

Geneva Conference, 1954:

- *May 1954: after French govt and public lost interest in retaining Vietnam as a colony as the cost outweighed the benefits, an international conference commenced → Viet Minh demanded the recognition of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and removal of French troops, where Vietnam was then divided into 2 along the 17th parallel*
 - *Part of the agreement was that elections would be held by 1956 to establish a single govt for a unified Vietnam*

North Vietnam in 1950s

- *After Geneva Conference: Ho worked fast to consolidate his hold on NV*
 - *Thousands fled from NV early on, but at the same time many Viet Minh soldiers and supporters also fled northwards → strengthening the regime as it got rid of potential opponents*
- *Ho also had much support from NV*
 - *He was recognised as a great leader who fought the Japanese invaders and the French + introduced land reforms which ensured land was confiscated from larger landowners and redistributed to peasant farmers → however this led to decline in agricultural output and later on, Famines*
- *To ensure (political) stability of the govt, NV was ruthless in dealing with opponents*
 - *When faced with violent resistance from large landowners during land redistribution → thousands ended up being executed*

South Vietnam in 1950s

- *End of Geneva Conference: Diem was the PM of SV*
 - *He was an anti-communist + prepared to imprison/exile communists + a patriot who hoped to modernise Vietnamese economy and society to strengthen the country against interference by foreign powers, so he introduced modernisation programmes → However his regime proved to be increasingly unpopular bc of his authoritarian methods (regime frequently imprisoned/executed opponents)*

A rigged referendum

- *July 1955: Diem announced Vietnam-wide elections agreed at G.C. would not be held + in October he held a referendum to remove Head of State/last emperor of Vietnam and install himself as President BUT referendum was rigged (votes didn't add up)*
- *Diem's actions had the support + involvement of US → SV depended heavily on US financial and military support → show how deeply involved US is with Vietnam's political affairs*

Problems of SV

An unpopular and corrupted regime:

- *US tried to pressure Diem into land reforms bc this would help increase support for the regime and help counter effects of communist propaganda BUT diem was not interested*
 - *His supporters mainly came from landlord class, and even with the "land-reforms", they did not benefit peasants as much and many landlords clung onto their wealth → (1960) the reform programme was completely stalled*
- *His regime was also very corrupt*
 - *Practiced nepotism: appointing his brothers as key officials and diplomats + appoint his sister-in-law as the First Lady*
 - *Refused to hold elections for local councils*
- *This led to widespread protests, often led by well-organised, well-educated and influential Buddhist monks whom the regime showed little respect for (e.g. Diem's pro-catholic policies antagonising the Buddhist majority in the country) + some protested by setting themselves on fire (self-immolation) → made him even more unpopular*
- *US: frustrated by Diem, but could not find anyone better → by 1950s, had supported his regime with almost \$1.6 billion, but the regime was still weak and unable to prevent communist insurgency in the countryside*

SV insurgency 1954-1960

- *Viet Minh who believed in the reunification of Vietnam also opposed Diem's regime + after his announcement of not holding the nationwide election → they started to wage a low-level campaign of disruption and harassment against the regime*

- Diem responded with harsh and repressive measures
 - Thousands of SUSPECTED communists were locked up, tortured, even executed + he also tried to strike at the insurgent's military base (with some success at 1954-1957) BUT it did not stem the insurgency
 - May 1959: NVCP approved Group 559 → which transported weapons, ammunition and other equipment to VC (insurgents who had formally organised themselves by 1960)
 - 1957-1960: 1700 assassinations carried out (could be anyone associated with SV govt, like police, officers of the law etc) + they also staged hundreds of attacks on govt forces
 - VC later created a supply route: HCM Trail

VC+SV Govt

- Guerilla Warfare: (conflict started escalating in 1960s) using HCM trail, VC sent reinforcements and supplies to guerilla fighters, including abt 40000 NVA troops between 1961-1963, who attacked SV govt forces, officials and buildings
- VC also chose to avoid well-defended SV positions in urban areas, focusing on making countryside unsafe for govt forces + also attacked US Air Force supply bases
- Strategic Hamlet Programme: peasants were relocated (sometimes by force) to fortified villages away from control and influence of VC + removing civilians allowed superior firepower of US Air Force and SVA to destroy VC without civilians being caught in crossfire BUT bc peasants lost their livelihood → contributed to dislike of Diem's regime + even attracted more support for VC and NV by allowing the NVA and NC to pretend to be them to hide from American troops and SVA

Involvement of China

- After communist victory in China in 1949, Mao saw US as his biggest threat → concerned about a possible invasion by US allies (backed by US forces) → He believed if Vietnam became a non-communist country allied with US → he would be vulnerable to attack from SK, V, and GMD in Taiwan → hence he was very eager to support a group that created an anti-US buffer in V, esp if it was communist + He felt a bond of loyalty to Ho + he

believed involvement in VW would help unite the Chinese people behind his leadership (he did the same in KW and it strengthened his position)

Involvement of USSR

- *1960s: USSR was cautious about getting involved*
 - *He was not as involved in Asia in early 1960s → bc of Sino-Soviet Split where China and USSR's relationship deteriorated in mid 1950s → both were less keen to cooperate → meaning NV had to play a balancing act between USSR and China's interests to gain aid and support from both sides*
- *Mid-1960s: Soviets began to show more interest in Vietnam*
 - *Sino-Soviet Split: USSR and China were in a contest with China over leadership of the communist world → bc showing support for another communist state was important in asserting USSR's leadership → They steadily provided more and more arms and essential supplies to NV*
- *Late-1960s: USSR provided more support than China, particularly in the form of aircraft and air defence like surface-to-air missiles*

Involvement of US

- *US convinced that China and USSR were planning to spread communism to countries in Asia, and if Vietnam fell, Domino Theory would happen*
- *1961: John F. Kennedy took over Eisenhower, but he was more cautious*
 - *He sent military advisors to train SVA, and supplied military equipment, and these efforts by US was organised by the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV)*
- *1963: JFK was assassinated + his successor, Johnson faced the same challenge: to avoid a full US military commitment to Vietnam while pursuing a containment policy to prevent communists from coming into power BUT he was more convinced and prepared than JFK to commit US to a full-scale conflict in Vietnam to contain communism*
 - *Heightened political instability in SV + Diem's assassination by SV military commanders in 1963 + lack of strong leader as replacement → could lead to communist takeover*

- Increased tensions between US and communist bloc: China exploding its first atomic bomb in Oct 1964 + USSR showing little interest in peaceful coexistence with the west
- US then increased their efforts in military and economically

OUTBREAK OF VW

- 2 August 1964: Gulf of Tonkin incident
 - NV patrol boats attacked a US destroyer in the Gulf of Tonkin → led US Congress to take decisive action, passing the GOT resolution, giving Johnson the power to take all necessary measures to prevent further aggression and achieve peace and security → marked the start of direct US military intervention
 - US troops sent troops to fight in Vietnam, and US allies like Australia, Britain, NZ and SK also contributed soldiers

1956-1967

	NV	US
Overall Strategy	- Because of inferiority in equipment, they turned to guerilla warfare (VC and NVA) to avoid large-scale battles not in their favour → did not wear uniforms and were hard to tell apart from peasants + they attacked villages, then disappeared into jungles, villages or tunnels	- Superior air power → engaged in strategic bombing to disrupt NV supply lines, e.g. Operation Rolling Thunder (1965), where NV cities, factories, bases, VC strongholds in SV and HCM trail were bombed → thousands of civilian casualties
Support from Civilian	- Ho knew it was important to win over the civilian pop → VC expected to respect and help the peasants - BUT they were also prepared to kill whoever opposed them/worked with enemies and killed an est 27000 civilians	- Not as much support compared to NV - "Search and Destroy" missions to hunt down VC forces often resulted in civilian deaths + use of defoliants and napalm as weapons resulted in long-term problems for civilians → low

		support for US
Morale	- One million VC and NV est to have died in war, more than US losses, BUT it was a price Ho was willing to pay for national liberation → VC strength: refusal to give in to anything less than complete removal of US from Vietnam	- Morale was high at first, but fell as war intensified → following conscription: many US troops sent to Vietnam were young and inexperienced, did not understand why they were conscripted to fight war in a faraway country, for a people they knew nothing about + exacerbated by media coverage on US involvement (many even tried to escape conscription)

Tet Offensive, Jan 1968

- 1956-1967: US thought war was going well as they used "body count" as a success, and their goal was to kill as many VC as possible so as to wear the enemy down
- 1968: During Vietnamese NY holiday, VC fighters attacked over 100 cities and other military targets → they used HCM trail to move war material and fighters from NV to SV
 - TO involved 80000 VC and NVA → particularly bitter fighting over city of Hue and around US military base at Khe Sanh in SV
 - TO was costly for the communists, VC being weakened, having lost abt 10000 experienced fighters + ppl of SV did not rise up to join the VC as they hoped
- US: led them to rethink their options as they had sent nearly 500,000 troops in Vietnam and were spending \$20 billion a year on the war, and yet the communists still took them by surprise, with a major offensive no less? + US and SV forces quickly retook the towns captured in Offensive, but to do so they needed large amts of artillery and air power → many civilians killed and ancient city of Hue destroyed

Shifting sentiments in US about TO

- Media:
 - Relationship between US govt and the media was good at first as they wanted to win domestic support for the war → journalists would get access to war zones,

interviews and regular reports + in return they could not reveal info that would help the enemy

- 1968: tone of reporting started to change → during TO, journalists abandoned their restraint, as it convinced many that US could not win the war and one journalist of CBS news (Walter Cronkite) publicly criticised the US war effort in Vietnam on National television → could have swung public opinion
- Rising anti-war sentiments
 - Additional media coverage and revelations of US war atrocities in VW like My Lai massacre where US soldiers murdered 347-504 unarmed SV civilians shocked american public → began to demonstrate and protest US involvement in VW
 - Graphic images publicised in mainstream media: "saigon execution" where a VC captain was held at gunpoint and later executed by a SV general → turned american public against war effort

Impact of TO

- Johnson: concluded war could not be won militarily → instructed his officials to start exploring possibilities of peace talks
- US looks to withdraw
 - Nov 1968: Nixon was elected → started policy of Vietnamisation, handling responsibility for the war to SV forces and withdrawing US troops → Between April 1969 to the end of 1971, almost 400000 US troops left Vietnam + Jan 1973: all parties signed Paris Peace Accords to end the war and restore peace to Vietnam
 - Congress also concluded that US should not continue its involvement in the war, esp given the corruption of the SV regime
 - 29 March 1979: last US forces left Vietnam + Ho died in 1969 (did not get to see US forces leave the country)

Fall of Saigon, April 1975

- Without US air power or military back-up and support of population, SV govt could not survive for long
 - Dec 1974: NV launched a major military offensive against SV

- April 1975: SV president Nguyen Van Thieu resigned and fled Saigon, which fell to rapidly advancing communist forces → remaining SV govt had no choice but to surrender to NV forces
- NV forces then declared victory in Saigon, and renamed it HCM city
 - They rounded up hundreds of thousands of SV and put them in “re-education camps”, where in reality it was prison camps where former supporters and collaborators of SV govt were subjected to indoctrination, torture and forced labour
- 1976: Vietnam became Socialist Republic of Vietnam, under Le Duan + aligned itself closely with USSR and continued to receive aid in order to secure and control the new nation

Damage to American Cold War Foreign Policy:

A bankrupt ideology	VW demonstrated that ideology of the west was not morally superior + atrocities committed by US soldiers and use of chemical weapons had damaged its reputation
Failure of containment	US failed to enact containment in Southeast Asia despite its military strength, and as feared (like the domino theory theorised) Laos and Cambodia also turned communist by 1975
Weakening of US presidency	US congress had traditionally supported presidents in conduct of foreign policy, but towards the end of VW, congress exercised greater oversight of presidential actions, e.g. introducing War Powers Act, limiting ability of president to go to war

- Within SE-A, inability of US to win VW and contain communism in Vietnam stoked fears of the spread of communism → contributed to the formation of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1967, who also declared SE-A as a zone of peace, friendship and neutrality in 1971 with the goal of keeping ASEAN free from interference of any outside powers
- Detente: US sought greater understanding with USSR → 1972: Both signed the Anti-ballistic missile treaty to reduce nuclear weapons, and this was the result of a series of successful bilateral negotiations known as Strategic Arms Limitation Talks + US also ended its block on the issue of China’s representation t UN and Nixon made visits to China to improve diplomatic relations