

# FIRST: REVIEW OF THE VIETNAM WAR & IT'S SIGNIFICANCE





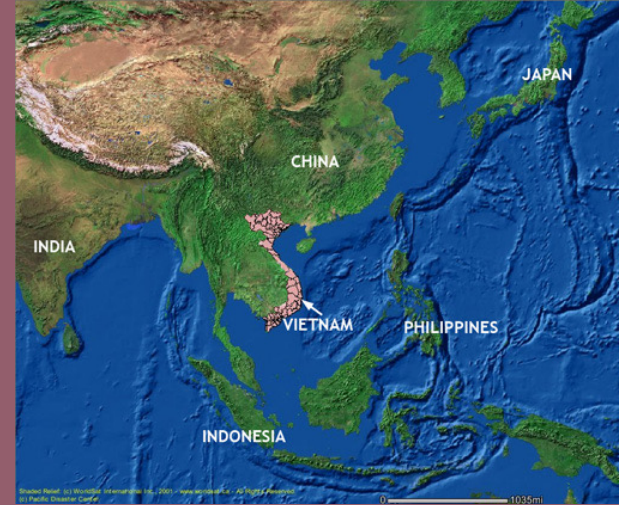
# WHAT DO YOU ALREADY KNOW?

*Optional: [Click here](#) for an article on this famous picture.*

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/retropolis/wp/2018/02/01/a-grisly-photo-of-a-saigon-execution-50-years-ago-shocked-the-world-and-helped-end-the-war/>

# SUMMARY OF VIETNAM

The Vietnam War was a long, costly armed conflict that pitted the communist regime of North Vietnam and its southern allies, known as the Viet Cong, against South Vietnam and its principal ally, the United States. The war began in 1954 (though conflict in the region stretched back to the mid-1940s), after the rise to power of Ho Chi Minh and his communist Viet Minh party in North Vietnam, and continued against the backdrop of an intense Cold War between two global superpowers: the United States and the Soviet Union.

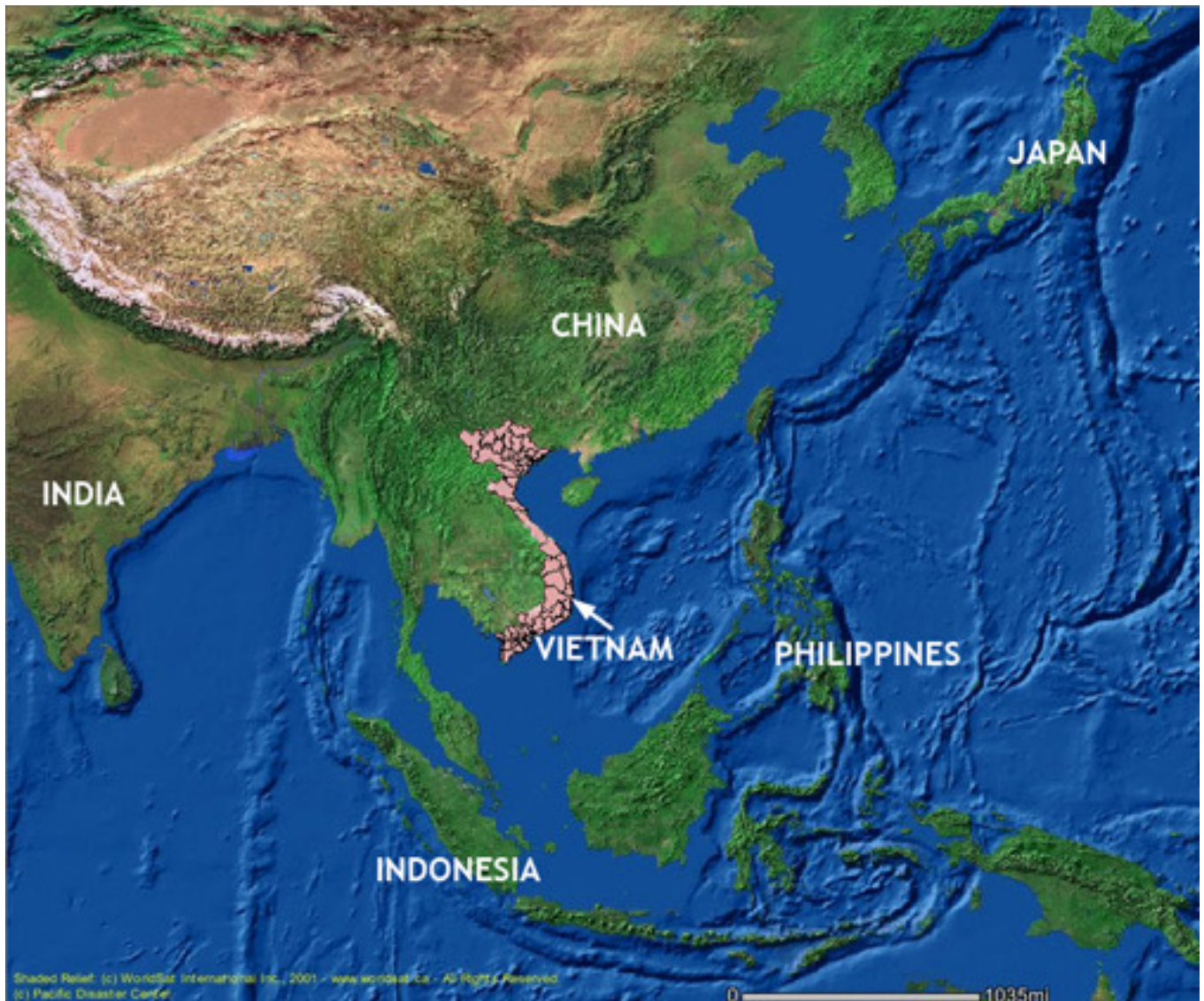


# SUMMARY OF VIETNAM

More than **3 million people (including 58,000 Americans)** were killed; more than half were Vietnamese civilians. By 1969, more than **500,000 U.S. military personnel** were involved. Growing opposition to the war in the United States led to **bitter divisions** among Americans.



In **1975**, communist forces seized control of Saigon, ending the Vietnam War, and the country was unified as **the Socialist Republic of Vietnam** the following year.



# ORIGINS OF THE CONFLICT

REMEMBER – Context and Long-Term Causes

The French had been an imperial power in control of Vietnam since 1800s

Then, during WWII, the French fell to the Nazis and the Japanese took control of the region.



A leader named **Ho Chi Minh** emerged, creating an **anti-imperialist resistance** group (called the **Viet Minh**) and they formed the Indochinese Communist Party

**When the war ended in 1945:** The Viet Minh **controlled North** of country, but wanted to control the rest. Ho Chi Minh declared that the period of foreign imperial power was over, and that **Vietnamese independence** was to follow.

Their Declaration of Independence was inspired by the declaration made by the American colonists in 1776!



The French return and reject Vietnamese claims of independence. A war starts between the French and the Viet Minh led by Ho Chi Minh in 1946.

*Optional*

# **Ho Chi Minh**

[Click here to learn more about Ho Chi Minh or copy and paste this link:](https://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war/ho-chi-minh-video)

<https://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war/ho-chi-minh-video>



# How did the U.S. get involved?

At first... **USA was sympathetic to Ho Chi Minh** (seen as a fight against imperialism which they could get on board with!)

But in **1949 there was a change in attitude** (China becomes communist & Soviet Union has the atomic bomb)

*Remember the **Domino Theory!*** The U.S. feared that communism would start taking over every country.... Saw this as part of a communist plot to dominate all of South-east Asia

Started giving **\$500 million/year to French war effort** and **helped set up non-Communist government** in South

## BIG IDEA:

America offered **financial and political** support at this stage to French & Vietnamese anti-Communists because of their **FEARS ABOUT THE SPREAD OF COMMUNISM.**

# **MAJOR DEVELOPMENT: FRENCH LOSE VIETNAM**

- **French fighting lasts from 1946-1954**
- **They experienced much of what Americans would later:**
  - **North Vietnamese used guerilla tactics (hit and run raids) which made fighting difficult**
  - **The tactics used by the French often hurt Vietnamese civilians (leading only to increasing support for Viet Minh!)**
  - **French losses were extreme and seemingly pointless, leading to a drop in French morale**
  - **The USSR & China supported the Viet Minh w/modern weapons**
  - **The Viet Minh had effective leadership, right tactics, and sheer determination**

# MAJOR DEVELOPMENT: FRENCH LOSE VIETNAM

Result: Peace Conference  
divides country until elections:

North (communist)

South (anti-communist & "democratic")

Laos & Cambodia become independent  
states



**"A poor feudal nation had beaten a great colonial power... It meant a lot; not just to us but to people all over the world."**

**- Viet Minh commander, 1954**

**MAJOR DEVELOPMENT:**

# **US INCREASES INVOLVEMENT**

Now fearing that the whole country could become united under the communist leader Ho Chi Minh, the USA interferes and halts elections!

"It was generally agreed that had an election been held, Ho Chi Minh would have been elected Premier... at the time of the fighting, possibly 80% of the population would have voted for the communist Ho Chi Minh as their leader." - *President Eisenhower writing after the Vietnam War*

# MAJOR DEVELOPMENT: US INCREASES INVOLVEMENT

- 1955: After halting elections, the US helped prop up a different leader named Ngo Dinh Diem and set up the **Republic of South Vietnam**
  - He was anti-communist & Catholic
  - U.S. liked him **solely because he was anti-communist** and was prepared to arrest & exile communists
  - The US gave him \$1.6 billion in 1950s!
  - But... Ngo Dinh Diem was corrupt & brutal
    - his actions made actually turned more peasants TOWARD support for Ho Chi Minh and the Communist group.



A Buddhist priest burns himself to death in protest against the attacks on Buddhist shrines by the government of South Vietnam in 1963.

# MAJOR DEVELOPMENT: FORMATION OF THE VC

The group of South Vietnamese people that supported Ho Chi Minh and unification of the country as a communist nation became called the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (aka the **VIET CONG** or **VC**)

# US INCREASES INVOLVEMENT

- **1960:** The Viet Cong starts a guerrilla war against South Vietnamese government
  - They attacked South Vietnamese govt forces, and later American air force and supply bases
- The United States, determined to stop the spread of communism in South Asia, decides it would provide aid to the South in multiple forms, **escalating their involvement over time:**
  - First with **money**
  - Then with **aid**
  - Then with **military advisors**
  - Then... eventually with **soldiers and the bombing of North Vietnam**
- The USA **drastically underestimated the North Vietnamese**
  - The American military was the strongest in the world... but they hadn't determined how to use it against the guerilla tactics of the VC (without totally obliterating the country they were seeking to "save")



- Meanwhile, Ho Chi Minh appealed to **nationalist feelings** to increase opposition to U.S. involvement
- But as with other revolutionary attempts at establishing a communist society, **the North Vietnamese and South Viet Cong used a reign of terror against anyone NOT supporting the communist revolution** (police, tax collectors, teachers, other employees of South Vietnamese government).
  - From '66-71, over 27,000 civilians were executed by Viet Cong. This led others to request greater commitment and support from the US against communist forces.

# VIETNAM

## MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS



# TIMELINE OF EARLY INVOLVEMENT

## WHICH PRESIDENTS WERE INVOLVED?

- **1950s:** Eisenhower agrees to send financial support
- **1962:** President Kennedy sent "adviser" to fight Viet Cong
- **1963-64:** Tension increases, American involvement increases
- **August 1964:** US Congress passes the "**Gulf of Tonkin Resolution**" after North Vietnamese patrol boats opened fire on US ships in the Gulf of Tonkin
  - gave President Lyndon Johnson power to "take all necessary measures [including the use of armed forces] to prevent further aggression and achieve peace and security"
- **Early 1965:** USA bombers strike at North Vietnam in what they call Operation Rolling Thunder
- **July 1965:** President Johnson agrees to send 180,000 American troops
- **1966 becomes the year of escalation**

*This is giving major power to the President (rather than Congress).*

- **The greatest strength of communist forces = refusal to give in**
  - Depended on supplies from **Ho Chi Minh trail**. Was continuously bombed, and continuously rebuilt.
  - Despite losing over 1 million VC and North Vietnamese, replacement troops were available.
- Communist forces will use **guerrilla tactics** that **wear down U.S. troops**
  - Plan was simple: **attack and disappear into the jungle**, into the villages, or into the tunnels (**leading the Vietnamese to be in control of when and where fighting occurs**)
  - No base, no headquarters (like during the American Revolution – they could take every city, but who cares - there is no capital for guerilla fighters trying to establish a country that isn't yet a country?). **There was no end possible if those in rebellion refused to give in.**

- As a result, circumstances of the war will lead to unusual development: the success for the U.S. was going to be measured by **“body count”** instead of territory taken
- Will use bombing campaigns, chemical weapons (**Agent Orange and Napalm**)
- Used policy of **search and destroy**
  - Problematic: inexperienced troops often walked into traps, civilian casualties were high, made US and South Vietnamese more unpopular
- **Morale and hope decline over time**
  - Soldiers were living in **constant fear** of ambushes or booby traps
  - This led to a **“dehumanization** of the people we were supposedly there to protect” - Lt. Barry Romo

The tour of duty in Vietnam was one year. Soldiers were most likely to die within their first month. The large majority of deaths took place in the first 6 months. Just as a soldier began gaining experience, he was sent home. A rookie army which constantly rotated inexperienced men was pitted against experienced guerillas on their home ground. - *Michael Bilton*

# Tet Offensive

NOT IN YOUR NOTES

- In 1968, a surprise attack by North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces known as the **Tet Offensive demonstrated that the USA was having a difficult time** winning the war.
- **Setbacks had happened in previous wars, but now this was TELEVISED for the world to see** (and for the family members of soldiers to see!)
- Even though the Tet Offensive it was a failure for Communists, it was **a turning point** for the US because:
  - 500,000 American soldiers were there, \$20 billion was being spent a year... people asked:
    - With that effort - *how could the opposition take the US by surprise?!*
    - *US & South Vietnam were often victorious in battle, but at what cost?*
- **Result = increasing antiwar feeling** and decline in morale of soldiers

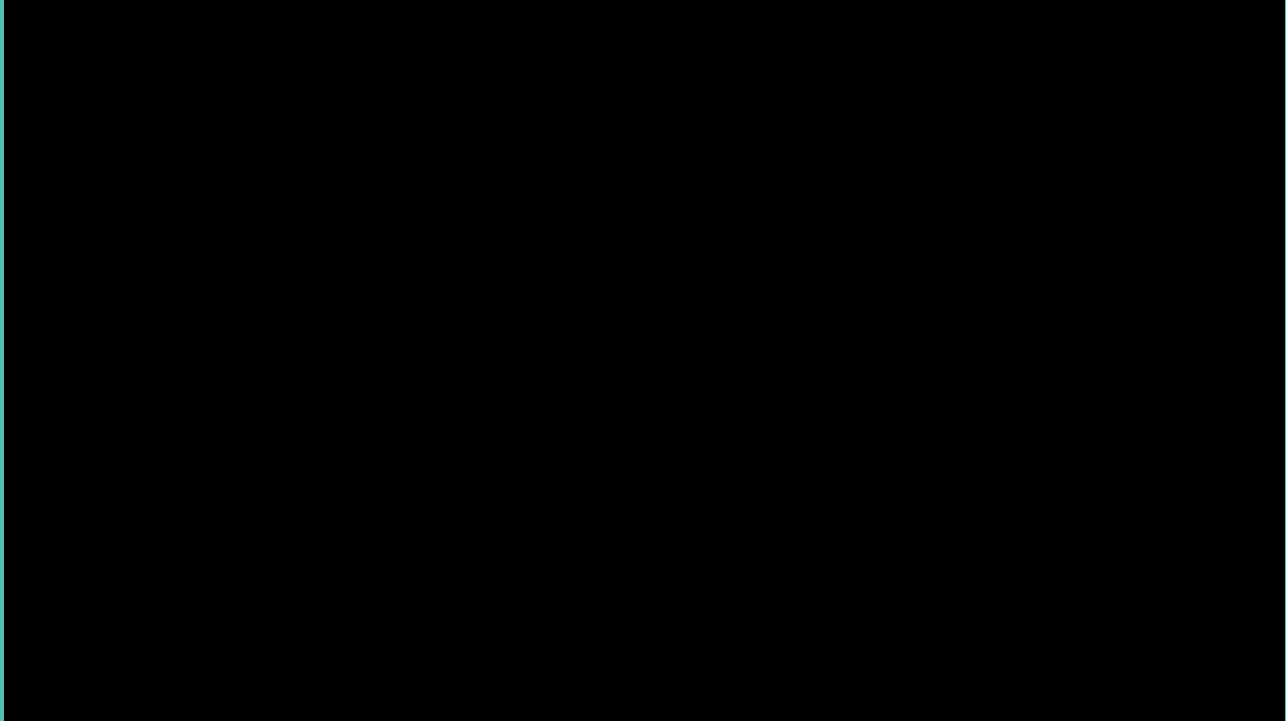


# VIETNAM

## MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

*Optional*

# Turning Point: Tet Offensive



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BPgWqgpgVRc&t=177s>

# THE PEACE MOVEMENT IN THE USA

- Public opinion turned more and more against the war
- Media (television) changed everything
  - For the first time, **events of a war were being shown** rather than described
- Vietnam became a **symbol of defeat and confusion**
- **Anti-war protests** took place across the country
- Thousands began to **"draft dodge"**
- One event had a particularly devastating affect on American and international support for the war: **The Mai Lai Massacre**
  - To many it seemed the clearest evidence that the war had gone wrong
- **In 1969, 700,000 anti-war protestors demonstrated in Washington DC (largest political protest in American history)**



## The Mai Lai Massacre

Hundreds of unarmed civilians were killed

12 months later, a letter reached politicians asking for an investigation

Life magazine published photos of event

*Optional*

[CLICK HERE FOR GREAT SHORT VIDEO REVIEW](#) OF THE ACTUAL LETTER  
RE: MAI LAI MASSACRE

<https://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war/my-lai-massacre-1>



Reminders: USA worried about *domino theory* in Southeast Asia. Begins following policy of *containment* → sends escalating aid → military advisors → more and more soldiers on the ground (under Eisenhower, JFK, and finally President Lyndon Johnson)

- Ho Chi Minh appealed to **nationalist feelings** to oppose U.S. involvement and to unite the country under a single Communist government
- The USSR supported the North Vietnamese with **funding & weapons**
- Communists utilized **guerrilla tactics** that **wear down U.S. troops**
- Major events **demonstrated that the USA was having a difficult time** winning the war.
- The U.S. and South Vietnam were experiencing many victories, but had to use **tons of artillery/air power resulting in many civilian deaths**
- **US soldiers experience decline in moral and hope**
- Tech developments meant that the **war was televised** and a **large anti-war movement joined other movements in the 1960s**

# SUMMARY

## CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING THUS FAR!

# THE PEACE MOVEMENT IN THE USA

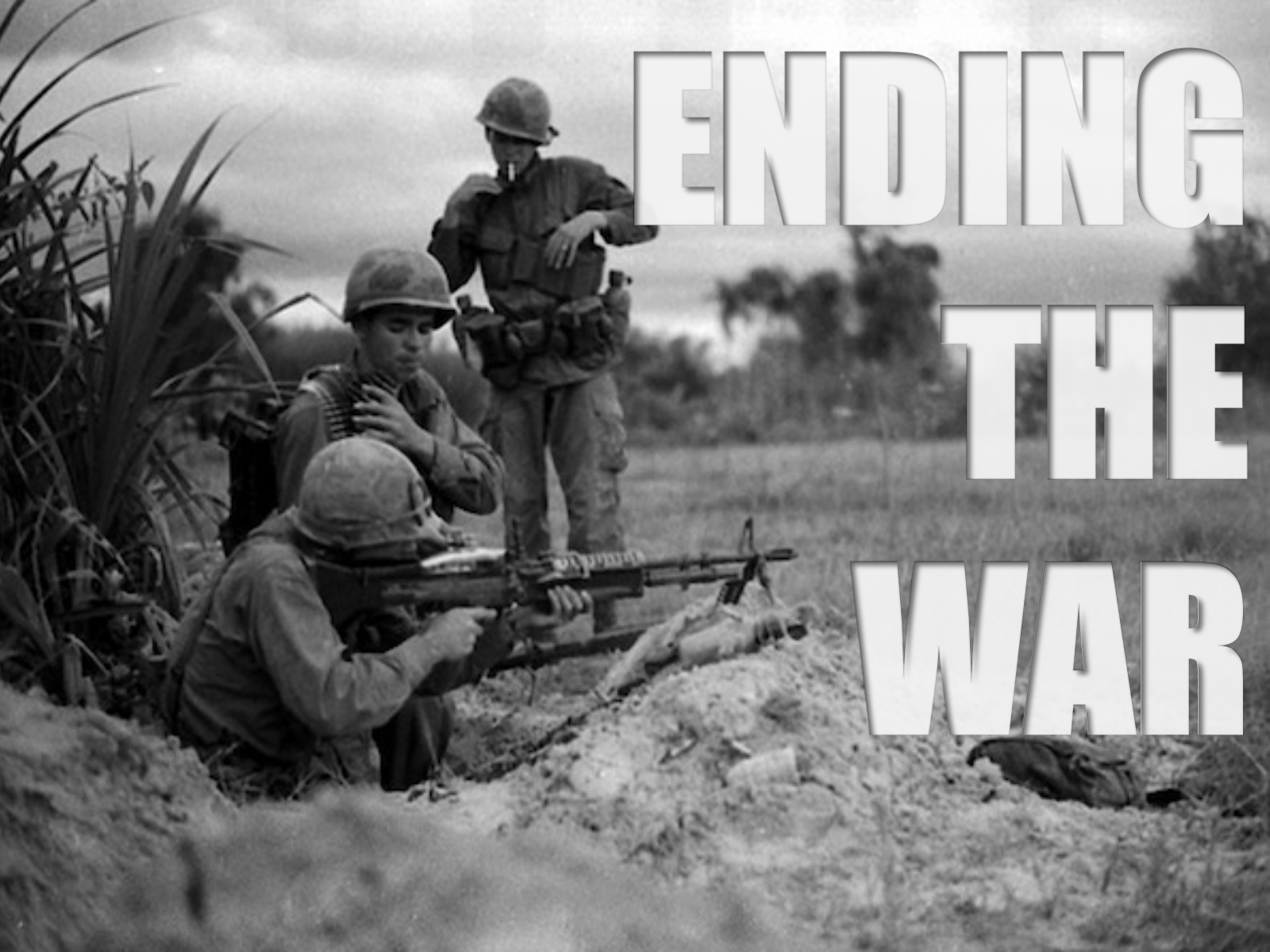
**REQUIRED**

Click here to see more about the  
protests back at home.

*Two minutes.*

Shows two very different points of view!

<https://www.pbs.org/video/moratorium-protests-1969-ewcsig/>



# ENDING THE WAR

Nixon won the election of '68 claiming (like all the candidates) that he would end the war in Vietnam.

Facing intense pressure from a war-weary public and widespread Vietnam War protests, Nixon sought a way to disengage American combat forces without appearing to abandon South Vietnam to the communists.

He rejected calls from the anti-war movement to order an immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops and publicly expressed a desire to achieve "peace with honor" in Vietnam.

# ENDING THE WAR IN VIETNAM

- **American President: Nixon tries to find a way out of Vietnam**
  - Americans realized that this war **cannot be won militarily**
  - Question was no longer "Could America win" but "how can we get out without it looking like a defeat?"
- **Utilized process of: Vietnamization (transferring responsibility onto Vietnamese)**
  - 1971: President **Nixon starts withdrawing troops** and hoping "Vietnamization" will work (despite all the evidence to the contrary)

# ENDING THE WAR IN VIETNAM

- **Fall of Saigon (1973-1975)**
  - Nixon had promised the South continuing financial aid and military, but Congress refused.
  - Cut backs on spending and American involvement had devastating consequences for South Vietnam
  - Without US support, there was no way South Vietnam could hold off a North Vietnamese takeover
- **1975: The last Americans left the Southern capital of Saigon. The South was immediately taken over by North Vietnam.**
- **OUTCOME: Socialist Republic of Vietnam**
  - **A unified socialist nation was created**

*Thousands of South Vietnamese desperately fled their homes to find freedom, or because they were fearful of the likelihood of massive arrests, 're-education' camps and executions they knew would take place at the hands of communist revolutionaries. Many are left behind.*

## Optional

**During the last evacuation of American soldiers and personnel, thousands of South Vietnamese had desperately tried to escape with them.**



“But with a limited number of helicopters and a mission to evacuate all Americans as soon as possible, the process not only involved deciding how many South Vietnamese could be evacuated, but also who got the golden ticket out.

The result was complete chaos and violence, with hoards of panicked Vietnamese civilians breaking through the compound gates and rushing the stairwells leading to the roof where the final group of US military helicopters would be leaving from. The desperation inherent in the scene was caught on film, with one image even showing an American punching a South Vietnamese man who was trying to force his way onto the helicopter.”

- [Click here for full article](#)

**NOT THE “PEACE WITH HONOR” NIXON HAD DESCRIBED**

# SIGNIFICANCE of Vietnam War (continued):

- Viewed as
  - **victory for international communism**
  - **enormous failure for US**
- Proved that **military strength alone could not stop communism**

After war...

- America tried to improve relations with China
- America entered a greater period of understanding with the Soviet Union called **détente**
- Became very suspicious of involving troops in any other conflict that US couldn't be sure it would easily/overwhelmingly win

Seemed to be a failure in many ways. Militarily and politically it had failed to stop the spread of communism. It was also a propaganda disaster. They had presented their campaign against communism as a moral crusade, but atrocities committed by American soldiers, the use of chemical weapons damaged the USA's reputation, and the support of a government that did not have the support of its own people damaged the reputation of the United States.



# SIGNIFICANCE

- **Around 1 million Vietnamese people would flee to France, Australia, and mostly to the United States**
  - Often known as **“boat people”** (at least 50,000 were drowned or murdered by pirates or captured into human trafficking rings)
- **Vietnam continued to struggle to recover. Why?**
  - **Millions of acres destroyed/still dangerous as a result of war**
  - **Millions displaced**
  - **Communist policies → continued poverty**
- **American bombing raids on neighboring Laos & Cambodia actually helped the Communists win in those countries:**
  - **Khmer Rouge took over in Cambodia in 1975’ (MUST KNOW ATROCITY THAT TOOK PLACE HERE IN 1970s – see [Study.com](https://www.study.com) assignment!)**



# RETURNING HOME



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wikBwsWXgGw>

# RETURNING HOME



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7xIWHIYVE8I>

# Other consequences of Vietnam

## EFFECTS ON VIETNAMESE SOCIETY

### Morals

- Fighting drove thousands of peasants into shanty towns near US bases – poverty, prostitution and drug abuse were common
- US forces were supplied with vast amounts of luxuries as well as military supplies – this created a huge black market with corrupt South Vietnamese government officials
- Buddhist priests protested about the effects of the American presence in Vietnam in the late 1960s

### Refugees

- Around 5 million South Vietnamese were displaced from their homes. Towns and villages in North and South Vietnam were devastated by bombing and ground fighting
- Vietnam took well over 20 years to start recovering from the war. Poverty, Communist policies and the hope of a better life led thousands of Vietnamese to become 'boat people' in the late 1970s onwards. They tried to sail to Malaysia and Hong Kong in makeshift boats. Around 1 million refugees escaped to the West (mainly USA). At least 50,000 were drowned or murdered by pirates. In the mid 1990s the USA finally ended its trade ban with Vietnam and the World Bank was allowed to invest in the country

## EFFECTS ON US TROOPS

### • Drug addiction

Hard drugs were available easily and cheaply in Vietnam from neighbouring Laos and Cambodia – official US army estimates put heroin use by American troops at 30 per cent

### • Confusion and bitterness

US forces were not welcomed home in the same way as victorious troops in the Second World War. Many found it difficult to adjust to civilian life

### • Stress

Strains of war led to post traumatic stress

### • Cancer

Some troops who handled Agent Orange contracted cancer

## EFFECTS ON THE ENVIRONMENT

### Chemical warfare

- Damaged crops which led to food shortages
- Destroyed 5.4 million acres of forest areas and the animals and plants living there
- Poisoned streams and rivers

## EFFECTS ON VIETNAMESE CITIZENS

- Chemical warfare meant that South Vietnamese citizens had in their bodies levels of dioxin (a powerful poison used in Agent Orange) three times as high as US citizens
- Large numbers of unexploded mines and bombs caused death and injury to adults and children for years to come
- Napalm caused horrific burns which killed or disfigured victims, often civilians caught in crossfire