

Humanities Department / IB History



THE COLD WAR TOPIC 3: THE COLD WAR IN ASIA: THE VIETNAM WAR

READINGS

Todd, Allan. <u>The Cold War</u>. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. Pp. 88-105.

Rogers, Keely. & Thomas, Jo. <u>The Cold War</u>. Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 2008. Pp. 57-71.

3.1 ANCIENT VIETNAMESE HISTORY

- Inhabited dated back to the Paleolithic times; centred around North Vietnam
- The earliest known Vietnamese people (known as Lac and later Kinh/Viet) adopted wet rice cultivation based on the Red River delta
- Currently form over 86 per cent of the population; 54 recognised ethnic groups in Vietnam
- Conquered by a Chinese general in 207BC to form Nanyue; later submitted to the Chinese Han dynasty
- Forced to assimilate into Chinese civilization; deep impact of Confucianism
- Trung Trac and her sister Trung Nhi defeated the Chinese in 40 AD; killed themselves two years later when the Chinese reinvaded their independent state
- Lady Trieu Thu Trinh revolted against China in 248 AD; also committed suicide



Stele commemorating a 618 AD anti-Chinese revolt

 Ngo Quyen managed to overthrow Chinese rule in the 938 AD; created the Dai Viet kingdom



Ngo Quyen

- Hanoi was called Thang Long (ascending dragon) in 1010 where the Ly dynasty made it the capital
- Tran Hung Dao defeated 3 Mongol invasions during the 13th century



A battle scene depicting the defeat of the Mongol fleets



Tran Hung Dao

 The Ming dynasty briefly established its rule over Vietnam but was defeated by Le Loi who established a capital in Hanoi under the Le dynasty



Stele commemorating Le Loi's victory over the Chinese

Our Great Viet is a country where prosperity abounds. Where civilization reigns supreme. Its mountains, its rivers, its frontiers are its own; Its customs are distinct, in North and South.

Trieu, Dinh, Ly and Tran Created our Nation, Whilst Han, T'ang, Sung and Yuan Ruled over Theirs.

Over the centuries,

We have been sometimes strong, and sometimes weak, But never yet have we been lacking in heroes. Of that let our history be the proof.

Le Loi's proclamation

- Vietnam was willing to recognize Chinese overlordship as part of the Chinese tributary system since 1369
- Korea and Vietnam ranked among the highest in the system
- In exchange for a token recognition of the Chinese emperor, the Vietnamese missions had access to the highly lucrative trade with China (See History Paper 3)

3.2 THE ERA OF FRENCH IMPERIALISM

The imposition of French control

- Vietnam was faced with a steady expansion of French imperialism in the 19th century; influenced by the desire to protect Roman Catholicism and to establish plantation agriculture
- Vietnam appealed to China for help; led to the failed Sino-French war in 1884-5 where France established a protectorate over Vietnam (See History Paper 3)
- The Nguyen dynasty was reduced to a puppet government
- Vietnam was ruthlessly exploited and was kept poor
- Remained a largely agricultural country

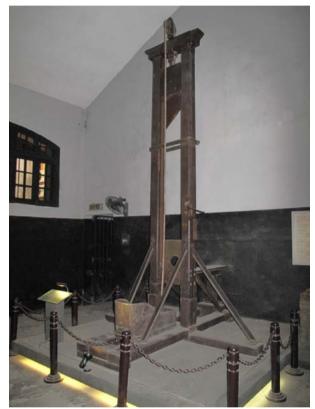
Vietnamese nationalist resistance

- Saw long periods of nationalistic resistance against the French
- The Can Vuong movement was led by the traditional Confucian scholarofficials who were determined to expel the French and kill the Christians; collapsed in 1896
- Other nationalists like Phan Boi Chau (1867-1940) and Nguyen Thai Hoc (1902-1930) were inspired by Chinese reformers like Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao and revolutionaries like Sun Zhongshan (see History Paper 3)
- The French stayed in power through the use of very harsh crackdown and working with Vietnamese collaborators



Hanoi Hilton: previously a French prison





Guillotine used by the French



Vietnamese nationalists executed

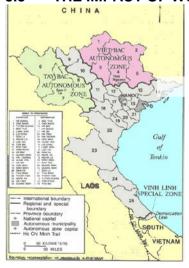


Hanoi Hilton's courtyard

The rise of the Vietnamese Communist Party

- was founded by Ho Chi Minh in China in 1930
- Ho had been trained in Moscow and was a Comintern agent
- Strong emphasis on nationalism hence people questioned his commitment to communism
- It would be fair to say he was both a nationalist and communist; really believed in the superiority of the socialist system
- wanted a united front approach where he was willing to ally with other nationalists to overthrow the French and delay socio-economic reforms
- Kept their aims general to ensure a wide appeal and toned down ideas of world revolution and a communist society
- Always calibrated his strategy with regard to the international situation
- Did not have much direct support from the Soviet Union

3.3 THE IMPACT OF WORLD WAR 2



- Vietnam came under indirect Japanese control during WW2
- Ho established a revolutionary base in Viet Bac, Cao Bang near the Chinese border
- Formed the Viet Minh which united Vietnamese nationalists; won support by focusing on nationalism rather than radical communist reforms
- Formed the National Liberation Army (NLA) and used guerrilla warfare and popular uprisings to seize power gradually, moving from the rural to the urban areas; controlled 1/3 of North Vietnam
- Ho declared independence in Ba Dinh Square on 2 September, creating the 'Democratic Republic of Vietnam'
- The American President Roosevelt was very keen on destroying French imperialism but died in April 1945
- Ho hoped to get American support but President Truman chose not to dispute French claims over Indochina
- His efforts to get the Americans to mediate between Vietnam and France were ignored

3.4 THE 1ST VIETNAM WAR

The outbreak of war

- Ho made great efforts to negotiate with the French but they had no intention of decolonising
- France wanted to retain the colonies because they represented French greatness
- had economic interests in Cochin China
- triggered a war in November 1946
- the Vietnamese General Vo Nguyen Giap adopted a guerrilla strategy against the French
- were poorly armed and equipped but were able to hold off the French

The growing role of America

- France was steadily drained financially
- Desperately needed American aid but the initial American position was to oppose French imperialism; America had no direct interests in the region
- France claimed Vietnam was a Cold War front; declared it was a Soviet and Chinese communist plot to extend communism
- America changed its mind due to the onset of the Cold War and the fall of China to communism in 1949
- Fear that communism would spread throughout Southeast Asia
- The Americans provided \$2900 million of aid from 1950-1954; in 1954 they were bearing 80% of the war costs

The Soviet position towards Vietnam

- Made no effort to stir up international support on behalf of the Viet Minh
- The Vietnamese were disappointed that Russia did nothing to prevent the return of the French military
- Did not recognize Ho's government; waited until Jan 1950 when the Vietnamese communists appealed for recognition
- Stalin considered Ho Chi Minh as being too independent
- Was careful not to intrude into a Chinese sphere of influence

The Chinese communist position towards Vietnam

- The Chinese discussed with the Soviets in August 1949 and it was agreed that the CCP would provide the main support to the Vietnamese communists
- China was concerned about ensuring the security of its southern borders
- Vietnam was recognized by China in Jan 1950
- Vietnam received weapons, advisers and war materials from Communist China after 1949 though both sides tried to deny it; many soldiers received training in China
- Chinese aid arrived in significant amounts in 1953
- Conflict between the two groups grew over each other's intentions and advice

The French defeat at Dien Bien Phu



- hoped to achieve a significant victory over the communists prior to negotiations
- Occupied Dien Bien Phu to cut the Viet Minh supply route through Laos
- Hoped to force the Vietnamese to fight at Dien Bien Phu
- Suffered a humiliating defeat in May 1954

The Geneva Conference of 1954



- Russia and China wanted to relax tensions with America after Stalin's death in 1953: needed to focus on domestic issues
- China and Russia were not willing to back the Vietnamese communists fully
- The Russians adopted the policy of peaceful co-existence (see Cold War notes Chapter 4)
- The Chinese were worried that when the French withdrew the Americans would come in and threaten China; wanted to keep the foreigners away from Chinese borders hence a divided Vietnam suited Chinese purposes
- The North Vietnamese wanted to control all of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia
- the 16th Parallel was finally adopted as the dividing line between North and South Vietnam; the North under the communists and the South under the non-communists
- Elections were to be held in 1956 to unify the country
- Agreed not to remilitarize the conflict where both sides were not to allow foreign troops into their territories
- The Americans refused to sign the agreement
- South Vietnam benefited most from the agreement because it saved the government from extinction as they would have lost any elections and the agreement gave it more area than it controlled

3.5 THE GROWING CONFLICT WAR BETWEEN NORTH AND SOUTH VIETNAM

The North Vietnamese government

- Established a strongly centralized one party state; was very repressive against its domestic enemies
- Ho Chi Minh remained personally very popular
- Divided over the issue of reliance on China and the USSR
- President Ho preferred a more even handed approach to both but was more wary of China

- The Secretary General Le Duan preferred an alliance with China while General Giap was pro-Soviet
- By 1956, the North Vietnamese government decided to focus on political agitation rather than armed struggle in South Vietnam
- The government became divided between North-firsters led by Ho Chi Minh and South-firsters led by Le Duan; the former wanted to build socialism in North Vietnam as there were growing economic problems while the latter wanted to support the growing resistance in South Vietnam
- In 1959 the South-firsters gained the upper hand; coincided with Le Duan's growing dominance of the government
- Adopted Resolution 15 to support the resistance in the South; started supplies through the Ho Chi Minh trail but did not support the sending of armed troops to the South

The North Vietnamese economy

- the Chinese and Russians provided the crucial raw materials and consumer goods
- received a lot of aid from Russia where they exceeded that of China by 60%; foreign loans accounted for 54.9% of the revenue in 1975
- There was a chronic dependence on imports for industrial raw materials, food and consumer goods
- Was plagued by very inefficient capacity utilization
- In 1960, the value of imports was 11% of the national income; rose to 23% in 1975

The South Vietnamese government

- Ngo Dinh Diem overthrew the Vietnamese emperor Bao Dai and established a republic
- A pro-French collaborator; devoutly Catholic and staunchly anti-communist
- Had close connections with the Americans but totally rejected their advice
- Ruled with the aid of his abusive and corrupt family members; supported by the Catholics and the rich landowners
- Ran the government in a very repressive and unrepresentative manner;
 rejected American advice to carry out democratic reforms
- Unable to win support from the masses nor was able to modernize South Vietnam
- The South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) was very poorly led and trained; were oppressive towards the masses
- The officer corps had no connection with the troops as more than ½ were Catholics and from North Vietnam
- Serious desertion problem
- Outnumbered the communist guerrillas but were unable to defeat them
- The Buddhists staged a massive protest in 1963 due to Diem's discrimination against them; reflected the growing weakness of Diem's government
- The ARVN generals plotted and killed Diem with the knowledge and approval from the Central Intelligence Agency on 1 November 1963
- Had no real plans on Diem's replacement
- Led to 7 unstable military governments until Nguyen Van Thieu and Nguyen Cao Ky came to power in 1965
- Their government was equally repressive and unrepresentative
- Failed to carry out much needed socio-economic reforms

The South Vietnamese economy

- The government failed to solve the serious agrarian crisis where the peasants were plagued with loss of land and tenancy issues
- The communists took advantage of the peasant resentment and spread propaganda which focused on land distribution, rent reduction and opposition to usury and corruption
- Used People's Courts to attack officials, tax collectors and landlords
- The Americans provided much economic aid but was squandered due to corruption

Anti-Diem forces in South Vietnam

- in 1955 a National Liberation Front was formed in South Vietnam
- coordinated activities among the various anti-Diem groups; did include many non-communists
- most of their supplies and weapons were obtained from local sources in South Vietnam
- carried out assassinations against officials and landlords and conducted small raids; began in 1957 where they were trying to destroy the government's hold over the countryside
- subjected to heavy repression and were suffering high losses
- kept pressing North Vietnam for support but they wanted to avoid war as they needed to carry out nation-building
- Hoped for a settlement through a coalition government
- By 1959 the North Vietnamese could no longer ignore the growing losses of the southern communists
- issued its Resolution 15 in May 1959 which called for armed violence in the reunification issue



- Began sending back the South Vietnamese communists in North Vietnam to infiltrate into the South through the Ho Chi Minh Trail
- Did not allow sending of North Vietnamese combat troops
- The National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (Viet Cong) was formed in December 1960 which was a front to attract all opponents to the Saigon government
- The NLF often acted independently of Hanoi
- made no reference to communism but stressed nationalism, democracy and moderate land reform
- launched a full scale revolt in March 1960
- A People's Liberation Armed Forces (Viet Cong) served as the military arm of the NLF
- grew to 15,000 by end 1961; grew to 25000 in 1962
- The North Vietnamese troops had to intervene in 1964 as the Viet Cong were unprepared for an intensive campaign
- Carried out the massive development of the Ho Chi Minh Trail
- By end 1964 the communists controlled ½ of South Vietnam; the South Vietnamese were only in control of the urban areas
- Stepped up operations in the urban areas, using assassination and sabotage
- ARVN was suffering losses while the government authority in the rural areas was dropping

The reaction of the major communist powers up to 1965

Up to 1959 the Soviets and the Chinese preferred peaceful reunification;
 were not keen when North Vietnam initiated military action in 1959

- China still went ahead with providing large military aid in the early 1960s; from 1956 to 1963, China provided aid totaling 320 million yuan
- As the Chinese aid was far more significant, it had greater influence over Hanoi
- The Russians were not very keen because of Cold War concerns; left the region to Mao until 1965
- it was only when America got involved in Vietnam in 1965 did the Soviets get involved
- The North Vietnamese leaders turned to the Chinese for support though not all the Vietnamese leaders were keen about the alliance
- Internal Chinese politics exploded over the issue of supporting North Vietnam; some argued it was their duty to assist North Vietnam while others argued that it was a Russian plot to get China entangled with America
- China's domestic situation was rapidly become more radical; Mao wanted a
 more aggressive international stance to counter Liu Shaoqi and Deng
 Xiaoping's tendency to adopt a 'revisionist' domestic and international policy
- An opportunity for China to highlight the Soviet failure to support national liberation movements
- In 1963 the Chinese promised that they would come to North Vietnam's defence should the Americans attack North Vietnam

3.6 THE 2ND VIETNAM WAR

The reasons for American intervention

- by the 1960s, the American-Soviet rivalry was extended to the developing countries; the 3rd world
- both sides were seeking for new client states
- Considered the communist movement as being evil and aggressive; saw the North Vietnamese as puppets of the USSR and China
- If South Vietnam fell, the rest of Southeast Asia would fall to communism; the domino theory
- Fear that American withdrawal from Vietnam would affect its international credibility; would lead to questions about its commitment to contain communism
- Would cause its allies to lose faith in America
- Clearly failed to recognize the importance of nationalism in the Vietnamese issue

The steady march to war

- The American President John Kennedy believed that the solution to wars of national liberation could be settled by technology and Special Forces applying counter-insurgency methods
- Supported by the Defence Secretary Robert McNamara and other advisers who were considered America's 'brightest and the best'; believed that there were technological answers to all problems and managerial solutions to all crises
- Hoped that he would not have to depend on combat troops or bombing of North Vietnam as demanded by his advisers

- Had repeatedly said to his advisers that he did not want to get involved in Vietnam but lacked the determination to take a firm stance for fear of being seen as an appeaser
- The Special Forces (the Green Berets) consisted of the best from the American military; would train local troops; went against the Geneva Agreement of 1954
- There were 11500 American military personnel in South Vietnam by end of 1962
- American civilians would promote political reforms which would undermine the communist hold over the peasants
- It was ironical that there was much faith in the new counter-insurgency techniques yet later the military claimed that there was an inadequate application of force
- Was succeeded by Lyndon Johnson
- As the South Vietnamese government and army grew weaker, there was more pressure on the Americans to intervene
- The CIA considered the situation untenable by end 1964
- Failed to focus on a political and economic solution; strong emphasis on military solutions
- Over 90% of the aid was to the military

The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution

- US Navy ships spying on North Vietnam claimed they came under attack in Aug 1964
- US Congress passed overwhelmingly the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution
- Allowed Johnson to wage war in Southeast Asia without a formal declaration of war
- France and the United Nations repeatedly urged negotiations but America refused for future it would be a precedence for the future
- The Americans wanted to buy time to ensure military success so that any negotiations will favour them; ruled out any political solution
- North Vietnam had sent out peace feelers but it was totally ignored by the Americans

The American aerial bombing campaign 'Rolling Thunder'

- The Americans were convinced that a simple cost benefit analysis through the use of conventional bombing would convince the Vietnamese communists to stop
- Did not target the communist war capabilities but the will of their leaders
- Attacked targets in North and South Vietnam
- Hanoi insisted that it would not negotiate until the bombing was halted; the Americans refused to stop until infiltration of South Vietnam stopped
- By 1970 more bombs were dropped on Vietnam than the whole of human history
- Were convinced that the war could be won through American money and material alone

Reasons for the failure of 'Rolling Thunder'

- Heavy Vietnamese anti-aircraft defence and the adoption of various methods to minimize losses
- American policy of gradually escalating the bombing was counterproductive

The deployment of American combat troops

- In February 1965, the communists attacked the American air base at Pleiku; 8
 Americans killed and 10 aircraft destroyed
- Led to the deployment of American combat troops; to protect the bases then expanded to search and destroy missions
- Tried to cut off the communists from their peasant bases but served only to inflict heavy civilian losses

Weaknesses of the American military

- Had a divided command structure hence different branches operated separately
- The troop rotation of 1 year tour of duty prevented the development of experienced soldiers; could not cope with the weather and diseases
- Adopted the strategy of attrition in hope of wearing down the enemy but they
 were unprepared for the challenges of fighting a guerrilla force due to their
 conventional training
- Overly reliant on superior firepower and technology rather than trained manpower
- Frustrated by their inability to distinguish between civilians and guerrillas
- Failed to get domestic American support which was distressed by rising deaths, taxes and the lack of a solution in sight; were ostracized, jeered or spat on
- Little effort to impose censorship over the American media
- The American military tended to focus on optimistic reports which led to a credibility gap
- The US public opinion was not able to sustain heavy losses for long

Strengths of the North Vietnamese Army and the Viet Cong

- were deeply motivated by nationalist reasons
- their ideological fervor was reinforced by political commissars
- adopted the 'cling to the enemy's belt' tactic so that American air and artillery power would be negated
- used guerrilla tactics backed by a network of tunnels to hid, in order to wear down the Americans
- had secure sanctuaries in Laos and Cambodia; the Americans could not pursue them
- backed by a steady logistical and manpower route, the Ho Chi Minh trail;
 aided by massive supplies from China and the Soviet Union

The Tet offensive: the turning point

- in 1967 the Viet Cong were suffering high losses; recruitment was dropping
- the South Vietnamese people began to resist the threat of North Vietnamese domination and were willing to postpone reunification; the North feared the peace sentiment was spreading
- began planning for a mass rural and urban uprising; badly needed a major victory in 1968

- was very hopeful as they knew that they did not possess military superiority
- a major simultaneous attack on many urban centres in January 1968 during the Vietnamese New Year of Tet: over 70000 communists involved
- could even attack the American Embassy in Saigon
- hoped that they would be supported by popular uprisings and mass ARVN defections but it did not materialize
- The Viet Cong were defeated by American firepower; over 32000 were killed and much of their revolutionary infrastructure was destroyed
- The Viet Cong numbers were dropping hence more regular North Vietnamese troops were sent to the south in 1968 onwards
- Had to re-adopt small scale guerrilla action until 1972
- despite the losses, the communists scored a major propaganda victory as the American public became convinced that the war could not be won; pressurized the government to pull out
- due to the Vietnam war being the 1st televised war

The growing domestic American opposition to war

- the Johnson administration was facing a credibility gap; kept making optimistic statements yet the results were dismal
- by 1967 the American government became divided over the war; the civilian officials became openly critical of the military assessments
- the growing economic cost of the war was crippling the economy as the government deficit soared and taxes were raised
- anti-war protests broke out in the universities and draft dodging became common
- Johnson declared a bombing halt in March 1968 and opened negotiations with North Vietnam
- In 1969 America began making troop withdrawals from Vietnam
- Ended the conscription in November 1969; began to shift on an all-volunteer army
- Quickly undermined the opposition from the students; the anti-war demos became less of an issue

Gradual withdrawal under Nixon

- President Richard Nixon declared that he wanted 'peace with honour'
- Introduced the Nixon Doctrine was to limit US ground troops in Asian wars;
 America would provide military and economic assistance but Asian countries to provide their own soldiers
- Adopted the policy of Vietnamisation so that American troops could withdraw and ARVN to take over the fighting
- Vietnamisation faced many problems like the inept and corrupt officer corps, the unwillingness of ARVN troops to fight in unfamiliar areas, low morale, poor pay and training etc
- Nixon wanted to force Hanoi to accept a negotiated settlement but the communists were determined to obtain a battlefield victory; a stalemate

The expansion of the war effort

- Nixon ordered the bombing of Vietnamese bases in Cambodia and invaded Cambodia in 1970 and 1971 in an attempt to stop the communist infiltration
- Was a 'covert' bombing campaign

- believed that it would increase America's bargaining power
- felt that a demonstration of American power would strengthen the Saigon government and force the North Vietnamese to give better terms

The Easter Offensive of March 1972



- launched by Hanoi
- to break the negotiation stalemate
- to show the Soviets and Chinese that they deserved continued support
- invasion against the northern provinces of South Vietnam then along the Cambodian border
- Hanoi was disappointed by their failure to instigate a popular uprising in South Vietnam
- ARVN survived the onslaught aided by American airpower, aided by the resumption of the bombing of the North
- Stopped the North Vietnamese invasion

The American-North Vietnamese Paris Peace Talks

- Began in 1968
- The key sticking point was that the Americans were determined to ensure the survival of South Vietnam while North Vietnam opposed a compromise peace
- The South Vietnamese government refused to negotiate with the Viet Cong present as it would mean formal recognition for them
- Nixon hoped to use the strategy of linkage with the Soviets where he would only make agreements with the Soviets if they cut off the arms supply to North Vietnam
- Visited China in 1972; hoped to use the improved relations with China to put pressure on the Soviets
- failed to realize that North Vietnam had its own aims and objectives separate from the Soviet Union and China
- Neither side changed their Vietnam policy and continued to send supplies especially anti-aircraft weapons
- Negotiations succeeded in October 1972

- Hanoi no longer insisted that Thieu stepped down and did not demand for a full coalition government
- Led to the formation of a National Council of Reconciliation and Concord to include the Saigon regime and the South Vietnamese communists
- Exchange of POWs
- End of infiltration by North Vietnam but did not require the North Vietnamese troops to leave the South
- End of American aid to the South
- treaty signed on 27 January 1973 in the Paris Agreement
- From 1965 to 1973 the United States spent \$109.5 billion and suffered 349,588 casualties
- The last American troops left in March 1973

The role of the Soviet Union during the Vietnam War

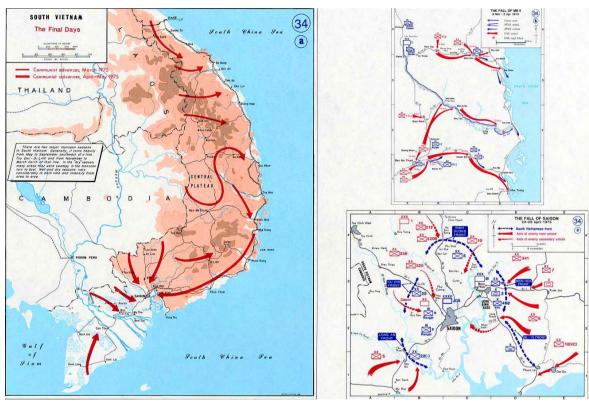
- Had to support North Vietnam lest Southeast Asian communists were discouraged by its lack of support
- Willing to support North Vietnam in order to undermine America; wanted it to be bogged down
- Competed with China to provide North Vietnam support
- Provided early warning intelligence of American bombing raids
- Provided vital military hardware like surface-to-air missiles
- Deployed no more than 3000 troops; miniscule losses
- Vietnamese soldiers attended Soviet military schools
- The North Vietnamese were unwilling to allow the Soviets to interrogate the US prisoners-of-war or have access to captured US military hardware
- The Soviets soon realized its lack of influence on the North Vietnamese
- Tried to press Hanoi to negotiate with the Americans but the North Vietnamese rejected their pressure

The role of China during the Vietnam War

- China warned the Americans that an invasion of North Vietnam would mean war with China
- When war broke out with the United States, it began to provide much aid as it could not afford to have a hostile enemy near its border
- Sent a series of warning signals to the Americans that they would intervene
 with military troops if the US went beyond bombing of the North and invaded
 North Vietnam
- Mao stepped up China's involvement in Vietnam as part of his plan to stimulate the Cultural Revolution
- In this war, the Vietnamese communists did not allow the Chinese any decision-making powers unlike in the 1st Vietnam war
- Provided anti-aircraft units and engineering units which freed the North Vietnamese troops for combat roles
- Protected strategic targets like critical railway bridges
- The Chinese were careful not to expand their commitments like they refused to send volunteer pilots, or limiting anti-aircraft troops above the 21st parallel etc
- Sharp increase in military supplies from China from 1965 onwards but sharp drop after 1969
- By 1968, China had deployed over 320000 troops

- Made efforts to hinder the movement of Soviet aid
- Kept pressing the North Vietnamese to break away from the Soviets
- When border conflicts broke out between China and the Soviet Union in 1969,
 China could not afford to have fighting continuing along its southern borders when the greater northern threat was brewing
- In October 1968 China pressed Vietnam to break relations with the Soviet Union but it refused
- China was unhappy that Hanoi opened negotiations with the Americans in 1968
- Began to reduce its support and withdrew all its forces by 1970; turned instead to the communist Khmer Rouge in Cambodia
- China due to the Cultural Revolution became very critical of the Paris Peace talks in contrast to Moscow

The fall of Indochina to communism in 1975



- Made Hanoi adopt a more military approach and launched an all-out invasion in 1975
- Thieu and Ky fled the country in April 1975
- The communist Khmer Rouge in Cambodia and Pathet Lao in Laos too came to power in 1975 after overthrowing pro-American military dictatorships
- There was deep fears that the communists would expand southwards but it never materialized
- The North Vietnamese government official denied the presence of any foreign communist troops
- Their involvement freed Hanoi to send more troops to South Vietnam

3.7 THE IMPACT OF THE VIETNAM WAR

1. Post-1975 Intra Communist conflicts In Southeast Asia

Vietnam and Russia

- Vietnam considered the USSR as the HQ of international communism.
- Wanted closer friendship with Russia to check China; treaty of friendship with Russia in 1978
- Became a COMECON member in 1978; provided much economic aid at friendship prices which was a drain on the Soviets
- Allowed Russia to use the large naval base in Camranh Bay
- Support declined after 1989 where Russia had a rapprochement with China; aid ended in 1991

Vietnam and China

- The Vietnamese felt that China betrayed it during the 1954 Geneva Conference
- was unhappy that China failed to provide them with more sophisticated weapons and for the Chinese protracted war strategy which would have slowed down the Vietnamese success at reunifying Vietnam
- China opposed Vietnam's domination of Indochina; a threat to China's borders
- Opposed its close relations with Russia



- The Chinese invasion of Vietnam was launched in February 1979
- 100000 Vietnamese troops stopped 200000 Chinese soldiers
- destroyed 4 Vietnamese border provinces and weakened the Vietnamese economy further

Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia

- Central Vietnam could easily be cut by external enemies; necessary to secure Laos and Cambodia to protect it
- The Vietnamese Communist Party dominated the Cambodia Khmer Rouge and Laotian Pathet Lao communist movements prior to 1975
- The Pathet Lao aligned themselves closely with Vietnam but the relations with the Khmer Rouge became very tense
- The memory of the Vietnamese invasions and exploitation was deep in the Cambodian psyche since 15th century
- Deep ideological differences where the Vietnamese communists placed the their interests first before 1975; expected the Cambodians and Laos to play a subordinate role
- The Cambodians deeply resented the Vietnamese in Cambodia; had been brought in to assist the French
- There were territorial disputes which were adjusted in favour of Vietnam
- The Khmer Rouge began launching raids into Vietnam in 1978
- The Vietnamese invaded on 25 December 1978 led by 100000 troops; to stop the Cambodian aggression
- Replaced the Khmer Rouge with a pro-Vietnamese communist government
- Vietnam only withdrew in 1989 in face of foreign condemnation, very serious economic difficulties and its inability to defeat the Cambodian resistance movement
- 2. Protecting the capitalist semi-democratic Southeast Asia
- Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand had the breathing space to develop their economies
- 3. Undermining of the American imperial presidency
- Congress began asserting its authority and started to limit the powers of the President
- In December 1970 it repealed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution
- In 1973 it imposed the War Powers Act which required the President to give an accounting of his actions within 30 days to committing troops to a foreign war; Congress had to approve the war