

# The War in Vietnam

A Timeline of Significant Events

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# A controversial conflict...

- ▶ The War in Vietnam is one of the most controversial topics in recent American history.
- ▶ There are many questions that arise regarding it.

Why did we get involved in Vietnam?

What were our goals?

Did we win?

Are there lessons that can be applied today?

- ▶ This presentation will provide an overall view of the war, and help answer some of these questions.



# The Vietnam War

## Part I: A Background to Conflict



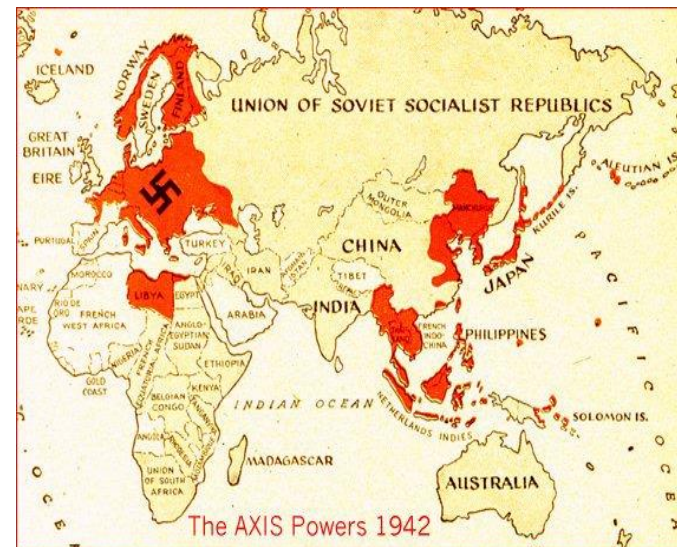
# 1880s-1940: A French Colony

- Vietnam was claimed by France as a colony in the 1800s.
- It supplied the French with natural resources and access to Asian trade



# 1941-1945: occupied by Japan

- In 1940, the Japanese invaded and occupied Vietnam.
- The allied countries worked with the native Vietnamese in an effort to defeat Japan.
- They succeeded, but the Vietnamese expected independence.



# 1954 Dien Bien Phu



- The French reoccupied Vietnam after 1945. Not wanting to become an imperial colony again, the “**Vietminh**,” led by **Ho Chi Minh**, fought them for independence.
- They defeated the French at the battle of **Dien Bien Phu**.
- The French left Vietnam.



# 1954 Geneva Accords

- An international conference attempted to deal w/ the situation in S-E Asia after the departure of the French.
- Results:
  - Vietnam was temporarily divided at the 17th parallel
  - North Vietnam was communist controlled by Vietminh
  - South Vietnam was backed by US and controlled by remnants of the French-controlled authority under Ngo Dinh Diem.
  - Elections were to be held in two years to unite the country.

# 1956 All-Vietnam elections



- The elections didn't take place, because Diem didn't think he could defeat Ho Chi Minh. The National Liberation Front (NLF), otherwise known as **Vietcong** formed to overthrow Diem, and was aided by the Vietminh beginning in 1960.

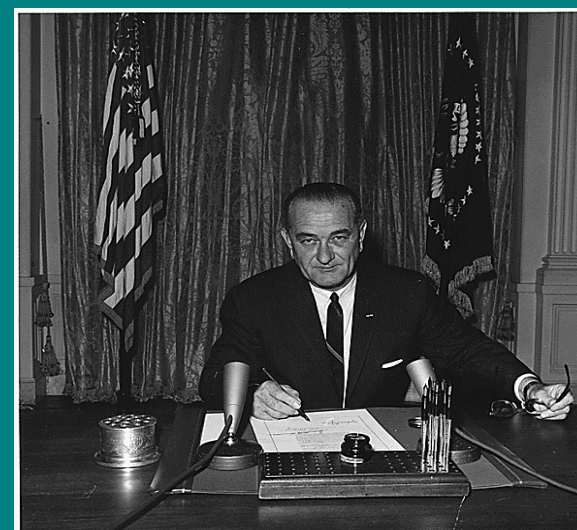
# 1963 Kennedy and “containment”

- 16,000 advisors were in the south by 1963, and authorized to combat VC directly.
- Kennedy wanted to buttress his anti-communist position after the Bay of Pigs and the Berlin Wall, and didn't want South Vietnam to fall to the communists because he thought other countries would follow (**domino theory**).



# 1964 Gulf of Tonkin Resolution

- The US accused N Vietnam of attacking navy ships in the Gulf of Tonkin.
- Congress passed a resolution that would allow US forces to defend themselves “by whatever means are necessary.”
- This led to an undeclared war between the United States and North Vietnam.



# Part II: The US in Vietnam



# 1965: 1st Combat troops in Vietnam

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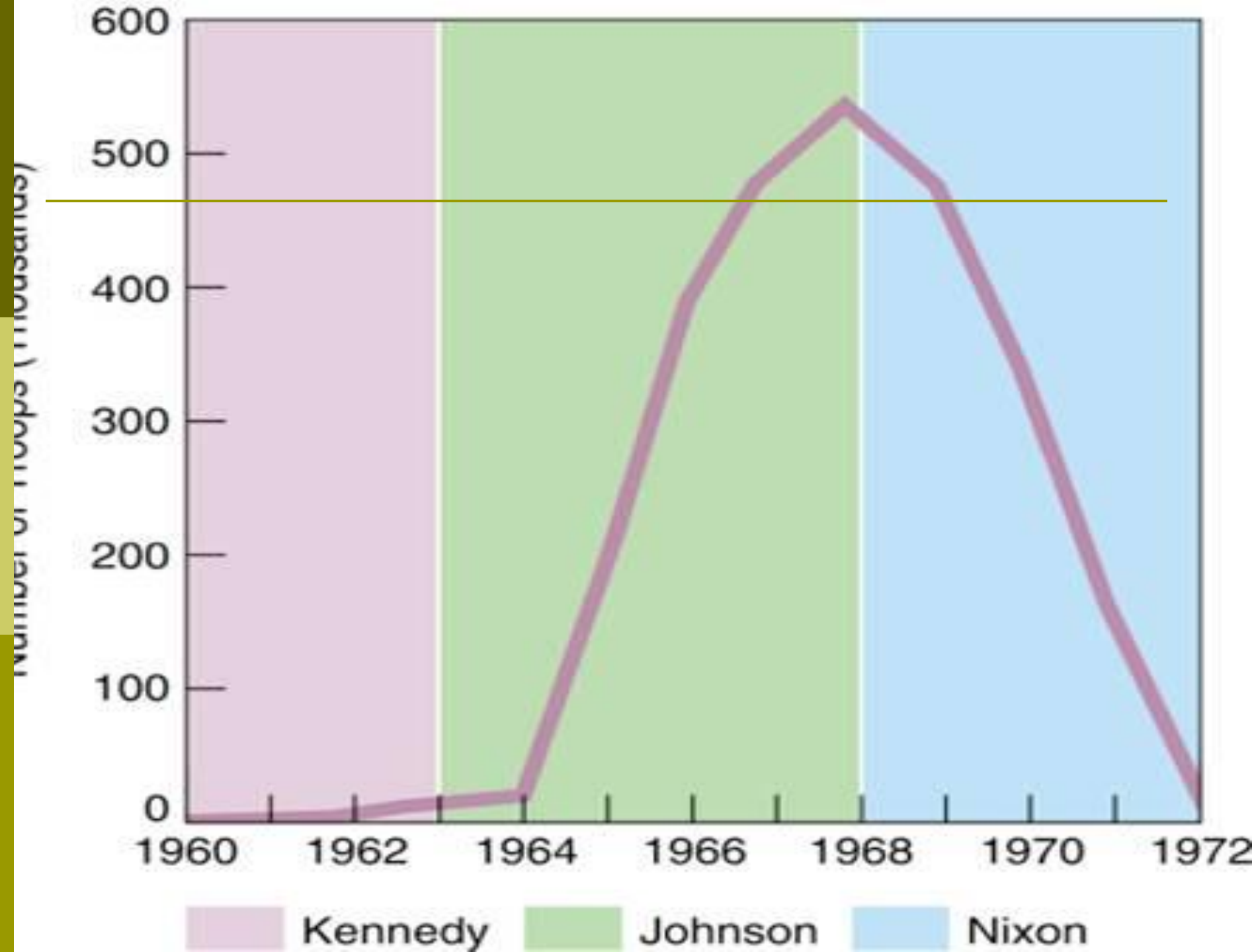
- ❑ Advisors now assume offensive operations against NVA (North Vietnamese Army) and VC (Vietcong guerrillas in the South).
- ❑ 1st bombing of the North; 1st search-and-destroy missions.

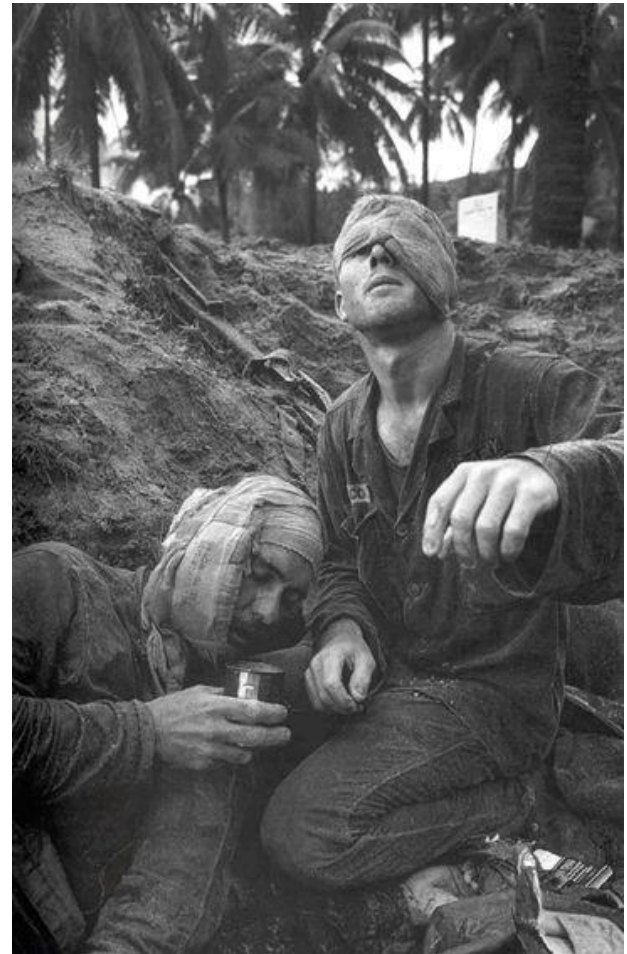


# 1966-1968: The War Intensifies

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- **Escalation** of US presence/operations in Vietnam occurs over the next three years.





# 1968: The Tet Offensive

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- US government had been telling Americans that the war would end soon.
- On the **Vietnamese New Year holiday of Tet**, the communists attacked over 100 cities, bases, and villages at once.
- Fighting lasted over a month.

Though the Americans defeated the communists militarily, the war was widely viewed at home as un-winnable, and many people believe the government had been lying to the public.

The anti-war movement escalated.





NATIONAL ARCHIVES



# 1969: “Vietnamization” of war begins

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- Richard Nixon was elected President and promised to get the US out of the war by turning the war back over to the South Vietnamese.
- He called this “**Vietnamization**”. This means training and supplying South Vietnamese troops, while withdrawing Americans a little at a time.

# 1970 US invades Cambodia



**In order to give the South a chance once we are gone, Nixon orders troops to invade neighboring Cambodia in order to shut down the Ho Chi Minh Trail.**

**This is very controversial, and some see it as a widening of the war.**



# 1970: The Kent State Massacre

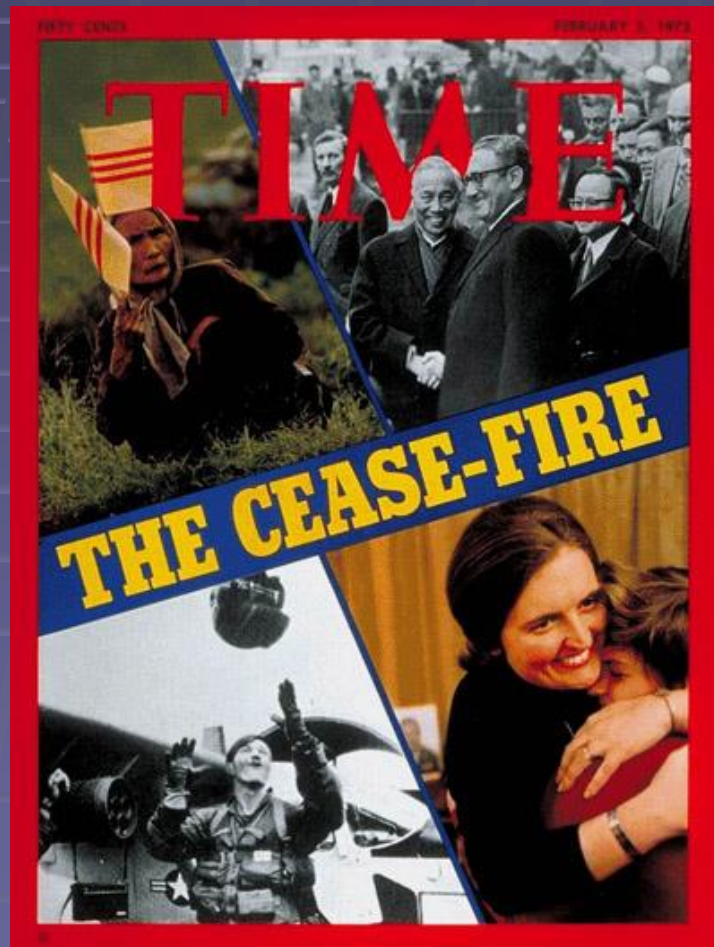
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- ❑ Protests erupt around the US.
- ❑ One of these is at Kent State University, where Ohio National Guard troops fired on student demonstrators.

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- Many people saw this as evidence that things were out of control, and pressure built even more for the US to get out of Vietnam.

# Part III: The Cease Fire and After



# 1970: Secret Peace Talks begin

- Nixon sent Henry Kissinger to meet with representatives of North Vietnam starting in February of 1970.
- The North Vietnamese were intractable during negotiations



# 1972: The Christmas Bombing



- To "convince" the communists to negotiate, Nixon authorized a massive aerial bombing campaign.
- US planes bombed North Vietnam for 12 days straight in December of 1972.

# 1973 Cease-fire signed

- Nixon used the stick (bombings) and the carrot (promised financial aid of \$7.5B) to achieve what he called “Peace with Honor”
- In January, North Vietnam agreed to a cease-fire, and promised to not invade the South but allow for elections.
- The United States withdrew all troops from the country, but promised it would respond strongly (more bombings) if North Vietnam broke the pact.

# 1975 South Vietnam Surrenders

- The war between North and South Vietnam continued for two years after the cease-fire with the US.
- ARVN forces collapsed, and refugees poured into **Saigon**. In April, the communists took over the entire country. Saigon was renamed **Ho Chi Minh City**.





Vietnam was unified under  
communism.



**What were the consequences  
of the War in Vietnam?**

# Casualties



The losses caused by the war in Vietnam were significant:

- 58,000 + Americans dead, 300,000 wounded, 2,300 missing
- 185,000 ARVN dead
- ½ million South Vietnamese civilians dead (estimated)
- 1 million NVA and VC dead (estimated)

# Further Statistics:

879,000 Vietnamese children were orphaned and 181,000 civilians were disabled by the war.

In addition, an estimated two million people fled war-torn Southeast Asia in the years following the war – 730,000 of which settled in the United States

# Vietnam Veterans



One of the most tragic legacies of Vietnam is the manner in which soldiers who served returned to the United States.

# A national tragedy:

- Improved medical technology saved many soldiers who might have died in previous conflicts – causing a **huge number of paralyzed and disabled veterans**.
- **No “victory parades”** for Vietnam – many people wanted to forget the conflict.
- In addition, **drug addiction** caused by habits picked up in Vietnam was a major problem
- As was a **high rate of cancer** among veterans exposed to chemicals such as “Agent Orange”

# The “Domino Theory” proved and disproved



The **Domino Theory** – the belief that if **Vietnam fell to communists** the **whole of Southeast Asia would – did not come to pass** as some expected.



Neighboring **Laos and Cambodia DID become communist**

**but Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia did not.**

In addition, the communist governments of the region began to quarrel among themselves – disproving the idea of a strong “International brotherhood” of communists.

# A collapse of faith in government...

**Many Americans lost faith in their government as a result of what occurred during the war.**

Tet, the Pentagon Papers, the My Lai Massacre, and the Kent State Massacre are some contributing factors.



The result is that people have become increasingly distrustful of government intentions and actions – and remain so today.

# Congress passed the War Powers Act

*was a US law designed to constrain the President in his war-making powers independent of Congress.*

Enacted over the veto of President Nixon, it provides that Congress should be informed within 48 hours of any overseas military activity.

Congress should endorse any military action overseas by the USA within 60 days, after which it may order withdrawal without the option of a presidential veto.



The War Powers Act demonstrates the problems arising from the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, and is designed so that “war declaration” return to the control of Congress.

# The Price Tag



- The Vietnam War cost America over \$150 billion.
- This added to the national debt and fueled inflation.
- The war consumed funding that might otherwise have been used for social and domestic programs.

# The Memorial

Maya Ying Lin, a Chinese-American architecture student at Yale, designed the memorial that was to become a symbol of the Vietnam War.



## **Vietnam Veterans Memorial**

**It is a huge black granite wall on which are the names of all those who died in Vietnam.**



# A long legacy...

- The Vietnam War has shaped American foreign policy and the manner in which average Americans view the government ever since.

What lessons are there for us to learn from the American experience in Vietnam?