

# Vietnam War



# Decolonization in Indochina

- Ho Chi Minh and Communists resisted Japanese occupation during WW2
- After WW2 Ho Chi Minh faced the French forces in a war of decolonization



# Outcome of decolonization

- A major French garrison surrendered at Dien Bien Phu in May 1954
- It was a communist victory and a loss of face for the French in Asia
- Geneva agreement of 1954 granted independence to Laos and Cambodia and divided Vietnam, temporarily at the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel

# After 1954....

- North was ruled by Ho Chi Minh
- South ruled by Ngo Dinh Diem (Catholic governing mostly Buddhists)
- The Diem regime was opposed by National Liberation Front and the Viet Cong (guerilla force) who both were supported by Ho Chi Minh and the North



# Viet Cong



# Why did USA become involved?

- America thought the practice of 'Containment' would work.
- Would be a repeat of Korea
- Americans still believed in the 'domino theory': If Vietnam fell to communism so would Laos, Cambodia, and other S Pacific countries

# American involvement after the French

- Americans were military advisors to the South Vietnamese
- The level quickly rose from 500-10000 men in 1962

# 'A classic case of gov't folly'

- Fact finding missions sent to Vietnam in the 1950s and 1960s repeatedly suggested that Americans should get out of Vietnam
- American leaders repeatedly ignored the facts and practiced 'cognitive dissonance'



# Tonkin Gulf Resolution 1964

- The North Vietnamese torpedoed and American destroyer
- Congress authorized Johnson to use 'all necessary powers' and 'all necessary measures'
- Led to: Air support and an increase in troops from 200000 in 1965 to 600000 in 1968

# The Gulf of Tonkin Incident

August 2<sup>nd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup>, 1964



# Ho Chi Minh Trail

- The North Vietnamese used the Ho Chi Minh Trail which ran from N Vietnam, through Cambodia, through Laos, and back into S Vietnam.





# American Troops status change

- In 1965 Johnson changed the status of Americans from advisors to combat troops
- He continued to see the war in Vietnam as a plan to expand communism



# A New President

- In 1968 Richard Nixon replaced Lyndon Johnson as the president of the USA
- He was elected on a platform of peace.



# 'Vietnamization'

- A Nixon plan
- To make the military of South Vietnam capable of defending itself and therefore allow the USA to withdraw as well as establish a creditable political regime in South Vietnam



# Kissinger's 2 track formula for 'Vietnamization'

- Strengthen the South Vietnam military
- Strengthen the South Vietnam government so it could have a broader base of support



# Nixon Peace offensive







# Napalm











# Ceasefire

- In January 1973, a ceasefire was signed
- The terms included:
- The return of American POW's
  - The USA's withdrawal of forces within 60 days

# Effects of the Vietnam War

- Money: \$150 billion
- Casualties: 2 million American troops; 57939 casualties
- Influence: In the end, less influence throughout SE Asia
- Morals: America could no longer claim innocence and moral superiority
- USA exercised raw power previously used by European nations

# Why did USA lose the war in Vietnam?

- Difficult to win against nationalist guerrillas
- War was unpopular at home. Anti-war movement sapped morale, and the cost of war in both casualties and money
- Unpopular in the world and the USA suffered international disgrace for actions
- USA could not win the war for the 'hearts and minds' of the S Vietnamese people
- American military became halfhearted and disillusioned

# Lessons the USA learned in Vietnam

- Even nuclear superpowers had limitations
- War without popular support at home is difficult to wage in a democracy
- Military intervention in a popular nationalist uprising can be futile
- Conscript armies are not reliable military force in wars like this. The USA soon cancelled the universal draft
- There should be limitations on the powers of the President to wage war
- The domino theory was more political rhetoric than truth