USA and USSR: Rival Superpowers

- After WWII the USA and USSR emerge as world’s main economic and military superpowers
- Had different political ideologies, economic systems, military alliances
- USSR-communism, The Warsaw Pact
- USA- capitalism, NATO
Cold War

- Cold War developed between USA and the USSR
- No direct conflict (‘hot war’) but supported opposites sides in conflicts in other parts of the world
- Almost went to war on a number of occasions (esp During Cuban Missile Crisis)
Key events in the Cold War before the Vietnam War

- US drop 2 atomic bombs on Japan 1945
- The Arms Race begins
- ‘Iron Curtain’ divides communist Eastern Europe from capitalist Western Europe
- The division of Germany into East and West
- The Berlin Blockade and Airlift, 1948
- USSR tests atomic bomb 1949
- Communists get control in China 1949
- The Korean War 1950-1953
- The Space Race begins
- The building of the Berlin Wall, 1961
- The Cuban Missile Crisis 1962
Military Alliances and the Iron Curtain
Fear of communism in the USA

- House of Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) investigated Hollywood
- Some actors and writers suspected of having communist sympathies were put on a ‘blacklist’
- In 1950 US caught a spy giving information to Russians
- In 1951 Ethel and Julius Rosenberg executed for giving information on atomic weapons to Russia
McCarthyism and the ‘Red Scare’

• 1950 Senator Joseph McCarthy said he had list of 350 communists working in the State Department
• McCarthy led a Senate Committee to investigate communists working for the US government
US Foreign Policy: Containment

- Truman Doctrine 1947: use economic and political pressure to prevent the spread of communism
- Marshall Plan 1947: economic aid sent to non-communist political parties and governments in Europe ($20 billion by 1951)
- Berlin Blockade and Airlift 1948-49 (US sent help to prevent communists getting control of West Berlin)
- Korean War 1950-1953 (US sent troops to help South Korea to repel the invasion by North Korean communists)
- Cuba: Bay of Pigs 1961 (US backed unsuccessful revolt by anti-Castro Cubans)
- Cuban Missile Crisis 1962 (Threat of nuclear war when USSR tried to put nuclear missiles in Cuba targeting the US)
The Domino Theory
Domino Theory

• ‘If we withdrew from Vietnam, the Communists would control Vietnam. Pretty soon, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Malaya would go...’-President Kennedy.
Indochina (Vietnam)

- Indochina was gradually colonised by the French in late 1800s/early 1900s
- In 1930s/1940s Emperor Bao Dai was in charge in theory but in reality a just French puppet ruler
- Indochina had an agricultural economy with big gap between rich and poor
- Nationalist & Communist opposition to the French emerged in the 1920s and 1930s
Japan invades Indochina in 1940

Nationalistic ‘Vietnam Independence League’ or ‘Vietminh’ organised by the communist Ho Chi Minh in jungle of north Vietnam to fight Japanese (and later the French)

Given help by OSS (later CIA)

After the defeat of Japan by the USA in WWII various groups fighting for control of Indochina (Vietnam)- The Vietminh, other Vietnamese nationalist groups, the French
Ho Chi Minh 1890-1969

• Lived in France as a young man
• Was a nationalist and a communist
• Involved in resistance to French in 1930s
• Involved in Vietminh fighting the Japanese who invaded Indochina during WWII
• Became leader of communist government of Democratic Republic of Vietnam which was set up in northern Vietnam in 1945
Indochina after WWII: North & South Vietnam

• French regain control of much of Vietnam but Vietminh began war of liberation against French
• Vietminh helped by China after communist revolution there in 1949
• French suffer major defeat at valley of Dienbienphu 1954
• International conference organised in Geneva divides Vietnam in two parts: North and South
• Vietminh get control of Hanoi & North Vietnam in 1954
Indochina after WWII: North & South Vietnam

• French regain control of much of Vietnam but Vietminh began war of liberation against French
• Vietminh helped by China after communist revolution there in 1949
• French suffer major defeat at valley of Dienbienphu 1954 and decide to withdraw from Vietnam
• International conference organised in Geneva divides Vietnam in two parts: North and South
• Vietminh get control of Hanoi & North Vietnam in 1954
North and South Vietnam in the 1950s

**North Vietnam**
- Ho Chi Minh and communists control North Vietnam
- Communist North Vietnam receiving help from major communist powers: China & USSR

**South Vietnam**
- Ngo Dinh Diem becomes leader in South Vietnam
- USA worried about spread of communism in Asia
- USA send $100m aid to South Vietnam in 1955
- American military advisers sent to help train South Vietnamese army
American Military Advisers assisting the South Vietnamese Army
Vietcong (VC) helped by North Vietnam Army (NVA) begin guerilla war against government in South Vietnam

- North Vietnam govt. forms the ‘National Liberation Front for South Vietnam’ (1960)
- North Vietnam government send arms & soldiers into South Vietnam along Ho Chi Minh trail to organise guerrilla war against South Vietnamese govt. and army
The government of South Vietnam

- Seen by many Vietnamese as corrupt and oppressive
- Unpopular with many peasants
- Used harsh and brutal methods against internal opposition esp. communists (also known as ‘Vietcong’)
- South Vietnamese government force some peasants to live in ‘strategic hamlets’ to try to make it harder for VC to hide
- Buddhist monks protested against harsh policies of the Diem government
Buddhist monk burns himself to death as a protest against the Government of South Vietnam
Changes at the top in South Vietnam

- USA support coup d’etat by Generals to remove Diem as leader in South Vietnam
- Diem assassinated in 1963
- General Minh takes over as leader
- General Khanh takes over as leader in 1964
JFK

- Democratic Party candidate John F. Kennedy elected President in 1960
- Lyndon B. Johnson becomes Vice-President
- Robert Mac Namara becomes Secretary for Defense
- JFK believed in ‘Domino Theory’ and policy of ‘Containment of Communism’
JFK and increased US involvement in Vietnam

- American government sent ‘military advisers’ to help South Vietnamese government
- Advisers taught the South Vietnamese army methods of ‘counter-insurgency’ to deal with the VC
- In 1960 1,500 American military advisers in South Vietnam
- In 1963 had increased to 23,000
- JFK assassinated in 1963
- Lyndon B. Johnson took over as President
LBJ

- Lyndon Baines Johnson
- Born in Texas 1908
- Worked as a teacher
- Elected to House of Representatives 1937
- Elected to Senate 1948
- Became Senate Majority Leader
- Vice President to JFK 1961
- Became President 1963 after JFK assassinated
LBJ’s domestic policies

• Under his leadership important changes to laws regarding black civil rights
• Civil Rights Act 1964
• Voting Rights Act 1965
• Had programme for ‘Great Society’
• Set up schemes to provide cheap housing, improve public schools, tackle poverty
• Introduced Medicare (for older people) and Medicaid (for poorer people)
Election 1964

- Republican candidate Barry Goldwater presented himself as tough on communism
- Goldwater suggested using atomic weapons against North Vietnam
- LBJ forced to adopt a more hawkish (hardline) approach to Vietnam (*Hawks versus Doves*)
- ‘Tonkin Incident’ took place in August 1964 (during election campaign)
- LBJ won election
The Tonkin Incident
August 1964

• In August 1964 the USS Maddox (US battleship) reported being attacked by North Vietnamese boats in Gulf of Tonkin

• Couple days later Maddox and C Turner Joy battleships again reported being fired on by North Vietnamese boats

• Congress passed ‘Tonkin Resolution’ gave LBJ ‘all necessary measures, including the use of military force to protect US interests in S.E. Asia
US involvement in Vietnam increases in 1960s under LBJ

- In 1963 $500m aid given by USA and 20,000 American military advisers in South Vietnam
- US Secretary for Defence Robert Mac Namara visits Vietnam (1964)
- US aircraft bomb North Vietnam
- Vietcong attack American targets in South Vietnam
The War in Vietnam: Lyndon Johnson & The Escalatory Phase
U.S. Troops Stationed in Vietnam (in 1000s)
June 1965-December 1968

End of 1965: 184,000
End of 1966: 388,000
End of 1967: 486,000
End of 1968: 537,000
Why did LBJ increase US involvement?

• He believed in Domino Theory
• He wanted to prevent the spread of communism in South East Asia
• He did not accept that the Vietcong were popular in South Vietnam
• He didn’t want to be seen as being soft on communism or the President who allowed South Vietnam become communist
"SMALL WORLD ISN'T IT?"

WE ARE IN SOUTH VIETNAM AT THE REQUEST OF THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT. LBJ

WE ARE IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA AT THE REQUEST OF THE CZECHOSLOVAKIAN GOVERNMENT. BREZHNEV
Operation Rolling Thunder
February 1965

- February 1965 US began bombing North Vietnam and the Ho Chi Minh Trail
- Between 1965-1969 more bombs on Vietnam than in all of WWII
- But NVA moved arms production, quickly rebuilt roads in the jungle and built 30,000 miles of tunnels in jungle in order to hide and continue supply of arms
- 50,000 civilians killed (used for propaganda by North Vietnam to encourage opposition to the war in USA)
"We're gonna' make history, Robert...!!"

CONTINUED BOMBING
OF VIETNAM
LBJ sends US troops to Vietnam
March 1965

- March 1965 US fighting troops deployed in Vietnam
- Marines land at Da Nang
- General Westmoreland commander of US troops in Vietnam
- 1965: 180,000
- 1966: 350,000
- 1967: 500,000
Tactics and weapons

**US**
- Bombing
- Napalm
- Defoliants: Agent Orange
- Cluster Bombs or ‘mother bombs’ (designed to wound)
- Phosphorous bombs
- Free-fire zones
- Search and Destroy (Body count- Kill ratios)
- Wounded prisoners shot

**Vietcong**
- Guerrilla warfare
- Mines
- Bouncing Betty
- Punjii stakes
- Trip wires
- Tunnels network
- Only engaged in one set piece battle: La Drang Valley November 1965
- Wounded prisoners shot
Search and Destroy

• Vietcong were waging guerrilla war against South Vietnamese and US army
• US began tactic of ‘pacification’ or ‘Search and Destroy’
• Villagers suspected of helping VC were killed and their villages were destroyed
• Success was measure in body counts or kill ratios
• Many innocent civilians treated badly or killed
• Resulted in turning many peasants against the US and the army and government of South Vietnam

- Monthly Average 1965: 172
- Monthly Average 1966: 412
- Monthly Average 1967: 770
- Monthly Average 1968: 1200
Civilians flee after a group of South Vietnamese Soldiers were ambushed and killed in their jeep by Vietcong.
Public support for the war in the US

• Initially a majority of Americans supported the war
• As the war progressed and US casualties rose public opinion changed and opposition to the war gradually increased
• In 1964 over 70% of Americans supported the war
• In 1968 public support for the war fell to less than 35%
Reasons for opposition to war in US

- People felt war was morally wrong
- People were unhappy with tactics of US army (napalm, agent orange, carpet bombing, civilian casualties)
- People felt it was a civil war and should be for Vietnamese to sort out not the US
- People felt that US interests not served by involvement in S.E. Asia
- People did not want to see Americans killed or wounded in Vietnam
- People felt it was distracting attention from domestic problems within USA
- People felt it was taking money that could be used to deal with problems within US
- Some feared being drafted into the army to fight in Vietnam
Who was involved in the Anti-War Movement?

- Many students
- Some trade unions
- Some church leaders
- Some black civil rights leaders (*Martin Luther King*)
- Some celebrities (*Norman Mailer, Muhammad Ali, Jane Fonda*)
- Some politicians
- Some journalists
- Some American veterans (ex-soldiers) of the Vietnam War
- Hippies and ‘Flower Children’
GIs AGAINST THE WAR IN VIETNAM!

VETERANS FOR PEACE IN VIETNAM!
END THE WAR IN
INDOCHINA
VIETNAM
NOW
PEACE
NOT WAR

MAKE LOVE NOT WAR
Actress Jane Fonda visits North Vietnam and speaks out against US involvement in Vietnam
YOUNG SOCIALISTS FOR
NO DRAFT
PULLEY & ZIMMERMANN

GIRLS SAY YES
to boys who say NO

Proceeds from the sale of this poster go to The Draft Resistance.
Black people in the USA and the Vietnam War

• Between 1961 and 1965 the number of black people in army was proportional to their numbers in the overall population
• After 1965 the number of black soldiers in the army was higher than white soldiers in proportion to their numbers in the overall population
• Partly due to the fact that it was easier for middle class white people to avoid the draft
• Going to college, joining the National Guard or leaving USA (e.g. Going to Canada) were all ways to avoid the draft
• Many black people opposed to the war either because felt it wasn’t justified and was distracting attention from domestic problems (education, health, poverty etc...) and taking money needed to deal with these problems
• Some black soldiers in Vietnam faced racial discrimination from white soldiers
MLK and Muhammad Ali speak out against the war in Vietnam

- Martin Luther King said ‘The Great Society has been shot down on the battlefields of Vietnam’
- Cassius Clay (Muhammad Ali) refused to serve in the army (burnt his draft card)
- He was put on trial and was also stripped of his world heavyweight title
Peace Talks between USA and North Vietnam held in 1966 but no agreement reached.
More US troops arrive and more changes at top in South Vietnam

- Dr. Phan Huy Quat takes over as leader in South Vietnam (February 1965)
- Nguyen Cao Ky takes over as leader (June 1965)
- By end of 1966 400,000 troops in Vietnam
- Thieu takes over as leader (September 1967)
- Opposition to war by Americans increasing
Tet Offensive 1968

- January 1968 Vietcong launched surprise attack on towns and cities all over South Vietnam
- 4 staff killed when US embassy in Saigon attacked
- 4,000 US troops and 2,000 South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) killed
- Huge losses for VC/NVA 50,000 killed
- But was a propaganda victory for North Vietnam and VC/NVA got control of many villages and towns in South Vietnam
American soldiers during the attack on the US embassy in Saigon in the Tet Offensive.
My Lai Massacre

- In March 1968 US soldiers killed 300 men, women and children in the village of My Lai in a Search and Destroy mission
- Children as young as 2 killed
- 70 civilians shot in a large pit
- Massacre kept secret by US military
- Leaked to New York Times in 1969
- Photographer released photos of massacre
- 13 soldiers put on trial for war crimes
- Only commander Wavell?? Convicted
- Sentenced to 10 years but given a pardon and released after 3 years
- Damaged image of US army and government
- Probably helped increase opposition in US to involvement in the war
USA in 1968

• Opposition to the war increasing
• Public support for the war falling (particularly after the Tet Offensive)
• Martin Luther King assassinated (April)
• LBJ changes Vietnam policy and decides not to run in Presidential election
• Robert Kennedy assassinated (June) after winning California primary to be Democratic Party presidential candidate
• Vice President Hubert Humphrey wins Democratic nomination for president in Chicago with riots outside convention hall
• Republican candidate Richard Nixon elected president (November) and makes Henry Kissinger becomes US National Security Adviser
The Vietnam War in 1968

- By 1968 40,000 US soldiers had been killed
- By 1968 150,000 US soldiers had been killed
- In 1968 540,000 US troops in Vietnam
- In 1968 war costing $30 billion a year
- LBJ scaled back bombing campaign and later in the year stopped it completely
- Peace talks organised in Paris but failed to achieve an agreement
Why did LBJ decide not to run for President in 1968 election?

• He realised he was unpopular with many Americans

• He was almost beaten in a primary by anti-war Democrat Eugene McCarthy

• Robert Kennedy announced his intention to try be selected as the candidate for the Democratic Party
LBJ and Vietnam

• War distracted from LBJ’s domestic policy
• Spending on war meant less resources for Great Society programmes
Role of media, photographers, television

- No censorship
- Many reporters and photographers were given unrestricted access even in combat zones
- 75 reporters/photographers killed
- Graphic photos and film influence public attitudes to the war in the US and internationally
Problems for USA in Vietnam and at home

• By 1969 30,000 US soldiers had been killed in the war
• Opposition in US to war increasing
• In May 1970 four anti-war demonstrators killed by Police at Kent State University
• US govt. Estimated that 65,000 GIs were on drugs (including many using heroin)
• By 1971 only 34% of Americans supported war
American POWs in North Vietnam

- American soldiers and pilots captured by the NVA and VC were sometimes killed
- Others were imprisoned in North Vietnam or in the jungle (often treated very badly by their captors)
- Some pilots were forced to give press conferences to the media in which they apologised for their actions and denounced the US role in Vietnam
American POW being welcomed home after his release
Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon
Pressure on Nixon to withdraw US troops

- War costing hundreds of millions of dollars
- Increasing numbers of US troops being killed
- No sign of US being able to win war
- Increasing opposition within US to the war
- US attempting to improve relations with communist China (and the USSR)
- But Nixon wanted ‘peace with honour’
- Hoped North Vietnam would accept a two state solution if US withdrew and war ended
END THE WAR IN VIETNAM AND SOCIAL CRISIS AT HOME!
The Nixon Doctrine and ‘Vietnamisation’ and increased bombing

- Nixon wanted ‘vietnamisation’ of the conflict
- Increased US aid to South Vietnamese army (ARVN) so they could take on Vietcong without US troops being directly involved
- ‘Nixon doctrine’ was to provide aid to help fight communism but not US troops
- US troops reduced from over 500,000 to 50,000 between 1971 and 1972
- Peace talks in Paris not making progress so US increased bombing of North Vietnam and Ho Chi Minh to put pressure on North Vietnamese to negotiate
- US hinted that they might use atomic weapons in order to put pressure on North Vietnam to negotiate (‘Mad man policy’)


Monthly Average
1969: 776
1970: 344
1971: 123
1972: 22

Number Killed

Month & Year
Figure 29.1 U.S. Troop Levels in Vietnam, 1960–1972
US TROOPS IN VIETNAM

Figures as of 31 Dec of year concerned

SOURCE: U.S. Army War College
Influence of military industrial complex

While the war in Vietnam had an enormous human cost in terms of death and suffering, it also meant a lot of business for the companies supplying materials, weapons and equipment to the US military.
The invasion of Cambodia

• Nixon authorised secret invasion of Cambodia to destroy Vietcong arms stores and supply lines
• Provoked a negative reaction in US against Nixon when invasion made public
• 4 anti-war protesters killed in clashes at Kent State University
• Majority in US congress felt Nixon had exceeded his powers as president
• War Powers Act passed in 1973 limiting US president’s use of troops
Peace Treaty and US withdrawal 1973

- China puts pressure on North Vietnam to sign peace treaty in Jan 1973
- Ceasefire
- US to withdraw from South Vietnam
- All POWs to be released
- Further negotiations to decide on future of North and South Vietnam
Communists invade South Vietnam
1975

• In 1975 North Vietnam launch attack on South Vietnam and capture Saigon
• Many fearing persecution under communists attempt to flee from Vietnam
• North and South Vietnam united under a communist government
Evacuation of the US Embassy in Saigon 1975
Impact of the war

• Millions of Vietnamese killed
• Over 50,000 US soldiers killed
• US policy of containment failed as communist govts. in Cambodia and Laos soon after war
• US image abroad damaged by use of napalm, agent orange and incidents of brutality (e.g. My Lai)
• War very divisive on US society
• CIA involved in illegal spying on anti-war groups in US
• Large numbers of refugees (‘Boat People’)
Why did USA lose the Vietnam War?

- US saw it as a cold war conflict, a civil war about ideology (communism vs. capitalism)
- Vietnamese saw it as a war of liberation, a nationalist uprising, war of independence, anti-colonial war
- Many Vietnamese saw USA as a colonial power occupying Vietnam (like the French and Japanese had done)
- The government of South Vietnam and did not have enough support among the population of Vietnam
- The government of North Vietnam was willing to take enormous numbers of casualties in order to win the war
- Public opinion in the US turned against the war because of its human and economic cost and some of the tactics used by the US army in the conflict
- It was difficult to defeat an enemy waging a guerilla war in a country with a lot of jungle (even with bombs, helicopters, etc...)
Impact of Vietnam War on USA

• War caused great divisions in US society between those who supported and opposed the war
• War affected US economy by causing budget deficits and inflation
• War had cost US $150 billion
• Containment policy failed (Laos and Cambodia also became communist soon after Vietnam)
• Morale of US military damaged by defeat
• International image of US damaged
• Credibility Gap: Trust in government damaged (e.g. Invasion of Cambodia, illegal monitoring of anti-war activists by CIA, My Lai cover up etc...)
• Powers of President reduced by the Congress
Numbers of casualties during the Vietnam War

- 58,000 US soldiers killed (300,000 wounded)
- 200,000 South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) soldiers killed
- 1,000,000 NVA/VC soldiers killed
- 1,500,000 civilians killed