

## International Scenario: The Vietnam War (1955-1975)

The Vietnam War was fought between communist North Vietnam and the democratic government of South Vietnam. The North was supported by the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union, while the South was supported primarily by the United States and France.

## Before the War

Before World War II, Vietnam was colonized by the French. During World War II, the Japanese seized control. At the conclusion of the war, multiple parties argued over what would become of Vietnam. Vietnamese communist leader Ho Chi Minh wanted freedom for his country. However, the Western Allies felt that Vietnam should return to the French.

## Containment

Fighting began over who would control Vietnam. North Vietnam contained mostly Ho Chi Minh's forces, known as the Viet Minh. French troops occupied much of the south. The United States kept a watchful eye on the situation in Vietnam as they practiced their policy of "containment" to prevent the spread of communism. When Ho Chi Minh began to succeed against the French, the U.S. became more concerned and began sending aid in 1950.

## The U.S. Enters the War

In 1954 the French left Vietnam defeated, and the country was divided into two parts. North Vietnam had a communist government, and South Vietnam had a democratic government. An election was planned for 1956 and would unite the country based on the results. However, the election never happened. In March 1959, Ho Chi Minh declared war to unite Vietnam under his rule. Still concerned about the spread of communism, the United States supported the southern leader Ngo Dinh Diem who they originally helped get elected. By December 1961, American military advisors made most of the war's military decisions. After the North Vietnamese attacked two U.S. ships in 1964, Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution to allow U.S. troops to use force in the area.

## A Difficult War

The terrain of Vietnam was mostly jungles, and the U.S. troops found it difficult to fight. The North Vietnamese fighters excelled at hiding in the dense jungles and setting booby traps for their enemy. While U.S. troops still relied on ground attacks (like the Tet Offensive), they also engaged in numerous bombing campaigns (Operation Rolling Thunder).

## The U.S. Leaves

President Richard Nixon began to withdraw troops from what was proving to be a losing battle in July 1969. On January 27, 1973, a ceasefire was negotiated. In April 1975, South Vietnam surrendered to North Vietnam. The country became the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and remains a communist country today. The Vietnam War was a major setback for the United States during the Cold War.

