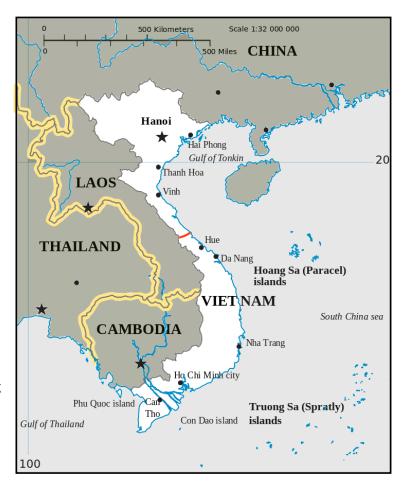# Origins of the war in Vietnam

The origins of American involvement in Vietnam date back to the end of the Second World War, when the Vietnamese were struggling against the continued French colonial presence in their country. **Ho Chi Minh**, the leader of the Viet Minh (Vietnamese Independence League) and the founder of Vietnam's Communist Party, successfully blended nationalist, anti-French sentiment with Marxist-Leninist revolutionary ideology. In 1954, after a prolonged guerrilla war to liberate Vietnam, the Viet Minh captured Dien Bien Phu, and decisively routed the French.

Map of Vietnam. The red line indicates the separation between North and South Vietnam following the peace negotiations in Geneva in 1954. Before the country was unified under the North Vietnamese government in 1975, Ho Chi Minh City was named Saigon.

In peace negotiations at Geneva, the decision was reached to divide Vietnam into northern and southern halves. The communists, headed by Ho Chi Minh, would govern the northern half, with its capital at Hanoi, while South Vietnam, with its capital at Saigon, would remain non-communist. The Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China supported the north, while the United States was determined to maintain an independent, non-communist South Vietnam.

In December 1960, the **National Liberation Front**, commonly called the **Viet Cong**, emerged to challenge the South Vietnamese government. A civil war erupted for control of South Vietnam, while Hanoi sought to unite the country under its own communist leadership. The Second Indochina War began in earnest with the US commitment to prevent the communists from overrunning South Vietnam. In spring 1961, the administration of John F. Kennedy expanded US support for the South Vietnamese government, including an increase in US military advisers, the doubling of military assistance, and authorization of the use of napalm, herbicides, and defoliants.

The escalating US involvement in Southeast Asia was driven by the logic of the **domino theory**, which contended that the falling of one country to communism would result in other surrounding countries succumbing to communism, much as one toppled domino will take down others in a

row. The containment strategy, laid out by [George Kennan in the Long Telegram](#), dictated that the United States do everything in its power to prevent the spread of communism. US officials believed that if South Vietnam fell to communism, so would the surrounding countries of Indonesia, Thailand, Burma, Malaysia, Laos, and Cambodia.

Lyndon Johnson and the war in Vietnam

In August 1964, the US government received word that two North Vietnamese torpedo boats attacked US destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin. [President Lyndon Johnson](#) requested authorization from Congress for the use of military force, resulting in the Gulf of Tonkin resolution, which laid the groundwork for the full-scale US military commitment to Vietnam. The resolution declared the support of Congress for "all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the armed forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.

Johnson was motivated by both domestic political and international balance of power considerations. He fully subscribed to the domino theory and to the containment strategy, and also feared appearing weak in the eyes of his domestic political opponents.

In 1965, Johnson dramatically escalated US involvement in the war. He authorized a series of bombing campaigns, most notably Operation Rolling Thunder, and also commited hundreds of thousands of US ground troops to the fight. Fearful that the war would jeopardize his domestic agenda, Johnson concealed the extent of the military escalation from the American public.

The 1968 **Tet Offensive**, a bold North Vietnamese attack on the south, convinced many US officials that the war could not be won at a reasonable cost. Heightened opposition to the war was one of the major factors in Johnson's decision not to run for re-election in 1968.

Richard Nixon and Vietnam

[Richard Nixon](#) campaigned for the presidency with a "secret plan" to end the war in Vietnam. Once in office, his administration sought to achieve "peace with honor." Nixon ultimately expanded the war into neighboring Laos and Cambodia, while simultaneously encouraging the "**Vietnamization**" of the war effort, which entailed the gradual withdrawal of US troops and an increasing reliance on the South Vietnamese armed forces. By the end of 1969, the number of American troops in Vietnam had been cut in half.

The **Paris Peace Accords** established terms according to which the last remaining US troops in Vietnam would be withdrawn. In 1975, the North Vietnamese finally achieved the objective of uniting the country under one communist government. The Socialist Republic of Vietnam was formally established on July 2, 1976, and Saigon was renamed **Ho Chi Minh City**. Though the outcome of the war was a clear defeat for the United States, countries surrounding Vietnam did not subsequently fall to communism, demonstrating the flawed reasoning of the domino theory.

The war in Vietnam had lasting consequences for US foreign policy. Congress passed the **War Powers Act** in 1973, in a clear attempt to reassert a measure of control over the making of foreign policy and to impose constraints on presidential power. For well over a decade, American public opinion was hostile to the idea of foreign interventions. This was known as the "**Vietnam syndrome**," and it entailed an unwillingness to become bogged down in foreign wars in which American national security interests were unclear.

> **– Khan Academy, https://www.khanacademy.org/**

FCCPA has created a database of the Fairfax County Korean veterans who died during the war, 25 June 1950 – 27 July 1953. Most of these men have been memorialized on the plaque at the Fairfax County Courthouse.

The database identifies 23 veterans. Where possible a biography, of each veteran's military life and a photograph of their gravestone is also included.

If you have any additions or corrections please contact the Fairfax County Cemetery Preservation Association (FCCPA).   To submit the information, please contact FCCPA through our website www.honorfairfaxcemeteries.org.

We would appreciate source information and/or documentation for any additions or corrections.

Acknowledgments

A historical compilation like this could not have been done without valuable resources and the contributions of many people.

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The contributors to **www.findagrave.com** for providing valuable online reference information and documentation of many of our area cemeteries and gravesites.

Members of our **database research committee** including Jamie Callender, Jack and Diane Dellomo, Mary Lipsey, and Ruth and Don Williams and West Springfield High School volunteers Sophia Haile and Rachel Inman.

Disclaimer:

FCCPA volunteers have contributed countless hours and extraordinary effort to create this database. Every effort has been made to ensure accuracy. It is accurate to the best of our knowledge. We do not claim that this database is complete. We would appreciate any corrections or suggested additions. Please contact FCCPA at http://www.honorfairfaxcemeteries.org/

Contact Us:

If you have any questions, corrections, or additions, please contact FCCPA through our website: www.honorfairfaxcemeteries.org. We would appreciate source information and/or documentation for any additions or corrections.