



Causes of USA involvement in Vietnam

US-Sino (Chinese) relations:

- USA and China fought each other in the Korean War so there was a lot of **suspicion and tension** between the two countries after the war ended.
- USA put travel restrictions on China and limited trade.
- It set up **SEATO**. This was an alliance of capitalist countries like USA, Australia, Thailand, Philippines etc. designed to help stop communism spreading in Asia.
- USA gave help to Taiwan (and still does) which is an independent capitalist country but which China claimed should be part of China. This really angered China.

French Indo-China and the Battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954

100 years ago, It was controlled by **France** as part of their empire. During WW2 (1939 – 1945) France were forced to leave Indo-China and Japan took control.

After WW2 the **Indo-Chinese War (1946 – 1954)** broke out as France returned to reclaim its territory and the locals, led by a **communist called Ho Chi Minh**, fought back. In this period Ho Chi Minh developed guerrilla warfare techniques to fight back against France.

The Indo-Chinese War came to a conclusion with the **Battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954**. A French base in North Vietnam was surrounded and attacked by a peasant army (the **Viet Minh**) inspired by Ho Chi Minh. 2000 French soldiers died and 11,000 were captured. **France suffered an unexpected and humiliating defeat and left the country and never returned.**

The Vietnam War Knowledge Organiser 1

1954 Vietnam is divided and Diem becomes unpopular in the South

When the French left, a peace conference was held in Geneva (the **Geneva Agreement**) in 1954 and the country was **divided in two**; North Vietnam was controlled by Ho Chi Minh who ran the country along communist lines, South Vietnam was controlled by Diem with the help of French funding and equipment.

However, Diem actions made him really unpopular with his own people:

1. He cancelled elections that were due in 1956 because he feared he might lose.
2. He also arrested and imprisoned anyone opposed to him.
3. He was corrupt and gave top government jobs to members of his family.
4. Diem was a catholic and persecuted Buddhists in South Vietnam. During the **Buddhist Crisis**, protest marches took place and Diem arrested and even killed some of the protestors. In the city of Hue, the police tipped chemicals over a group of praying Buddhists.

In one well known protest a Buddhist monk Thich Quang Duc, publicly burned himself to death in protest against Diem's government. (BUT he was still supported by the French and USA because he was anti communist) Diem was so unpopular that a group called the **National Liberation Front** (nicknamed the **Viet Cong**) was set up in 1960. They fought against Diem and tried to make South Vietnam communist.

Diem was eventually assassinated in 1963.



Ho Chi Minh
Communist leader of North Vietnam



President Eisenhower meeting President Diem of South Vietnam



Why did the US get involved in Vietnam?

1. During the 1950s the **Cold War** was underway as the Soviet Union and Capitalist USA tried to spread their own ideas and stop their opponents. In 1947 the USA's '**Truman Doctrine**' pledged to stop the spread of communism wherever it appeared. This started the US foreign policy for the next 40 years – **The policy of containment**. A promise to help any country that wished to not be communism. This is why the US became involved in Vietnam to stop the spread.

2. After the **Chinese revolution** the USA believed in the '**domino theory**' which said that even small countries must be stopped from turning communist – this would prevent communism from spreading across a whole region.

In the early 1950s the USA started to send weapons and funding to South Vietnam to protect it from the North. The US President Eisenhower also sent in small numbers of military 'advisors' to help the South stop the spread of communism.

At the same time Ho Chi Minh was receiving arms, supplies and troops from China and Soviet Union.

3. The Korean War, hardened US views and accelerated the US pledge to enforce the Policy of Containment. And increase spending on the **Arms Race**.

4. The anti-communist feelings in USA increased because of **McCarthyism**. Senator McCarthy claimed there was a growing 'red menace' or a 'red scare' with communists hidden in America- this belief encouraged voters to vote for a hard line approach towards communism.

In 1961 John F Kennedy (JFK) became President, and started to increase the number of special advisers sent over to help. **By 1964 there were 23,000 US advisors** in South Vietnam.

In 1962 JFK introduced his '**Strategic Hamlets**' program. The USA attempted to stop the spread of communist ideas into the villages of South Vietnam by moving the villagers into new safe compounds, surrounded by guards and barbed wire, to protect them. However, this backfired on JFK when the locals felt that they were being rounded up and sent into prison camps, rather than being protected. The US also offended Vietnamese people who believed that they should live in the same villages of their ancestors, and not in a Strategic Hamlet. This pushed people to joining the Vietcong.

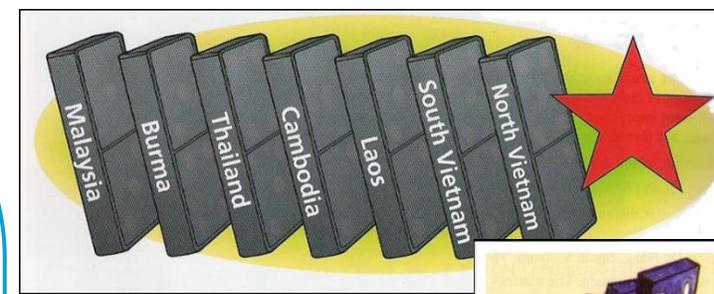
In 1964 an American ship, the USS Maddox, allegedly came under attack from NV boats in the '**Gulf of Tonkin Incident**'. There is controversy here since it was later found that the second attack may not have actually happened and President Johnson manipulated events to persuade Congress to pass the 'Gulf of Tonkin Resolution'.

The **Gulf of Tonkin Resolution** allowed the President to act as he wished in Vietnam. The media had supported this action – persuading Congress & the US population that he was doing the right thing.

However, Johnson did not use this new law immediately as it was an election year in America.

In 1965, the VC attacked an American base at Pleiku in South Vietnam, killing 9 US soldiers and destroying 10 aircraft. This caused Johnson to trigger the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution.

The USA responded by bombing North Vietnam (**Operation Rolling Thunder**) and by sending troops into South Vietnam. The Vietnam War had begun.



"Oh, He's A Great Anti-Communist — It's Just That He Finds The Buddhists Are Easier To Get At"



An example of a source that could be in Q1 or Q2 of this paper. The soldier is labelled '**Diem's Gov**' and the caption says '**Oh, He's a great anti-communist- it's just that he finds the Buddhists are easier to get at**'.

This is useful to a historian as it illustrates how the US would support Diem purely because he was anti-communist and would fight against Ho Chi Minh in the North who was supporting the independent communist guerrilla fighters in the South- the Vietcong. He was a corrupt leader who was also anti-Buddhist- the main religion in the region. Many Buddhist monks protested against Diem's rule and Diem's forces were violent towards them but the US ignored this because....