

Causes of the Vietnam War



OBJECTIVES

- Describe and evaluate the events that led to the war between North Vietnam and South Vietnam.
- Identify and explain the foreign policy of the United States at this time, and how it relates to the policies of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson.
- Describe how President Johnson changed the course of the war.

Where is Vietnam?



Vietnamese Nationalism

Nationalism-

- DEFINITION: "...devotion to one's own nation and its interests over those of all other nations."
- A doctrine
- Belief that nationality is the most important aspect of one's identity

Vietnamese Nationalism:

- Extended back 2000 years

Resisting neighboring China's almost constant invasions

- 1800's French Colonialism

Vietnam under control of France:

- Oppression
- White rulers



Ho Chi Minh

- Educated in France
 - Inspired by French Revolution, American Revolution
- Nationalist
- Communist
- Led the Vietnamese independence movement after WWII
 - Was the head of the League for the Independence of Vietnam (*Vietminh*)
- Aroused his people's nationalism in order to repel French
- Viewed by U.S. as a communist, therefore a threat
- Eventual leader of communist North Vietnam (Socialist Republic of Vietnam)



French Indochina War (1946-1954)

- White Colonialism vs. Vietnamese Nationalism
- France vs. Viet Minh (led by Ho Chi Minh)
- Called the dirty war back in France
- Most of fighting took place in North Vietnam
- Culminated in the Battle of Dien Bien Phu
- War ended with the Geneva Accords
- 400,000 deaths



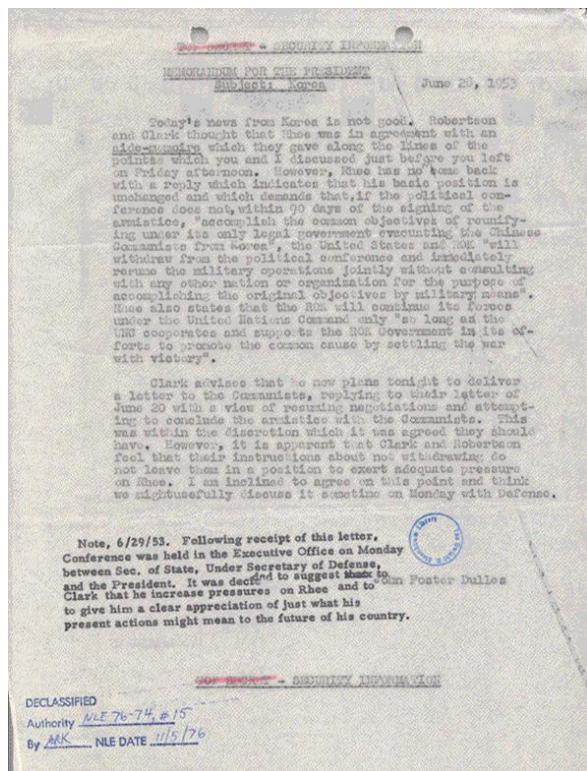
A French Foreign Legion unit patrols in a communist controlled area. The tank was supplied by the United States.

U.S. Involvement pt. 1

- United States originally supported Ho Chi Minh
 - 1945, Ho Chi Minh appealed to U.S. for help
 - U.S. agreed to help UNTIL communist China and USSR officially recognized Minh's government
 - U.S. had to withdraw support and began supporting with in the struggle with Vietminh
 - 80% of the French war effort provided by the U.S.



1953 State Dept. Memo



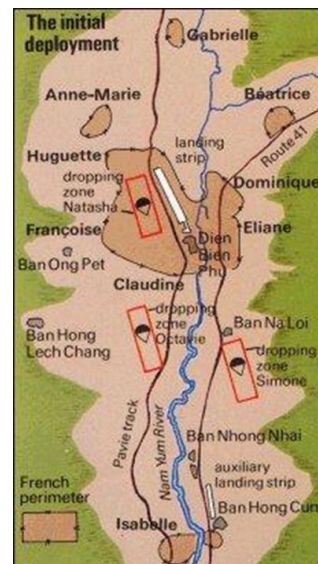
If France loses, it "...would mean the eventual loss to Communism not only of Indochina but of the whole of SE Asia...If the French actually decided to withdraw, the U.S. would have to consider more seriously whether to take over in the area."

Dien Bien Phu

- March – May 1954
- Massive French defeat that effectively ended the war

Dien Bien Phu:

- Air supply base deep in hills of Vietnam
- French supplies brought in by air
- Viet Minh corralled the French forces at the air base and routed the French army



Geneva Convention

- Met in Geneva, Switzerland 9 April – July 1954: Discussed the situation in Vietnam
 - Representatives of Ho Chi Minh, Vietnamese emperor Bo Dai, Cambodia, Laos, France, United States, Soviet Union, China, Britain
- Results of Geneva Convention:
 1. Vietnam was divided into two separate nations
 - South Vietnam
 - North Vietnam
 2. Elections to be held in 1955 to determine future direction of S. Vietnam
 3. Formation of Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) – alliance against communism





N. Vietnam



Civil War



S. Vietnam



Ngô Đình Diem



South Vietnamese Elections

As a result of Geneva Convention, elections must be held to determine future of South Vietnam - 1955

Migrations South and North

- 450,000 mostly catholic Vietnamese move south
- 52,000 communist supporters move north

Communists urged to stay in the south to influence the upcoming vote

U.S. begins to get involved by influencing elections



U.S. Involvement pt. 2

- U.S. dabbles in the South Vietnamese elections
 - Diem backed by United States
 - Seen by U.S. government as capable leader
- U.S. sent Ngo Dinh Diem to Vietnam in 1954 to become Prime Minister
 - 1955 elections
 - Diem's brother organized and ran the elections
 - Lots and lots and lots and lots of election fraud
- CIA sent advisor Edward Lansdale to Vietnam
 - Along with U.S. government, believed that Diem would win a free election
 - American officials said 60% - 70% of unhindered vote would go to Diem
 - Lansdale warned Diem against fraud:
 - *"While I'm away I don't want to suddenly read that you have won by 99.99% . I would know that it's rigged then."*
 - *Diem recorded 98.2%*
 - 605,025 votes for Diem in Saigon where only 450,000 were registered



Ngo Dinh Diem

- Set up as leader (Prime Minister) of S. Vietnam
- Backed by United States government
- Nationalist
- Catholic - persecuted non-Catholics (Buddhists)
- Anti-Communist
- 1956 Diem began his rule
 - Authoritarian and corrupt
 - Persecutes those who oppose him
 - Vietcong – communist terrorists spring up in the south
- Two attempts to be overthrown
 - 1960 coup attempt
 - 1962 palace bombing
 - Nov. 2, 1963 is overthrown



What about the Vietnam people?

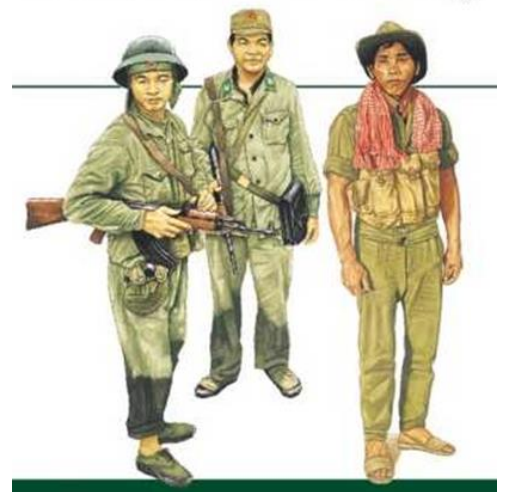
1. Still nationalistic
 - Nationalism starting to become synonymous with communism
 - Want freedom
 - Diem was NOT freedom
 - More start to lean toward communism as a result
2. Kicked French out
 - French were Catholic
 - Diem was Catholic
 - Vietnamese still think France is in control
 - U.S. steps in – Vietnamese think “another white power to control us”
3. The whole time, Ho Ch Minh is up in N. Vietnam, in control of communist government
 - Has his hands in the affairs of S. Vietnam
 - Whispering in the ears of the people



Viet Cong

- *Viet Cong*...communist guerrillas using terrorist tactics in South Vietnam during the Vietnam War
 - *guerrilla* - a member of a small group of fighters who make sudden attacks on an enemy
 - Gained control of more territory and earned the loyalty of an increasing number of South Vietnamese
 - Aided by Ho Chi Minh and North Vietnam throughout the war
 - National Liberation Front (NLF) - Vietcong's political name.

The NVA and Viet Cong



Domino Theory

- Originated in 1950
- If one country falls to communism then the countries around it are immediately threatened, and they will fall too.
 - Must keep the first from falling
 - It was the U.S.'s job to stop them.
- Why Vietnam?
 - Neighboring China is communist
 - Indochina the source of rice, natural rubber, tin
 - Japan dependent on Vietnamese rice
 - Communism might seep over to Japan if goods it imports are controlled by communist nation



John F. Kennedy

- Foreign policy
 - Followed Eisenhower's lead
 - In 1960, Eisenhower had sent hundreds of military advisors to help South Vietnam against the North. (*after the French left*)
 - Used limited military action against Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam
- CIA
- enacted policies providing political, economic, and military support for the unstable French-installed S. Vietnamese government
- Sent 16,000 more military advisers to S. Vietnam
 - Approved the removal of Diem as head of S. Vietnam – did we assassinate Diem?

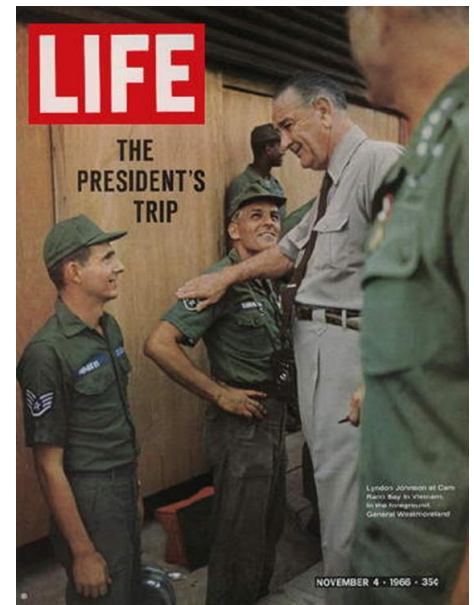


Lyndon B. Johnson

- Became president after JFK's assassination
- Escalated U.S. involvement in Vietnam
 - 16,000 soldiers in 1963
 - 550,000 soldiers in 1968
- Firmly believed in the "Domino Theory"
 - LBJ's version of containment policy required America to make a serious effort to stop all Communist expansion

"If we allow Vietnam to fall, tomorrow we'll be fighting in Hawaii, and next week in San Francisco."

"I am not going to lose Vietnam. I am not going to be the President who saw Southeast Asia go the way China went."



Intensifying the War

- February 1965...a V.C. attack killed 8 American soldiers and wounded 126
 - Pres. Johnson responded by authorizing the bombing of North Vietnam
 - He then sent more soldiers over to Vietnam to aid in securing American bases and airfields
 - 1965...25,000 American combat troops were in Vietnam
 - By the end of the year, there were 184,000 troops
- There was intense fighting between the V.C. and the United States
 - 1966...385,000 troops stationed in Vietnam
 - By 1968 there were 538,000



U.S. Involvement pt. 3

- United States determined to maintain freedom – Do whatever it takes to stop the spread of Communism
- Escalation of major combat operations
 - Battle of Ia Drang Valley (as seen in the film *We Were Soldiers*)
 - First major battle of the Vietnam War
 - Nov. 14 – 18, 1965

