

## Background to Indo China/Vietnam conflict

### Indo China in 1900

French system of control

1. Military
2. Taxes
3. Roads, railways

French liberalism towards Vietnam pre 1914

- Economic expansion
- Social reform
- Greater autonomy
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### Opposition to the French

Why such persistent resistance:

1. Cultural
2. Models of Boxers and Japan
3. Impact of World War 1

The 20th century opposition:

Focused on the Vietnam area of Indochina

1. 1916 Rebellion

Organised by *Association for Restoration of Vietnam*

- Wanted to follow Japanese model and create a Vietnam mainly independent but with some links to France
- Set up pre WW1
- Support from official, educated classes

Rebellion crushed by French

2. 1930 Uprising

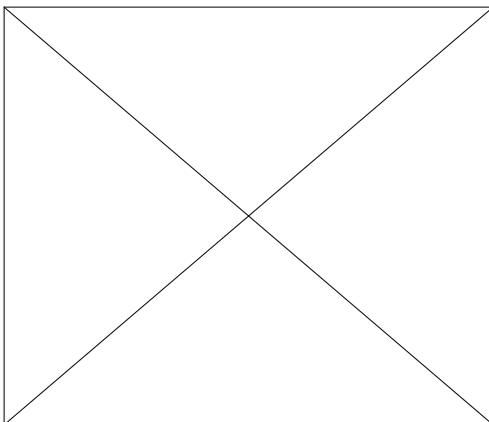
Organised by *National Party Of Vietnam (VNQDD)*

- Wanted an independent Vietnam
- Support from official, educated classes

3. Ho Chi Minh (see printed biography from Time Magazine)

- Importance of childhood
- Importance of French experience
- Spotted by Trotsky and trained in revolution and resistance by Russians
- ICP (**I**ndochinese **C**ommunist **P**arty) & Growth of support 1930-39

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General Giap & Ho Chi Minh

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### The struggle for Independence

#### Phase I: Ho Chi Minh and World War II

- Fall of France led to Vichy govt set up in France by Germans. Vichy govt now took control of colonies, incl Indo China
- 1941: Japan attacks south east Asia. In Indo China the (Vichy) French are allowed to remain in control, if gave economic resources to Japan
- Ho released from Chinese prison to lead resistance to Vichy French army in Indo China.
- **US:** supplied & financed.  
**Ho:** played down communist elements of ICP  
main goal to be national independence, not revolutionary communism
- Ho sets up new force: Viet Minh led by Giap to unite political opposition  
controls 3 northern provinces by Sept '44
- Aug 1945: Japan surrenders, Vietminh set up prov govt. Announce Democratic Rep of Vietnam
- Truman less keen on Ho than FDR, believing him a communist. Therefore:
  - Nationalist China encouraged to invade North
  - UK to occupy the south, handing it back to French.
- Ho does deal with French:
  - disbands ICP
  - agrees to French return if Vnam could be free country within Union Francaise
- After agreeing, French break promises. Leads to war with France.

#### Phase II: Ist Indo China War, 1945-54 (against France)

Two stages:

##### A) Guerilla war in the mountains

Ho moves into mountains to build up an anti French force  
No US support now, as US believes him a communist  
Not much USSR support as the USSR does not see Ho as a communist  
But much public support in villages: worked with villagers to improve conditions (schools, clinics)...like Castro/Che later in Cuba  
Giap builds up the army, at this time engaging in a "dirty war" from mountain bases

##### B) Classic war, out of mountains

By 1952, Giap was ready  
Troops confident and well trained  
Ho now has USSR support, so more weapons  
Dien Bien Phu = key battle  
Timing = crucial: Great powers meeting at Geneva, 1954 to discuss Cold War problems, incl Vietnam (= time of Thaw after death of Stalin)  
Aim was to defeat French before the conference and then get Great Powers to agree to independence of Vietnam under Ho.  
Battle: French drawn into a trap, then destroyed by artillery dragged up the mountain tops and waves of Viet Minh troops.  
Viet Minh victorious because:

1. Giap was a brilliant general, French generals (Navarre) were incompetent, misreading situation & encouraging "Verdun" mentality to the end
2. French allowed themselves to be drawn into a trap at the extreme range of their air supplies, Viet Minh had support in all the surrounding areas from villagers. The French then were poorly supplied.
3. Tenacity of Viet Minh: jungle routes built/ guns on 50,000 bike carriers/ fanatical fighting of Viet Minh at huge cost to them
4. Isolation of French: Internationally, little support. US dsid little due to CIA error (Told White House that French would win without US help)
5. French army at Dien Bien Phu = an embarrassment to France. Feeling of anti colonialism strong.

After defeat, France leaves and hands over Indo China for discussion at Geneva.....

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### Phase III: The US War & independence, 1954-75

#### Why the US got involved in Vietnam

##### **1. The US replaced the French in Vietnam**

- Vietnam was part of the French Empire.
- At end of WW2 it liberated itself from Japanese, led by Ho Chi Minh
- But Ho = communist & French returned to control Vietnam
- Ho fought the French for 9 years finally defeating them too  
= Geneva Conference, 1954
  1. Vietnam divided in two. North to be communist under Ho  
South to be democratic under French (but then the French could not afford to do this), so  
US protection
  2. Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) between them
  3. Elections within 2 years for a united single Vietnam

##### **2. Govt of the South was very unpopular**

- led by Diem, corrupt politician
- this increased opposition to him in the south from National Liberation Front who wanted union with Ho's North (NLF = Vietcong)
- campaign of terror in the south

##### **3. North Vietnam supported the south**

- Reason: US refused to allow the promised elections to take place
- North then decides to support the NLF terror campaign
- in return US now sends help to Diem (Money, supplies, 'advisers'-10,000 by 1962)

##### **4. Assassination of Diem Nov 1963**

- Diem becomes too unpopular even for US (burning Buddhists)
- JFK & CIA plot to overthrow him
- overthrown & shot but no better afterwards, US support has to increase

##### **5. JFK Assassinated**

- 3 weeks later in Dallas Nov 1963
- replaced by LBJ
- LBJ decides to increase US involvement:
  - a) to show he was as tough as JFK
  - b) to end the war quickly so that he could devote his attention to domestic problems

##### **6. Tonkin Incident**

- = excuse for getting involved.
- US destroyer was attacked off North Vietnam coast.
- US Congress gave LBJ the power to take whatever measures necessary to protect South Vietnam as a fellow SEATO member from attack. War never officially declared.

#### **Led to US war in Vietnam**

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### **Why the North & Viet Cong were victorious in Vietnam:/Why the lost**

#### 1. Vietnamese (Vietcong & North) had a cause to fight for

= war of liberation, therefore fought with great determination  
US troops unsure of war, seemed to be supporting corrupt regime.

#### 2. US forces in weak military position:

At first: untrained for guerrilla conflict/jungle methods

Later (post Tet): demoralised:

- no sense of purpose
- unwilling to pointlessly risk/lose lives
- troops undisciplined: desertion
  - 'fragging' of officers
  - drugs ('1971 58% on marijuana 22% heroin)  
5,000 hospitalised for wounds  
20,000 for drug abuse

#### 3. Increased opposition to war at home in USA

War heavily reported, esp on TV

Funerals mounted: very public

rise of protest movt.s esp amongst youth:

eg draft cards burnt

protest marches/sit-ins/Kent State (4 students shot)

hippie 'peace and love' era :music & festivals

#### 4. International opposition to US involvement:

world opinion upset by:

napalm and bombings of North

reported US atrocities,

eg My Lai massacre, 1968.

village believed to VC HQ

bombed & occupied. But = wrong one.

When villagers appeared, not VC but civilians, and still shot: 400 dead

mainly women & children

Court martial of officer, Calley "No big deal, Sir"

= world-wide marches, pressure to leave Vietnam.

#### 5. Material support for North from USSR & China

Especially in final years of war: weapons, food through Hanoi

#### 6. Strong leadership of North

First Ho, then Giap provide united leadership with disciplined govt

US Presidents unsure, change policies frequently. At end, Nixon is forced to resign.

So by 1973, US was happy to forget entire war & leave South Vietnam, defeated.