

KEY QUESTION: How successful was US Containment in Vietnam? Part 1, 1954 - 63

KEY TERMS

Containment / Domino Theory / Imperialist / Insurgency / NLF / Viet Minh / Viet Cong /

Contextual Background:

- Vietnam had been a French colony before it was occupied by the Japanese during World War Two.
- After World War Two, it was returned to French control, but many Vietnamese people wanted independence.
- As a result, in the 1950s, the French found themselves fighting a war against the **Viet Minh**, an organisation dedicated to getting rid of foreign imperialist powers from Vietnam.
- Worried about the spread of communism in South East Asia, the USA began to financially support the French war effort in Vietnam.
- Halting the spread of communism was an idea that President Truman had said he was committed to as part of his Truman Doctrine, which was announced in 1947 during the early days of the Cold War.
- In 1954, the French were finally defeated by the Viet Minh at the **Battle of Dien Bien Phu**.
- This defeat was formalised in the **Geneva Agreement**.
- The agreement temporarily separated Vietnam into two zones - a northern zone to be governed by the Viet Minh and a southern zone to be governed by an anti-communist government led by **Ngo Dinh Diem**.

How many stars would you award the US for containing communism in Vietnam to 1963?



Why did the USA become involved in Vietnam?

- America was operating a policy of containment. The USA believed in the domino theory and feared if Vietnam fell to communism, other countries in South East Asia would follow. Consequently, the USA supported the anti-communist South Vietnamese dictator, Ngo Dinh Diem, who refused to hold elections to unify the country.
- America also had other (economic) interests in South Vietnam. It was an attractive country because it was an area rich in tungsten, tin and rubber. These were important resources which the Americans could benefit from.
- Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson all supported the policy of containment. The spread of communism had to be stopped. They all believed that China which had become communist in 1949 and the USSR were behind North Vietnam's insurgency upon the south.
- The USA was operating a policy of containment and they feared the domino effect; in this instance, they viewed Vietnam as a wobbly domino because, under Ngo Dinh Diem, South Vietnam was becoming more vulnerable to communist influence. He was unpopular and corrupt. In 1963 the US backed his assassination. The US felt they had to 'bolster' the South with their support.

Who was Ho Chi Minh?

- He was a Vietnamese nationalist who believed the best future for Vietnam was unified under his communist leadership. From 1941 he led Vietnam's resistance to Japanese and then French occupation.
- In 1960, Ho Chi Minh formed the NLF and declared a 'war' to overthrow the South Vietnamese government and unite Vietnam under communist rule with the support of the Vietcong insurgents

What form did US support for South Vietnam take up to 1963?

Eisenhower: Had secured a ceasefire in Korea (1953) and didn't want the US to be directly involved in another conflict so quickly, so under him the US provided financial aid, paying for half the French involvement and 1,000 military advisers. This failed! The French lost

Kennedy: Increased the financial aid to South Vietnam and increased the advisers to 16,000. He supported the strategic hamlet programme.

Discussion Point: Financial aid and US advisers were making little difference – what would you advise JFK to do?



DATE Check: 1941 Ho Chi Minh forms Viet Minh / 1945 - 1954 French attempt to regain their former colony defeated / 1956 Elections – not held! / Insurgency begins