

Module 10: The Cold War
Topic 2 Content: The Vietnam War

Vietnam War

Vietnam War 1955-1975



Background War End of War

The image is a presentation slide titled "Vietnam War" in a window-like frame. The main content area features a composite image. The top portion shows soldiers in a field, with one soldier in the foreground holding a rifle and another in the background near a helicopter. The bottom right portion is a portrait of Ho Chi Minh. Below the image is a navigation bar with three sections: "Background" (green arrow), "War" (red arrow), and "End of War" (blue arrow). Each section contains small circular icons representing individual slides.

Background

Colonial History

The screenshot shows a software window titled "Vietnam War". Inside, there is a section for "Colonial History". On the left, it lists "French Indochina" with sub-points for Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Below that, it notes "WWII" and states "Ruled by Vichy France" and "Occupied by Japan". On the right is a map of Southeast Asia with Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia highlighted in blue, and the entire region labeled "French Indochina". Neighboring countries like China and Thailand are also labeled. At the bottom, a progress bar shows the current position in the "Colonial History" section, with markers for "Background", "War", and "End of War".

During the Age of Imperialism, France ruled over Indochina, a colony in Southeast Asia made up of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. This region was an important source of raw materials such as iron and rubber, and Vietnam was the largest source of these materials for France.

When France was conquered by the Germans in World War II, Indochina was ruled by the Vichy French government, which collaborated with the Nazis. In reality, the colony was occupied and ruled by the Japanese, who were looking for other ways to attack China and additional colonial territories.

Post WWII

Vietnam War

Post WWII

- France looked to regain control of Indochina
- Ho Chi Minh led communist insurgency
- Communist Democratic Republic of Vietnam established September 1945

Post WWII

Background War End of War

After World War II ended, France sought to regain control of Indochina. Within Vietnam, however, a number of pro-independence groups that were opposed to colonial rule had been established during the war. One such movement was a communist insurgency. It was led by Ho Chi Minh who was educated in France and the Soviet Union. During the war, he led many military campaigns against the Japanese and Vichy France rulers to try and drive them out of the country.

After Japan lost the war and left Vietnam, the communists established the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in September of 1945. The communists would have to defeat the French before the country was truly independent.

War

French Defeat

Vietnam War

French Defeat

China and the Soviet Union supported communist insurgents

1954

- French beaten at Dien Bien Phu
- Vietnam divided at the 17th parallel
- Communists control North Vietnam

French Defeat

Background War End of War

Ho Chi Minh and his communist insurgents used hit-and-run guerilla tactics making it difficult for the French to win any significant battles. It also made the war costly and unpopular at home in France.

In 1950, China and the Soviet Union recognized the communists as the legitimate government of Vietnam and started to support the insurgents. In 1954, after the French were soundly defeated at the battle of Dien Bien Phu, France was ready to end the war. Both sides agreed to a peace settlement that divided Vietnam at the 17th parallel with the communists in control of North Vietnam. Free elections would be held at a later date to reunify the country.

Having recently concluded the Korean War, the U.S. was firmly committed to its policy of containment. With French assistance, America supported a government in South Vietnam to counter the communist one in the North. The situation was looking very similar to Korea which was divided between a communist North and a non-communist South.

Diem Becomes President

Vietnam War

Diem Becomes President

- 1955 elections
- Diem crucial to containment

Diem Becomes President

Background War End of War

In 1955, Ngo Dinh Diem held a controversial election in South Vietnam, after which he declared South Vietnam to be an independent country and himself as president.

Diem was Roman Catholic and strongly anti-communist in a country that was mostly Buddhist. Shortly after the election, Diem directed a campaign against some Buddhists and suspected communists, imprisoning and killing many. Diem was supported by President Eisenhower who saw Diem as a crucial part of America's strategy to contain communism in North Vietnam.

U.S. Military Buildup

Vietnam War

U.S. Military Buildup

Diem's government unpopular

Viet Cong - communist insurgents from North

1960

- Communists try to overthrow South
- U.S. starts sending military advisors

1963

- Diem overthrown

1964

- U.S. sends troops and starts bombing North

U.S. Military Buildup

Background War End of War

Unfortunately for the U.S., Diem's government lacked popular support among the Vietnamese due to many of his dictatorial actions.

In 1960, the North began a campaign to overthrow the South using Viet Cong soldiers and guerilla attacks against the government. The Viet Cong won support among some in the South, especially the peasants.

U.S. leaders strongly supported their containment policy and President Kennedy sent military advisors to help Diem's government. In 1963, as Diem became even less popular, he was overthrown by the South Vietnamese military with the unspoken support of the American government.

In 1964, after North Vietnam attacked an American battleship, the U.S. began sending troops to South Vietnam and began bombing runs against the North. This made South Vietnam's military government even less popular.

Long War

Vietnam War

Long War

- North Vietnam protracted war strategy using guerilla tactics
- Protests in the U.S.
- Draft re-instated

Long War

Background War End of War

North Vietnam realized that it couldn't win if it fought the U.S. directly, so it adopted guerilla tactics. Despite being the best-equipped army in the world, the U.S. couldn't defeat the North Vietnamese and their guerilla army.

As the war continued, many people in the United States began protesting against the war. Since there was a shortage of people volunteering for the military, President Johnson was forced to reinstate the draft. This made the war even less popular in America.

President Nixon

The image shows a presentation slide titled "Vietnam War" with a sub-section "President Nixon". The slide lists key events from 1968:

- Nixon wins presidency
- *Vietnamization* - greater dependence South Korean soldiers
- U.S. troop reduction
- Increased bombing of North Korea and neighboring countries
- Over 543,000 American military personnel in Vietnam

At the bottom of the slide is a navigation bar with three sections: "Background" (green), "War" (red), and "End of War" (blue). A white box labeled "President Nixon" is positioned above the "War" section, with a red dot indicating the current slide's position.

As the war dragged on, Richard Nixon won the 1968 American presidential election, partly on his promises to end the war. His Vietnamization strategy was based on the idea that the South Vietnamese were not doing enough to fight the war, and that South Vietnamese soldiers would be used in greater numbers as American troops were brought home.

In 1968, at the height of the war, there were over 543,000 American military personnel in Vietnam. In order to make up for the American troops that being withdrawn from the country, Nixon ordered more bombing campaigns against the North.

As American troops dropped more bombs on Vietnam, as well as neighboring countries, and images of atrocities from the war made it to the front pages of newspapers around the world, support for the war continued to diminish in the U.S.

End of War

End of War



Realizing that the U.S. was fighting a losing battle, President Nixon slowly tried to get the U.S. out of the war while maintaining the South Vietnamese government as a non-communist ally.

From 1973 until the fall of Saigon in 1975, America withdrew its troops while turning over the country to the South Vietnamese. The North Vietnamese kept pushing into the South and finally won the war as the Americans hurried to evacuate remaining personnel.

[Photo courtesy Meutia Chaerani - Indradi Soemardjan]

Aftermath

Vietnam War

Aftermath

- > 58,000 U.S. Soldiers killed
- > 150,000 wounded
- > 21,000 permanently disabled
- > 100,000 draft dodgers

Background War End of War

Aftermath

The Vietnam War was the deadliest conflict of the Cold War. Over fifty-eight thousand American servicemen lost their lives and others remain missing in action. The war also showed that America could not always stop the spread of communism through military means.

The war had a huge effect on American society. Over one hundred thousand men fled to Canada to avoid the draft. In 1977, United States President Jimmy Carter granted a full, complete, and unconditional pardon to all Vietnam-era draft dodgers.