two and a half thousand Vietcong troops attack Song Be, a South Vietnamese provincial capital. After two days of fierce battles in and around the town, the Vietcong withdraw.

## June 10, 1965

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At Dong Xai, a South Vietnamese Army district headquarters and American Special Forces camp is overrun by a full Vietcong regiment. U.S. air attacks eventually drive the Vietcong away.

## June 27, 1965

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General William Westmoreland launches the first purely offensive operation by American ground forces in Vietnam, sweeping into NLF territory just northwest of Saigon.



General  
Westmoreland

## August 17, 1965

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After a deserter from the 1st Vietcong regiment reveals that an attack is imminent against the U.S. Marine base at Chu Lai, the American army launches Operation Starlite. In this, the first major battle of the Vietnam War, the United States scores a resounding victory. Ground forces, artillery from Chu Lai, ships and air support combine to kill nearly 700 Vietcong soldiers. U.S. forces sustain 45 dead and more than 200 wounded.

### **September - October 1965**

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After the North Vietnamese Army attacks a Special Forces camp at Plei Mei, the U.S. 1st Air Cavalry is deployed against enemy regiments that identified in the vicinity of the camp. The result is the battle of the Ia Drang. For 35 days, the division pursues and fights the 32d, 33d, and 66th North Vietnamese Regiments until the enemy, suffering heavy casualties, returns to bases in Cambodia.

### **November 17, 1965**

Elements of the 66th North Vietnamese Regiment moving east toward Plei Mei encounter and ambush an American battalion. Neither reinforcements nor effective firepower can be brought in. When fighting ends that night, 60 percent of the Americans were casualties, and almost one of every three soldiers in the battalion had been killed.

## **Background of the Vietnam War**

### **Colonial Past of Vietnam**

The Treaty of Hué, concluded in 1884, formed the basis for French colonial rule in Vietnam for the coming seven decades. In spite of military resistance, by 1888 the area of the current day nations of Cambodia and Vietnam was made into the colony of French Indochina (Laos was added later). Various Vietnamese opposition movements to French rule existed during this period, such as the Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang who staged the failed Yen Bai mutiny in 1930, but none were ultimately as successful as the Viet Minh common front, which was founded in 1941, controlled by the Indochinese Communist Party, and funded by the U.S. and the Chinese Nationalist Party in its fight against Japanese occupation.

During World War II, the French were defeated by the Germans in 1940. For French Indochina, this meant that the colonial authorities became Vichy French, allies of the German-Italian Axis powers. In turn this meant that the French collaborated with the Japanese forces after their invasion of French Indochina during 1940. The French continued to run affairs in the colony, but ultimate power resided in the hands of the Japanese. The Viet Minh was founded as a league for independence from France, but also opposed Japanese occupation in 1945 for the same reason.

The U.S. and Chinese Nationalist Party supported them in the fight against the Japanese. Viet Minh leader Ho Chi Minh was suspected of being a communist and jailed for a year by the Chinese

Nationalist Party. Double occupation by France and Japan continued until the German forces were expelled from France and the French Indochina colonial authorities started holding secret talks with the Free French. Fearing that they could no longer trust the French authorities, the Japanese army interned them all on 9 March 1945 and created a puppet state instead, the Empire of Vietnam, under Bảo Đại.

On 22 August 1945, following the Japanese surrender OSS agents Archimedes Patti and Carleton B. Swift Jr. arrived in Hanoi on a mercy mission to liberate allied POWs and were accompanied by Jean Sainteny a French government official. The Japanese forces informally surrendered (the official surrender took place on 2 Sep 1945 in Tokyo Bay) but being the only force capable of maintaining law and order the Japanese Imperial Army remained in power while keeping French colonial troops and Sainteny detained.

## **August Revolution**

During August, the Japanese forces allowed the Việt Minh and other nationalist groups to take over public buildings and weapons without resistance, which began the August Revolution. OSS officers met repeatedly with Ho Chi Minh and other Viet Minh officers during this period and on 2 September 1945 Ho Chi Minh declared the independent Democratic Republic of Vietnam before a crowd of 500,000 in Hanoi. The Viet Minh grasped power across Vietnam in the August Revolution, largely supported by the Vietnamese population. However, the major allied victors of World War II, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the Soviet Union, all agreed the area belonged to the French. As the French did not have the ships, weapons, or soldiers to immediately retake Vietnam, the major powers came to an agreement that British troops would occupy the south while Nationalist Chinese forces would move in from the north. Nationalist Chinese troops entered the country to disarm Japanese troops north of the 16th parallel on 14 September 1945.

## **Return of French**

On the urging of the Soviet Union, Ho Chi Minh initially attempted to negotiate with the French, who were slowly re-establishing their control across the area. In January 1946, the Viet Minh won elections across central and northern Vietnam.

The war spread to Laos and Cambodia, where Communists organized the Pathet Lao and the Khmer Serei, both of which were modelled on the Viet Minh. Globally, the Cold War began in earnest, which meant that the understanding that existed between the Western powers and the Soviet Union during World War II disintegrated. The Viet Minh fight was hampered by a lack of weapons; this situation changed by 1949 when the Chinese Communists had largely won the Chinese Civil War and were free to provide arms to their Vietnamese allies.

In January 1950, the communist nations, led by the People's Republic of China (PRC), recognized the Viet Minh's Democratic Republic of Vietnam, based in Hanoi, as the government of Vietnam, while non-communist nations recognized the French-backed State of Vietnam in Saigon, led by former Emperor Bảo Đại, as the Vietnamese government the following month. The outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950 convinced many Washington policymakers that the war in Indochina was an example of communist expansionism directed by the Kremlin. PRC military advisors began assisting the Viet Minh in July of 1950.

PRC weapons, expertise, and laborers transformed the Viet Minh from a guerrilla force into a regular army. In September of 1950, the United States created a Military Assistance and Advisory Group (MAAG) to screen French requests for aid, advise on strategy, and train Vietnamese soldiers. By 1954,

the United States had supplied 300,000 small arms and spent US\$1 billion in support of the French military effort, shouldering 80 percent of the cost of the war. There were also alleged talks between the French and Americans in which the possible use of three tactical nuclear weapons was considered.

One version of the plan for the proposed Operation Vulture envisioned sending 60 B-29s from U.S. bases in the region, supported by as many as 150 fighters launched from U.S. Seventh Fleet carriers, to bomb Viet Minh commander Vo Nguyen Giap's positions. The plan included an option to use up to three atomic weapons on the Viet Minh positions. Admiral Arthur W. Radford, Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, gave this nuclear option his backing. U.S. B-29s, B-36s, and B-47s could have executed a nuclear strike, as could carrier aircraft from the Seventh Fleet.

The Battle of Dien Bien Phu marked the end of French involvement in Indochina. Giap's Viet Minh forces handed the French a stunning military defeat, and on 7 May 1954, the French Union garrison surrendered. Of the 12,000 French prisoners taken by the Viet Minh, only 3,000 survived. At the Geneva Conference, the French negotiated a ceasefire agreement with the Viet Minh, and independence was granted to Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam.

## **Geneva Accords**

The battle prodded negotiators at the Geneva Conference to produce the final Geneva Accords in July 1954. The accords established the 17th parallel as a temporary demarcation line separating the military forces of the French and the Viet Minh. North of the line was the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, or North Vietnam, which had waged a successful eight year struggle against the French. The North was under the full control of the Worker's Party, or Vietnamese Communist Party, led by Ho Chi Minh; its capital was Hanoi. In the South the French transferred most of their authority to the State of Vietnam, which had its capital at Saigon and was nominally under the authority of the former Vietnamese emperor, Bao Dai. Within 300 days of the signing of the accords, a demilitarized zone, or DMZ, was to be created by mutual withdrawal of forces north and south of the 17th parallel, and the transfer of any civilians who wished to leave either side was to be completed. Nationwide elections to decide the future of Vietnam, North and South, were to be held in 1956.

But it were these elections that the United States of America decided to stall in order to prevent a communist takeover in Vietnam and unleashing the domino effect in the region. Accepting the de facto partition of Vietnam as unavoidable but still pledging to halt the spread of communism in Asia, U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower began a crash program of assistance to the State of Vietnam—or South Vietnam, as it was invariably called. At the same time, Viet Minh leaders, confidently expecting political disarray and unrest in the South, retained many of their political operatives and propagandists below the 17th parallel even as they withdrew their military forces to the North.

## **Key parties involved**

### **North Vietnam**

When Germany defeated France in 1940, during World War II, Ho Chi Minh saw it as an opportunity for the Vietnamese nationalist cause and in January 1941 and organized the Viet Minh, or League for the Independence of Vietnam. Forced to seek China's aid for the new organization, Ho was imprisoned for 18 months by Chiang Kai-Shek's anti-Communist government. With the Allied victory in 1945,

Japanese forces withdrew from Vietnam, leaving the French-educated Emperor Bao Dai in control of an independent Vietnam. Viet Minh forces seized the northern city of Hanoi and declared a Democratic State of Vietnam (known commonly as North Vietnam) with Ho Chi Minh as president who went on to become a symbol of Vietnam's struggle for unification during a long and costly conflict with the strongly anti-Communist regime in South Vietnam and its powerful ally, the United States.

During the First Indochina War, the French returned Bao Dai to power and set up the state of Vietnam (South Vietnam) in July 1949, with Saigon as its capital. Armed conflict between the two states continued until a decisive battle at Dien Bien Phu ended in French defeat by Viet Minh forces. The subsequent treaty negotiations at Geneva partitioned Indochina and called for elections for reunification in 1956.

Backed by the United States, the strongly anti-Communist South Vietnamese government of Ngo Dinh Diem refused to support the Geneva accords, and put off elections indefinitely. In 1959, armed conflict broke out again, as Communist guerrillas known as the Viet Cong began launching attacks on targets (including U.S. military installations) in South Vietnam. The Viet Cong appealed to North Vietnam for help, and that July the central committee of Ho's Lao Dong (Worker's Party) voted to link the establishment of socialism in the North to the cause of unification with the South.

The U.S. continued to increase its support of South Vietnam, sending economic aid and—beginning in December 1961—military troops. American air strikes against North Vietnam began in 1965, and in July 1966, Ho sent a message to the country's people that “nothing is as dear to the heart of the Vietnamese as independence and liberation.” This became the motto of the North Vietnamese cause.

### **South Vietnam**

Committed to the logic of the domino theory, U.S. leaders sought to forestall the elections in Vietnam. The United States thus threw its support behind the politician Ngo Dinh Diem, a Vietnamese nationalist and Catholic who emphasized Confucian values of loyalty and tradition and opposed the overthrow of old Vietnamese social structures—a move that the revolutionary Vietnamese Communists advocated.

He faced opposition not only from the communist regime in the North but also from the Viet Minh's stay-behind political agents, armed religious sects in the South, and even subversive elements in his own army. Yet Diem had the full support of U.S. military advisers, who trained and reequipped his army along American lines and foiled coup plots by dissident officers. Operatives of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) bought off or intimidated Diem's domestic opposition, and U.S. aid agencies helped him to keep his economy afloat and to resettle some 900,000 refugees who had fled the communist North.

By late 1955 Diem had consolidated his power in the South, defeating the remaining sect forces and arresting communist operatives who had surfaced in considerable numbers to prepare for the anticipated elections. With U.S. support, Diem rejected the prospect of Vietnam-wide elections as specified by the Geneva Accords and instead held a referendum limited to the southern half of the country. Using fraud and intimidation, Diem won over 98 percent of the vote, removed the feeble Bao Dai from power, and proclaimed South Vietnam to be the Republic of Vietnam (RVN). The North, not ready to start a new war and unable to induce its Chinese or Russian allies to act, could do little. A CIA

operative working in Saigon, Edward Lansdale, was installed as an advisor to Diem. The United States then helped Diem organize the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) to control his new state.

Beneath the outward success of the Diem regime, however, lay fatal problems. Diem was a poor administrator who refused to delegate authority, and he was pathologically suspicious of anyone who was not a member of his family. His brother and close confidant, Ngo Dinh Nhu, controlled an extensive system of extortion, payoffs, and influence peddling through a secret network called the Can Lao, which had clandestine members in all government bureaus and military units as well as schools, newspapers, and businesses. In the countryside, ambitious programs of social and economic reform had been allowed to languish while many local officials and police engaged in extortion, bribery, and theft of government property. That many of these officials were, like Diem himself, northerners and Roman Catholics further alienated them from the local people .

## **Viet Cong**

The Viet Cong, or National Liberation Front (NLF), was a political organization and army in South Vietnam and Cambodia that fought the United States and South Vietnamese governments during the Vietnam War (1959–1975), and emerged on the winning side. It had both guerrilla and regular army units, as well as a network of cadres who organized peasants in the territory it controlled. Many soldiers were recruited in South Vietnam, but others were attached to the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN), the regular North Vietnamese army. During the war, communists and anti-war spokesmen insisted the Viet Cong was an insurgency indigenous to the South, while the U.S. and South Vietnamese governments portrayed the group as a tool of Hanoi. Although the terminology distinguishes northerners from the southerners, communist forces were under a single command structure set up in 1958.

Diem's unexpected offensive against communist political organizers and propagandists in the countryside in 1955 had resulted in the arrest of thousands and in the temporary disorganization of the communists' infrastructure. By 1957, however, the communists, now called the Viet Cong, had begun a program of terrorism and assassination against government officials and functionaries. The Viet Cong's ranks were soon swelled by many noncommunist Vietnamese who had been alienated by the corruption and intimidation of local officials. Beginning in the spring of 1959, armed bands of Viet Cong were occasionally engaging units of the South Vietnamese army in regular firefights. By that time the Central Committee of the Vietnamese Communist Party, meeting in Hanoi, had endorsed a resolution calling for the use of armed force to overthrow the Diem government. Southerners specially trained in the North as insurgents were infiltrated back into the South along with arms and equipment.

Despite its American training and weapons, the Army of the Republic of Vietnam, usually called the ARVN, was in many ways ill-adapted to meet the insurgency of the Viet Cong, or VC. The higher ranks of the army were also thoroughly penetrated by Viet Cong agents, who held positions varying from drivers, clerks, and radio operators to senior headquarters officers. With its heavy American-style equipment, the ARVN was principally a road-bound force not well configured to pursuing VC units in swamps or jungles. At the end of 1960 the communists in the South announced the formation of the National Liberation Front (NLF), which was designed to serve as the political arm of the Viet Cong and also as a broad-based organization for all those who desired an end to the Diem regime.

- The Front's regular army, usually referred to as the "main force" by the Americans, was much smaller than Diem's army, but it was only one component of the Viet Cong's so-called People's Liberation Armed Forces (PLAF).
- At the base of the PLAF were village guerrilla units, made up of part-time combatants who lived at home and worked at their regular occupations during the day.
- Their function was to persuade or intimidate their neighbours into supporting the NLF, to protect its political apparatus, and to harass the government, police, and security forces with booby traps, raids, kidnappings, and murders.
- The guerrilla forces also served as a recruiting agency and source of manpower for the other echelons of the PLAF.
- Above the guerrillas were the local or regional forces, full-time soldiers organized in platoon- or company-sized units who operated within the bounds of a province or region.
- Based in remote jungles, swamps, or mountainous areas, they could operate throughout a province (in the case of regional forces) or even the country (in the case of the main force). When necessary, the full-time forces might also reinforce a guerrilla unit or several units for some special operation.

### **People's Republic of China**

The Chinese had a history of helping the Vietnamese with the April of 1950 when PRC began forming the Chinese Military Advisory Group (CMAG) in order to provide military assistance to the Vietnamese forces fighting the French.

In 1954, with the ending of the First Vietnam War, and the Big Power Geneva conference, Vietnam would be split into two nations, North and South Vietnam. In the north Ho and the party's attention would be focused; at least for several years, on consolidating power and economic development. The inevitable Communist collectivization and tribunals began with confiscations, arrests, localized uprisings and the execution of 15,000 Vietnamese before order could be restored by the PAVN. The CMAG returns to China in September of 1955 having accomplished its mission, quite possibly one of the most successful advisory missions ever. China continued; however, to provide substantial levels of military aid for North Vietnam to the tune of \$106 million from 1955 to 1963, effectively giving the North the resources needed to begin the insurgency in the South. Thus, the North Vietnamese formed the National Liberation Front, NLF, in December of 1960 and the People's Liberation Armed Forces, PLAF, the following year in 1961. Both the NLF and PLAF would be more commonly referred to as the Viet Cong, or Vietnamese Communists.

A campaign of terror and assassination against the South Vietnamese government soon began as thousands of officials would be killed or kidnapped by Viet Cong insurgents. The United States would not sit idly by during this period but began an ambitious program of military aid to the fragile government of South Vietnam. The stage was set, for a second war in Vietnam which would be, once again, fought largely with Chinese military aid.

### **United States**

## Cold War

U.S. involvement in Vietnam occurred within and because of the larger context of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. Immediately after World War II, tensions between the United States and USSR escalated, as Soviet forces occupied nearly all of Eastern Europe and set up Communist governments there as a buffer between the Soviet Union and the capitalist West. In 1946,

British prime minister Winston Churchill famously railed against the USSR in his “iron curtain” speech, which lamented the sudden wall of secrecy that had gone up between Eastern and Western Europe. The Policy of Containment In 1947, U.S. State Department analyst George F. Kennan argued that the USSR was not likely to make any rash moves and that the United States could keep Communism from spreading simply by deterring Soviet expansion at critical points, mostly in Europe, over the long term. This policy of containment became extraordinarily influential in the U.S. government and became the basis of U.S. policy for much of the Cold War. The escalation and paranoia of the United States can be viewed in three events in 1948 and 1949 brought the American fear of Communism to a fever pitch.

- Berlin Wall
- USSR's first atomic bomb testing
- Mao Zedong coming to power in China First, the USSR, which controlled East Germany, attempted to drive U.S., British, and French forces out of West Berlin by cutting off all outside access to the city. The United States responded to this blockade with the Berlin airlift over the winter of 1948–1949, dropping crucial supplies into West Berlin until the Soviet Union relented. Then, in August 1949, the USSR successfully tested its first atomic bomb. Finally, in October 1949, after years of civil war, the Nationalist government of China fell to the Communist forces of Mao Zedong. The combined force of these three events plunged the United States into a deep paranoia and fear that Communists would take over the world and might even be plotting secret operations in the United States.

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