

IMUN 2026

Historical Security Council Issue #1: The Situation in Vietnam March 1964

The situation in Vietnam was a proxy conflict between the United States of America, the South Vietnamese Army and the communist forces in Vietnam, the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese Army (NVA).

The origins of the conflict date back to the late 19th century during France's colonisation of Indochina, which was crushed by civilian opposition in 1930. This was followed by Japan's invasion and subsequent occupation in WWII. Japan exploited Indochina's resources giving birth to the Viet-Minh resistance led by the hardline communist Ho Chi Minh. After the war, the Viet-Minh swiftly regained control of the Northern region of the country and declared independence in Hanoi 1945 (Walsh, Ben; VASSAR; BBC Bitesize).

From 1946-1954 Vietnam was once again plunged into violence with France, with the latter hoping to regain control. Ho Chi Minh successfully masked his hopes for a communist Vietnam, and gained sympathy from other nations, particularly the USA. In the view of other nations, the Viet Minh were fighting French colonial rule (Walsh, Ben).

In 1949, the communists, led by Mao Zedong, took over China and aided Ho Chi Minh in his vision for Vietnam. The USA changed their views on the Viet Minh significantly, seeing them as Mao Zedong's puppets and feared a full communist take-over in Asia (Walsh, Ben). As a result, the USA provided steady economic aid to the French war effort and helped set up a non-communist government in the southern region (VASSAR).

The war between the French and the Viet Minh ensued, generating further support for the communist cause. Guerrilla tactics made it difficult for the French; specifically hit-and-run raids which inflicted 90,000 casualties (Walsh, Ben). The war came to a decisive end with the Battle of Dien Bien Phu, an offensive led by communist forces under General Vo Nguyen Giap (Walsh, Ben; VASSAR). This battle highlighted the crucial support received from the USSR and China, as well as the effective leadership and tactics that ultimately defeated France (Walsh, Ben).

Following the war, a peace conference was held in Geneva, which allowed for the creation of the final Geneva Accords in July 1954 (VASSAR). These established that the 17th parallel be a temporary border between the northern and southern regions of Vietnam (VASSAR; Walsh, Ben; BBC Bitesize). A demilitarised zone was to be established 300 days after the accords were ratified. In

addition, leadership elections were to be held in 1956. Communist superpowers accepted the proposals, fearing that an accord allowing a full communist takeover of Vietnam would anger the U.S and France (VASSAR).

The plan for elections, however, was not popular with the USA, since results would favour the Communists, and they did not give their support. Secretary of State John Dulles believed that they offered too much power to the communists, and did not want to give up the south without a fight. As a result, Dulles and President Eisenhower accepted a series of agreements created by the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) and an oppositional force in the south against the communist north (VASSAR).

Increased American involvement in Vietnam was rooted in concerns for growing Soviet and communist influence over Asia (Walsh, Ben). This would later be known as the 'domino theory', in which Communist Vietnam would influence neighbouring countries such as Laos, Cambodia, and further throughout Asia (Walsh, Ben; BBC Bitesize). The decisions and the methods made by the U.S, however, showed indifference towards the Vietnamese civilians (Walsh, Ben).

In 1955, the U.S aided politician Ngo Dinh Diem in the creation of the Republic of South Vietnam. Diem was an extremely corrupt anti-communist who belonged to the landlord class and was a Christian. He was unfavoured by civilians for his contempt of the Buddhist religion and peasants (Walsh, Ben).

By 1957, this generated further support in the northern region for the communists, who were now known as the Viet Cong movement (Spector, Ronald H.; BBC Bitesize). The group consisted of North Vietnamese communists taking orders from Ho Chi Minh, as well as South Vietnamese opponents of the government who were deeply affected by local official corruption (Spector, Ronald H.; Walsh, Ben).

The Viet Cong started a war against the South Vietnamese government. The army of the south, the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN), was unprepared for the Viet Cong rebellion. One reason was the ineffective officers within the army who were indifferent, incompetent, or corrupt. In addition, high-ranking army operations were infiltrated by Viet Cong agents. The army also had its limitations in the terrain they could operate in, as the U.S's heavy equipment was efficient on roads rather than in jungles or swamps. Furthermore, the U.S military advisors who were responsible for improving the ARVN, which lacked a thorough understanding of the Vietnamese

language: hence, their deployment lasted for less than a year. By the end of 1960, communist forces formed the National Liberation Front (NLF) in the south. This was devised as the political force of the Viet Cong to spark support for the communists and overthrow the southern government. Overall, the communist insurgency attacked major political areas and threatened many South Vietnamese government officials, making the countryside dangerous for peasants (Spector, Ronald H.).

In 1961, President Kennedy sent his military advisors to South Vietnam to report on the situation in the country and evaluate any potential need for American aid. The report, the “December 1961 White Paper”, sought increased military, economic aid, and advisors to support the Diem government and deal with the NLF. Kennedy considered the proposals of the accord but his advisors argued that he should withdraw from the Vietnam situation altogether, stating that it would be a “dead-end alley” for them (VASSAR).

Kennedy decided on a middle ground, where he favored a partnership with Diem and increased its military involvement in South Vietnam with more artillery, machines, and advisors as a result (VASSAR). Kennedy’s policy during the ensuing conflict was not to “blunder into war, unclear about aims or how to get out again” (Walsh, Ben). The war between North and South Vietnam escalated, and America’s involvement. South Vietnam reported growing NLF control in the countryside. For countermeasures, Diem’s government launched a programme called the Strategic Hamlet Programme which sought to relocate civilians from rural areas into more secure areas, where they could be protected and fully separated from Viet Cong influence (VASSAR). This programme backfired as the ARVN or the Southern government could not distinguish villagers from communist insurgents (Spector, Ronald H.). In addition, discontent among the peasants because of obligatory labour and frequent relocation led to the programme’s failure (Spector, Ronald H.; VASSAR).

As the Viet Cong steadily grew more immune to the American firepower and machinery in the war, there were many concerns as to whether the Diem government could bring an end to the conflict. In 1963, Diem’s family and his government spiralled into a brutal dispute between the Buddhist leadership. Major protests by the Buddhist population were met with violence by Diem’s forces. This led to the horrifying death of Buddhist monk Thuang Quang Duc, who immolated himself publicly to show his opposition to the Diem regime. These atrocities performed by Diem’s leadership would significantly tarnish his relations with the U.S. By November 1963, ARVN generals seized control of Diem’s palace and his security forces. The U.S. maintained a neutral stance to the

situation and stopped their aid to Diem's family. The family would be captured and killed, ending their rule in the South (Walsh, Ben).

Three weeks after Diem's murder, Kennedy was assassinated and Vice-president Lyndon Johnson was appointed president. Unlike Kennedy's calculated and cautious mindset in his decision making, Johnson was prepared to bring the U.S into a full-scale war against the Viet Cong in the hopes of preventing the 'domino effect' and upholding the policy of 'containment' (Walsh, Ben).

In Hanoi, the Viet Cong believed that the war was in their favour and mobilised their troops for a full scale military campaign in the south. Viet Cong and the NVA were sent to the south through the Ho-Chi-Minh trail and were supported by Mao Zedong with weapons and logistics. The Soviet Union also sent aid to the North. The only options the Americans had were to strike heavy blows on the north, through maritime attacks and strategic parachute drops on the North (Spector, Ronald H.).

Focus of Debate:

Focus on the immediate cessation of the armed conflict between North and South Vietnam and all the parties involved, and ways in which the ARVN and the Viet Cong can reduce their military developments, political campaigns, and machinery to de-escalate combat in the countryside and cities. P5 should discuss ways to reduce Viet Cong insurgency in the south and work towards peaceful co-existence between the north and south, to uphold developments made under the Geneva peace accords and respect the territorial divisions they established. Following the steps and the proposals stated by the Geneva Accords, devise and implement methods to resolve political turmoil in the south and establish a democratic government. It is crucial that delegates reflect on the flaws in the Diem regime and construct solutions that respect the peasants in the region and Buddhist religion. Delegates should also consider providing relief and aid to peasants for the damage and losses faced in the countryside.

Relevant resolutions and documents:

- [Geneva Agreements 20-21 July 1954 Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities in Vietnam 20 July 1954 / U.S. Department of State Office of the Historian - Geneva Accords](#)
- [Security Council Vetoes Resolution: Vietnam for admission to membership in the United Nation \(1952\)](#) - Requests the United Nations to allow the Republic of Vietnam to be a UN member. This resolution failed due to the USSR vetoing it. 2 Sept. 1952.

- [International Agreement on the Neutrality of Laos](#) - Signed on July 23 1962 in Geneva by major superpowers and Asian states, this treaty establishes Laos as a neutral buffer state. This would later be violated by North Vietnam, as they would use the Ho-chi-minh trail across Laos to enter the South.
- [US National Security Action Memorandum \(NSAM\) No. 288](#) - Dated back to March 17 1964, this report created by Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara after his return from Saigon. This details U.S.'s programs for a non-communist South Vietnam. It also details key events taking place in Vietnam chronologically.
- [The Laos Crisis, 1960–1963](#) - Relevant event involving the U.S in a Cold War struggle for Laos against North Vietnamese and Soviet Union influence. An example of the 'Domino Theory'.
- [French President Charles de Gaulle's "Neutralization" Proposal \(1964\) / US/France view on the proposal](#) - President de Gaulle shares how "The difficulty is that the term neutralization is being understood by certain people in Vietnam as having immediate application and not as a long-term objective. These people consider that any advocacy of neutrality at the present time really is a pseudonym for eventual".
- [Report of the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission to South Viet-Nam](#) - Made on December 7 1963, detailing events of The Buddhist Crisis, and statements from the main parties in South Vietnam involved in the turmoil between the Diem regime and the peasants.
- [Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968, Volume I, Vietnam, 1964](#) - Detailing documentation of the U.S. government and their involvement in the Vietnam situation. More in-depth reports of the U.S in March 1964.

Works Cited

Walsh, Ben. "Case study 3: the Vietnam War." GCSE Modern World History.

[Student's Book] : for OCR, AQA, EDEXCEL, CCEA, WJEC, 2nd ed., Hodder and Stoughton, 2012, pp. 353-54.

Spector, Ronald H.. "Vietnam War". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 26 May. 2026, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Vietnam-War>. Accessed 3 July 2026.

VASSAR. "The Vietnam War: An Overview." *VASSAR*, 2026 Vassar College, www.vassar.edu/the-wars-for-vietnam/vietnam-war-overview. Accessed 7 July 2026.

BBC Bitesize. "The Vietnam War." *BBC Bitesize*, British Broadcasting Company, www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zv7bkqt/revision/2. Accessed 5 Aug. 2026.