

Cold War: Vietnam

Was the world made safe for democracy by the U.S. actions during the Cold War?

Historians generally date the Cold War from the end of World War II to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. It refers to the intense rivalry for world domination between the United States and its allies on one hand and the Soviet Union and other communist countries on the other. While there were no direct military conflicts between the two superpowers, there were several armed clashes with military support by one side or the other or both. In the early 1950s, the Korean War pitted the South Korea, United States and others under the flag of the United Nations against North Korea and Communist China.

Cold War Arms Race

Cold War tensions grew ever more grave with the invention of atomic weapons by both sides. Both the U.S. and the Soviets invested in massive nuclear build-ups designed to so threaten the devastation of the other that an attack would be unthinkable. Both countries greatly increased military spending. However, nuclear deterrents did not stop ground wars between other nations and intense economic and diplomatic competition. The arms race even extended into space with programs first of satellites and then of manned space flights.

The U.S. adopted the policy of containment first developed by diplomat George Kennan. It did not seek to push back the Soviets from Eastern Europe or Communist China on the theory that their own internal weaknesses would eventually lead to their collapse. It was, however, committed to preventing the spread of communism ("containment") to new territories. In the 1950s, nationalist forces in Vietnam tried to overthrow the French colonial power and drew support from neighboring Communist China. Fearing what was called the "domino effect", the U.S. stepped in when the French were defeated to prevent losing neighboring Southeast Asian nations one by one to communist-aligned forces. Eventually, the North Vietnamese army forced a U.S. withdrawal after staggering losses of soldiers and civilians on both sides.

Americans' Response to the Vietnam War

American involvement in Vietnam was very unpopular at home. President Lyndon Johnson, fearing an expansion of communism in Southeast Asia, committed even more troops to the conflict. With political opposition mounting, Johnson refused to seek election in 1968. President Richard Nixon sought a military victory with more and more American troops, provided by a draft of young American men. Colleges proved to be particularly strong staging grounds for protests against U.S. policy, sometimes leading to illegal or even violent demonstrations. Protesters clashed with police at the 1968 Democratic convention in Chicago, providing an ugly window on a breakdown in the U.S. political process. That led both parties to re-examine their nomination policies to be more inclusive to minorities, women and young voters who felt that they had been frozen out of the top level of decision-making.

American economic superiority eventually led to the collapse of the Soviet Union. President Ronald Reagan instituted a major build up of military forces in the 1980s. The Soviet Union attempted to match American commitments but could not sustain the effort, leading the Russians to severe domestic problems. The Soviets could no longer keep in place the troops necessary to keep satellite countries in submission, and Eastern European countries began to throw off Soviet rule. The Soviet Union itself split into Russia and several independent nations.

The Cold War was over, leaving the United States as the world's only superpower. However, the Russians retained their nuclear arsenal, and the rise of religious and ethnic tensions in the Middle East and China's dramatic rise as a major economic and military power created new challenges to world peace.

Supporting Questions

What ideas influenced US policy during the Cold War?

- "Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) Nations," ca. 1950-1975 (Video)
- Operational Priority Communication from Strategic Services Officer Archimedes Patti, September 2, 1945 (Document)
- Letter from Ho Chi Minh to President Harry Truman Asking for Intervention, February 28, 1946 (Document)
- Truman Doctrine, March 12, 1947 (Document)
- "Come South" Propaganda Poster, August 5, 1954 (Image)
- "Communism Means Terrorism," September 15, 1954 (Image)
- "America's Stake in Vietnam" Speech by U.S. Senator John F. Kennedy, June 1, 1956 (Document)
- "No. 52 Vietnam" NSA Memorandum, May 11, 1961 (Document)

How did changes in technology impact global cooperation/alliances during the Cold War?

- "No. 115 Defoliant Operations in Vietnam" NSA Memorandum, November 30, 1961 (Document)
- "Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, July 26, 1963 (Document)
- "Stick 'em up!" June 9, 1964 (Political Cartoon)
- "Iowa Veteran Describes Tactics of the Enemy During the Vietnam War" from Iowa Public Television, 2015 (Video)
- "U.S. Army Veteran's Perspective on the Mindset of the South Vietnamese Soldiers During the Vietnam War" from Iowa Public Television, September 10, 2017 (Video)

How effective was U.S. diplomacy in creating or eroding safety in the world?

- Letter from Iowa Soldier during the Vietnam War, Date Unknown (Document)
- "Vietnamese Army's Seven Commandments" Propaganda Poster, May 28, 1956 (Image)
- Letter Detailing Agricultural Issues in North Vietnam, 1963 (Document)
- Memorandum of World's Reaction to Developments in Vietnam, September 14, 1963 (Document)
- "Aggression from the North" Propaganda Poster, April 23, 1965 (Image)
- Saigon CIA Chief's Assessment of Vietnam, March 17, 1975 (Document)
- "U.S. Army Veteran Describes the Role of Military Advisors in Vietnam in the 1960s" from Iowa Public Television, September 10, 2017 (Video)
- "The U.S. Exit From Vietnam War: U.S. and South Vietnamese Veterans Share Their Perspectives" from Iowa Public Television, September 10, 2017 (Video)

*Printable Image and Document Guide

Additional Resources

"The Vietnam War" from IPTV

This resource from Iowa Public Television has a number of videos and other primary resources about Iowans' experiences in Vietnam.

Battlefield Vietnam: A Brief History

This resource provides an extensive timeline to the events that occurred in Vietnam. The website is hosted by the Public Broadcasting System.

Vietnam War from National Archives

The National Archives have amassed an extensive collection of resources specific to the Vietnam War and has links to a variety of resources from presidential libraries.

“Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) Nations,” ca. 1950-1975



Courtesy of National Archives, “Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) Nations,” *The Big Picture Television Program Series*, ca. 1950-1975

Description

This video is about the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), and it aired on “The Big Picture” Television Program Series, which was created by the U.S. Army. Only the first two minutes are available in this clip. SEATO was created in September 1954 and ended in 1977. It was primarily created to block further communist gains in Southeast Asia. Based on the belief that most Americans did not know much about the SEATO countries, “The Big Picture” staff sent cameras into Australia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Thailand and the Philippines. The result is an episode that highlights the Communist strategy in Southeast Asia to undermine non-communist governments by threat and subversion.

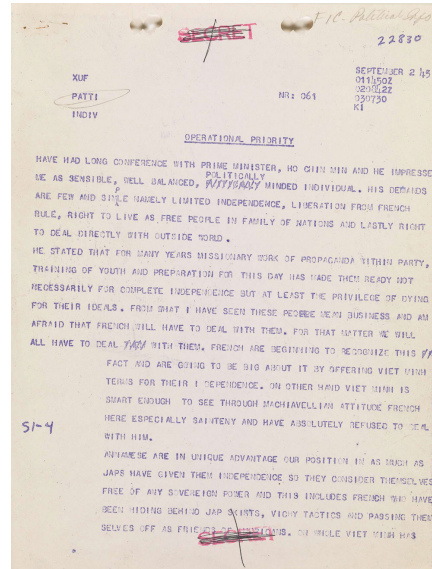
Source-Dependent Questions

- How does the announcer choose to describe the Communist threat? Why would he choose such words?
- Why after World War II would the threat of communism in Asia be of a concern to the United States?

Citation Information

“Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) Nations,” *The Big Picture Television Program Series*, ca. 1950-1975. Courtesy of the National Archives

Operational Priority Communication from Strategic Services Officer Archimedes Patti, September 2, 1945



Courtesy of National Archives, Patti, Archimedes, "Operational Priority Communication from Archimedes Patti," U.S. Office of Strategic Services, 2 September 1945

Description

In 1945, during World War II, Japanese troops took control of Vietnam (under French rule at the time). At the end of the war, Ho Chi Minh — the Vietnamese Communist leader—seized an opportunity to escape decades of French rule. The day Japan surrendered to the Allies, Ho Chi Minh declared independence in front of a crowd of Vietnamese. In a deliberate appeal for American support, he opened his speech with the words: "All men are created equal. They are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among them are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." Before he declared independence in front of thousands of cheering citizens in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh asked U.S. Office of Strategic Services Officer Archimedes Patti to check his wording of the first passage. He needed an American for the job because he had borrowed it from the Declaration of Independence. Patti recorded his impressions of the Viet Minh (a national independence coalition dominated by communists) in this report. He wrote: "From what I have seen these people mean business and I'm afraid that the French will have to deal with them. For that matter we will all have to deal with them."

[Transcript of the Operational Priority Communication from Strategic Services Officer Archimedes Patti](#)

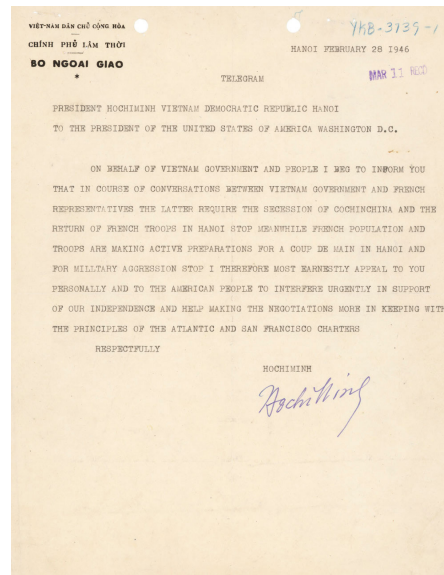
Source-Dependent Questions

- How did Patti describe Ho Chi Minh? How was this different from the viewpoint from the "[Southeast Asia Treaty Organization](#)" video?
- In the last two sentences of the document, how would geographic factors determine the proposed actions in Vietnam?
- How are ideological alliances between countries informing individual action? Use evidence from the document.

Citation Information

Patti, Archimedes, "Operational Priority Communication from Archimedes Patti," U.S. Office of Strategic Services, 2 September 1945. Courtesy of National Archives

Letter from Ho Chi Minh to President Harry Truman Asking for Intervention, February 28, 1946



Courtesy of National Archives, Ho Chi Minh, "Letter from Ho Chi Minh to President Harry S. Truman," 28 February 1946

Description

Following the end of World War II, Ho Chi Minh reached out to President Harry S. Truman for support in ending French rule in Vietnam. In the document, Ho Chi Minh references both the Atlantic and San Francisco charters as a basis for his claims. The Atlantic Charter was drawn up in 1941 following the outbreak of World War II by the U.S. and England and the San Francisco Charter references the document that creates the United Nations (UN Charter). In both documents, the United States lends their support for support self-government by occupied peoples during World War II.

[Transcript of Ho Chi Minh's Letter to U.S. President Harry Truman](#)

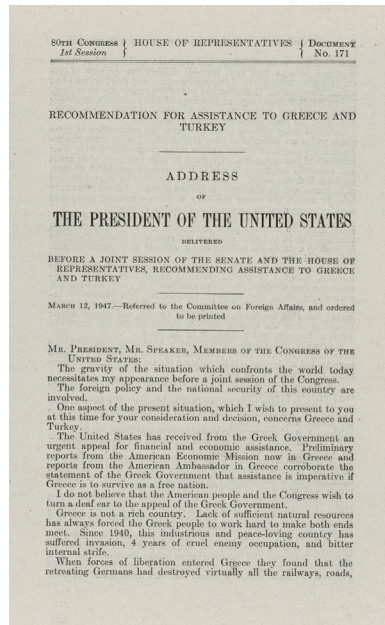
Source-Dependent Questions

- What was Ho Chi Minh asking President Truman for in the telegram?
- How does his request align with stated U.S. policy? Why would his request not be met considering the [characterization of Ho Chi Minh by Operations Officer Archimedes Patti](#)?

Citation Information

Ho Chi Minh, "Letter from Ho Chi Minh to President Harry S. Truman," 28 February 1946. Courtesy of National Archives

Truman Doctrine, March 12, 1947



Courtesy of National Archives, Truman, Harry S., "Truman Doctrine," 12 March 1947

Description

President Harry S. Truman presented this address on March 12, 1947, before a joint session of Congress. His message, known as the Truman Doctrine, asked Congress for \$400 million in military and economic assistance for Turkey and Greece, to provide U.S. intervention to halt the spread of communism that dictated U.S. actions during much of the Cold War.

[Full Transcript of the Truman Doctrine](#)

[Transcribed Excerpt from the Truman Doctrine](#)

Source-Dependent Questions

- What ideals does Truman directly call upon in his support of free people?
- How would Ho Chi Minh have seen his [request](#) in keeping with U.S. ideas? How did Truman have categorized [Ho Chi Minh's request](#)?
- Consider the phrase "I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures." What does Truman mean by this statement? Who might the armed minorities or outside pressures be? Why didn't he just name specific groups or people he was referring to in the document?

Citation Information

Truman, Harry S., "Truman Doctrine," 12 March 1947. Courtesy of National Archives

“Come South” Propaganda Poster, August 5, 1954



Courtesy of National Archives, “Come South,” U.S. Information Agency, 5 August 1954

Description

The 1954 Geneva Accords called for a temporary partition of Vietnam at the 17th Parallel — creating a Communist state in the North and a French-backed non-Communist state in the South. There was a 300-day period of free travel between North and South Vietnam before the border closed. The U.S. ran a propaganda campaign to encourage Northerners to “Go South to avoid Communism,” where they would be “welcomed with open arms,” as seen on this 1954 poster.

Source-Dependent Questions

- Describe how the U.S. characterized Communist North Vietnam. How does this imagery align with ideas about communism from the [Big Picture Television Series video](#)?
- What ideas would have influenced the U.S. to undertake a propaganda campaign in Vietnam? How would this support or undermine the response to [Ho Chi Minh asking for U.S. support for self-determination](#)?

Citation Information

“Come South,” U.S. Information Agency, 5 August 1954. Courtesy of National Archives

“Communism Means Terrorism,” September 15, 1954



Courtesy of National Archives, “Communism Means Terrorism,” U.S. Information Agency, 15 September 1954

Description

This poster, created and distributed internationally by the United States Information Agency (USIA), was designed to amplify fear of communism in a newly-divided Vietnam. This poster from 1954 reads, “Anywhere there is communism, there is terrorism and assassination!” Earlier in 1954, the Geneva Accords had called for a temporary partition of Vietnam at the 17th Parallel — creating a communist state in the North and a French-backed non-communist state in the South. A series of events intensified the “Red Scare” that gripped Americans in the 1940s and 50s. In 1949, the Soviet Union successfully tested an atomic bomb. Chinese Communists formed the People’s Republic of China that same year. North Korea invaded South Korea the next year. Many interpreted these events as evidence of a global Communist plot. USIA posters were designed to promote U.S. values; to expose alleged Communist falsehoods, threats and crimes and to strengthen understanding of and support for U.S. objectives in the Cold War.

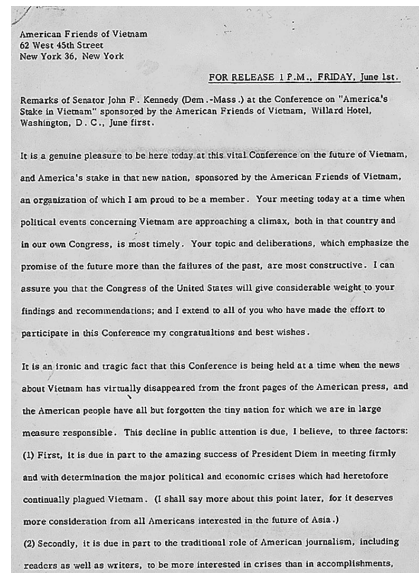
Source-Dependent Questions

- How does the poster show imagery of terrorism?
- Why did the artist choose a vulture to represent the communists?
- How does the poster show imagery of terrorism? What impact did the creator intend by using this kind of imagery?
- Why did the artist choose a vulture to represent the communists?

Citation Information

“Communism Means Terrorism,” U.S. Information Agency, 15 September 1954. Courtesy of National Archives

“America’s Stake in Vietnam” Speech by U.S. Senator John F. Kennedy, June 1, 1956



Courtesy of National Archives, Kennedy, John F., “America’s Stake in Vietnam,” 1 June 1956

Description

This speech was given by U.S. Senator John F. Kennedy during a time when Vietnam was to hold an election to reconcile the country as laid out in the 1954 Geneva Accords. However, the U.S. was concerned that this would give too much power to the communists at the time. Instead, then President Eisenhower supported the creation of a non-Communist state in Southern Vietnam led by President Ngo Dinh Diem, who helped stave off such an election. In Diem, as Sen. Kennedy alludes to in his speech, the U.S. finds an ally against communism but not necessarily a democratic leader.

[Full Transcript of “America’s Stake in Vietnam” Speech](#)

[Transcribed Excerpt from “America’s Stake in Vietnam” Speech](#)

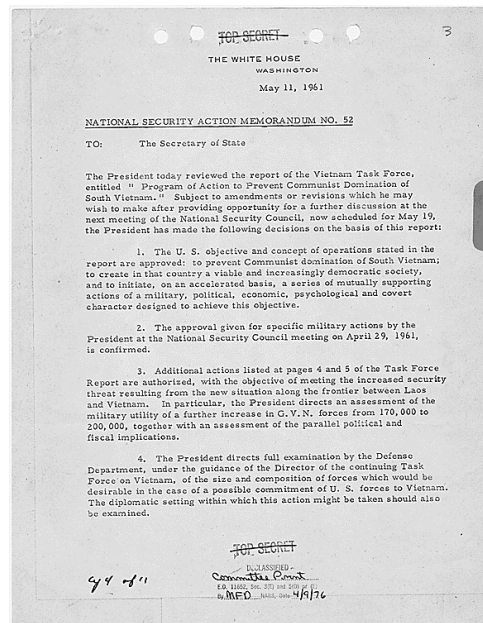
Source-Dependent Questions

- What happens when a firefighter makes a mistake and actually catches other buildings on fire? How does the metaphor of the U.S. as a volunteer firefighter to show the weakness of the country’s foreign policy?
- In points two and three made by President Kennedy, what ideas are central to the U.S. policy in Vietnam? How does this foreshadow the type of action Kennedy may take in Vietnam?

Citation Information

Kennedy, John F., “America’s Stake in Vietnam,” 1 June 1956. Courtesy of National Archives

“No. 52 Vietnam” NSA Memorandum, May 11, 1961



Courtesy of National Archives, “National Security Action Memorandum No. 52 Vietnam,” 11 May 1961

Description

Following research gathering in Vietnam, the document outlines the actions of President John F. Kennedy. In 1961, politically and militarily, President Ngo Dinh Diem’s regime was losing supporters. By January of 1962, the U.S. began military action directly against the North. The memo foreshadows the Kennedy administration taking an even more active role in Vietnam.

[Transcript of “No. 52 Vietnam” NSA Memorandum](#)

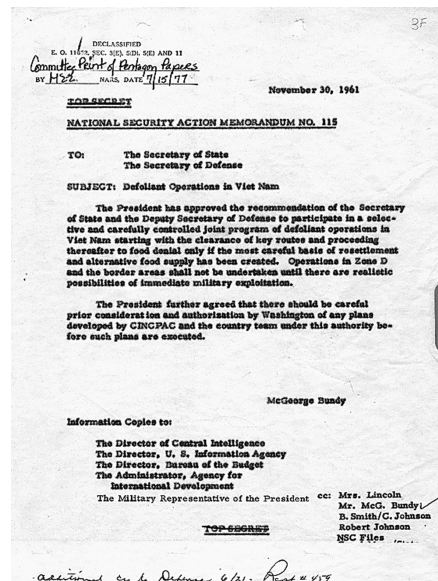
Source-Dependent Questions

- How do the policy recommendations align with the [speech then-Sen. John F. Kennedy](#) gave in 1956?
- Why would the U.S. undertake covert actions as outlined in point 10 in a country in which we were aligned? How would actions in Cambodia align with U.S. ideas at the time?

Citation Information

“National Security Action Memorandum No. 52 Vietnam,” 11 May 1961. Courtesy of National Archives

“No. 115 Defoliant Operations in Vietnam” NSA Memorandum, November 30, 1961



Courtesy of National Archives, “National Security Action Memorandum No. 115 Defoliant Operations in Vietnam,” 30 November 1961

Description

The use by the U.S. military of defoliants such as Agent Orange under the codename Operation Ranch Hand has been controversial since the war ended. During the war, the use by some was viewed as necessary to fight both to expose the enemy and to make it difficult for the North Vietnamese economically. The use of the chemical also led to serious health problems for U.S. soldiers responsible for spreading the chemical with little protection. The memo below authorizes the use of this type of chemical warfare.

[Transcript of “No. 115 Defoliant Operations in Vietnam” NSA Memorandum](#)

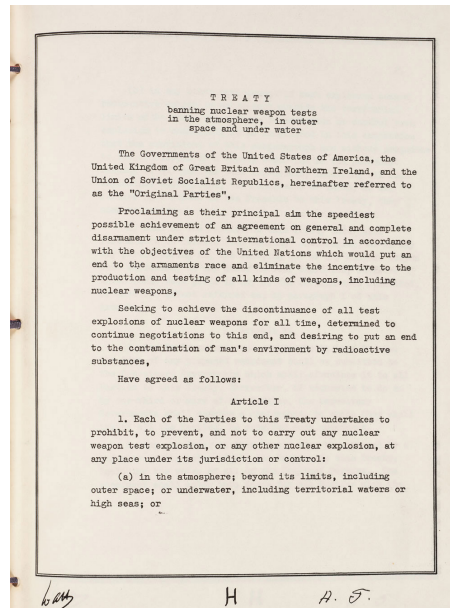
Source-Dependent Questions

- What might be some of the long-term human and environmental impacts of using these kinds of chemicals?
- Why would it be important to have an alternative food supply prepared? What does this communicate about the U.S. mission in Vietnam as more than just “winning” the war?
- Consider the timing of the memo prior to the Gulf of Tonkin. What did the early consideration of such tactics communicate about the potential role the U.S. would hold in Vietnam?

Citation Information

“National Security Action Memorandum No. 115 Defoliant Operations in Vietnam,” 30 November 1961. Courtesy of National Archives

“Nuclear Test Ban Treaty,” July 26, 1963



Courtesy of National Archives, “Nuclear Test Ban Treaty,” 26 July 1963

Description

Continued testing of atomic and then hydrogen devices led to a rising concern about the effects of radioactive fallout. As knowledge of the nature and effects of fallout increased, and as it became apparent that no region in the world was untouched by radioactive debris, the issue of continued nuclear tests drew widened and intensified public attention. Apprehension was expressed about the possibility of a cumulative contamination of the environment and of resultant genetic damage. The Nuclear Test Ban Treaty was signed in Moscow on August 5, 1963, it was ratified by the U.S. Senate on September 24, 1963 and entered into force on October 10, 1963. The treaty prohibited nuclear weapons tests “or any other nuclear explosion” in the atmosphere, in outer space and under water. While not banning tests underground, the treaty prohibited such explosions if they caused “radioactive debris to be present outside the territorial limits of the State under whose jurisdiction or control” the explosions were conducted. In accepting limitations on testing, the nuclear powers accepted as a common goal “an end to the contamination of man’s environment by radioactive substances.”

[Full Transcript of the “Nuclear Test Ban Treaty”](#)

[Transcribed Excerpt from the “Nuclear Test Ban Treaty”](#)

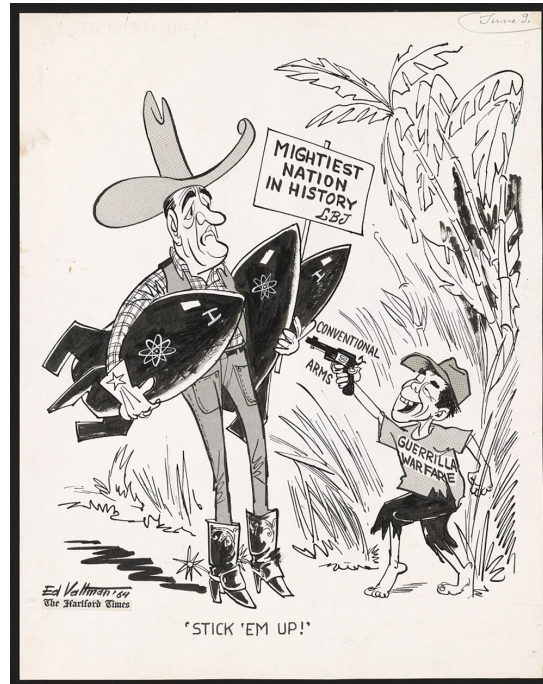
Source-Dependent Questions

- What was the intent of the countries in creating this treaty? Cite specific evidence.
- How did the technological advances create an environment (situation) where the two major enemies during the Cold War would work together in creating this document? Why might a nuclear test ban treaty actually increase the probability of conflict between the U.S. and the USSR through third parties like Vietnam?

Citation Information

“Nuclear Test Ban Treaty,” 26 July 1963. Courtesy of National Archives

“Stick ‘em up!” June 9, 1964



Courtesy of Library of Congress, Valtman, Edmund S., “Stick ‘em up!” *The Hartford Times*, 9 June 1964

Description

This political cartoon shows the irony of the conflict in Vietnam. At the time the cartoon was created, the United States had the most advanced nuclear arsenal, however, all of the advanced technology did not guarantee the U.S. a victory in Vietnam. Following the events at the Gulf of Tonkin, the United States, especially under President Lyndon B. Johnson, continually deployed more soldiers to the region. The cartoon depicts the months before the Gulf of Tonkin when the U.S. had begun reinforcing air power to the region because of North Vietnamese offensives in Laos. The cartoon shows a Viet Cong soldier labeled “Guerrilla Warfare” standing at the edge of tall grass, pointing a handgun labeled “Conventional Arms” at a startled President Johnson, who is carrying atomic bombs under his arms and a sign that reads, “Mightiest Nation in History LBJ.”

Source-Dependent Questions

- What does the political cartoon communicate about public support for Vietnam prior to the Gulf of Tonkin?
- What does the image communicate about the role technology should have played in the conflict? How does the image communicate how the U.S. believed their technological superiority would impact the conflict?

Citation Information

Valtman, Edmund S., “Stick ‘em up!” *The Hartford Times*, 9 June 1964. Courtesy of Library of Congress

“Iowa Veteran Describes Tactics of the Enemy During the Vietnam War” from Iowa Public Television, 2015



Courtesy of Iowa Public Television, “Iowa Veteran Describes Tactics of the Enemy During the Vietnam War,” *Iowans Remember Vietnam* - Iowa Public Television, 2015

Description

Iowa veteran Vincent Lewis describes an experience with enemy tactics while serving in an artillery unit during the Vietnam War. The Viet Cong forces learned they could intercept U.S. troops’ communications on the battlefield and order U.S. planes to drop bombs on their own troops. Ever vigilant, U.S. commanders had to keep a watchful eye on the battlefield to avoid friendly fire as a result of this practice.

Source-Dependent Questions

- Describe the type of weapons being used by the U.S. military in this video.
- Compare the tactics used by the U.S. and Viet Cong. Describe how effective these tactics were by using evidence from the video?
- How did the fear of friendly fire impede the U.S. progress? Why was this strategy effective?

Citation Information

“Iowa Veteran Describes Tactics of the Enemy During the Vietnam War,” *Iowans Remember Vietnam* - Iowa Public Television, 2015. Courtesy of Iowa Public Television

“U.S. Army Veteran’s Perspective on the Mindset of the South Vietnamese Soldiers During the Vietnam War” from Iowa Public Television, September 10, 2017



Courtesy of Iowa Public Television, “U.S. Army Veteran’s Perspective on the Mindset of the South Vietnamese Soldiers During the Vietnam War,” Iowa Experience: Vietnam - Iowa Public Television, 10 September 2017

Description

Veteran Caesar Smith gives his perspective on the mindset of South Vietnamese soldiers he served with who had been fighting for their country’s freedom since World War II. Smith was a career military officer who served two tours in Vietnam. In 1964, he was a U.S. advisor to South Vietnamese troops. This segment is from “Iowa Experience: Vietnam,” a panel discussion recorded at Iowa Public Television in Johnston, Iowa, on September 10, 2017.

Source-Dependent Questions

- How does Caesar Smith describe the perspective of the South Vietnamese soldiers he was advising?
- According to the video, why would South Vietnamese soldiers alter position? How does this corroborate [Vince Lewis’ account](#) of the effectiveness of tactics used by the Viet Cong against the United States’ superior military strength?

Citation Information

“U.S. Army Veteran’s Perspective on the Mindset of the South Vietnamese Soldiers During the Vietnam War,” *Iowa Experience: Vietnam* - Iowa Public Television, 10 September 2017. Courtesy of Iowa Public Television

Letter from Iowa Soldier during the Vietnam War, September 6, 1967



Celeste Room
Co B, 504th HP Bn
Camp Holloway
Pleiku, West Central Highlands
Republic of Viet Nam
Wednesday pm, 6 September 1967

Dear Mrs Greene:

We had some excitement last Wednesday night. We were sitting around reading and writing at 8:30 when the company area shook with an explosion. Someone yelled, "Incoming mortar!" The alert siren in the motor pool was turned on, and grabbing weapons, flack jackets and steel pots, we scrambled for our bunker. After five minutes we noticed that we seemed to be the only company on alert. In ten minutes the word came down that it was a false alarm; two guys in a 1968 Austin Company hoob (190 yds from our hoob) were taking apart a M177 grenade round to convert it to a salt shaker when it exploded. One guy lost a hand and part of his leg, and the other caught a piece in his side. Such a waste and a tragedy! They won't even get a purple heart.

We have an unusual new vehicle in our company. It is one of six new VHOQ Comado Armored Cars recently delivered to Vietnam. The all-around seven-ton weight armor makes the crew immune to small-arms fire, hand grenades and many other explosive devices. The hull is designed with no vertical surface (like the M109, to deflect large projectiles). It doesn't have to stick to solid ground either. When the crew "bounces up" the hatches, the car can navigate calm bodies of water. It can go 60 mph over ideal conditions, and even if all four of the big tires should lose pressure, the thing will still top 40 mph on a good road. We are very happy to have the car for escort of important convoys through unsecured areas.

Do you remember my mention of a fellow named Ferraro being accidentally shot in the leg? Well that poor guy is the unluckiest person I've ever met. He finally got on his feet and back to duty after 6 weeks and what happens - he gets thrown through the windshield in a jeep wreck. He now has a broken leg, taped wrists and stitches all over his chin, and won't be able to take the rest off till November. The common consensus is "give the poor guy a hand-dip discharge before he kills himself." His nickname is "combat."

Headquarters personnel of this company got a new platoon SGT last month in the person of Specially Sergeant Hillman who is affectionately called "The Bearcat" because of his stopped back, big ears and hooked nose. He insisted on separating us in our living quarters by job category so for last two weeks all the supply and personnel clerks have been grinding hammers and hating hammer. Our new hoob is really nice - 40x20' with 8' walls and large general purpose tent covering our A-frame supports to keep out the weather. While we were at it I built wooden shelves to fill the inside of my metal wall locker. I am now perfectly organized for the first time since I entered into this military existence.

This last weekend elections were held in town. Extra MPs were brought up from the 1st Div at Dragon M to handle any enemy-inspired disturbances. The

Courtesy of State Historical Society of Iowa, 6 September 1967

Description

The letter from James (Jim) Leonardo, an employee at the State Historical Museum to one of his co-workers, outlines his experience in Vietnam. The letter was typical of soldiers writing home during this time period. In 1967, Vietnam was drawing to a close and the year of fighting levied heavy losses in the North. The election referenced in the letter had 83 percent of the country voting between 10 candidates for president with the winner being Nguyen Van Thieu, who had strong connections to the military. Although the election was viewed by the U.S. as a symbol of the country moving forward Thieu's opponents voiced concern over the U.S. role in the election.

[Full Transcript of Letter from Iowa Soldier during the Vietnam War](#)

[Transcribed Excerpt from a Letter from Iowa Soldier during the Vietnam War](#)

Source-Dependent Questions

- What actions did Jim point to as progress in Vietnam?
- Why would it be necessary for the military to be involved in the election?

“Vietnamese Army’s Seven Commandments” Propaganda Poster, May 28, 1956



Courtesy of National Archives, “Army Behavior Poster (7 Panels to set) - Vietnamese Army’s Seven Commandments,” U.S. Information Agency, 28 May 1956

Description

This source comes from a series of propaganda posters showing how the South Vietnamese military supports agricultural production. The image shows a farmer and South Vietnamese soldier together in a field, and promoting how the military was supporting and protecting individual land ownership.

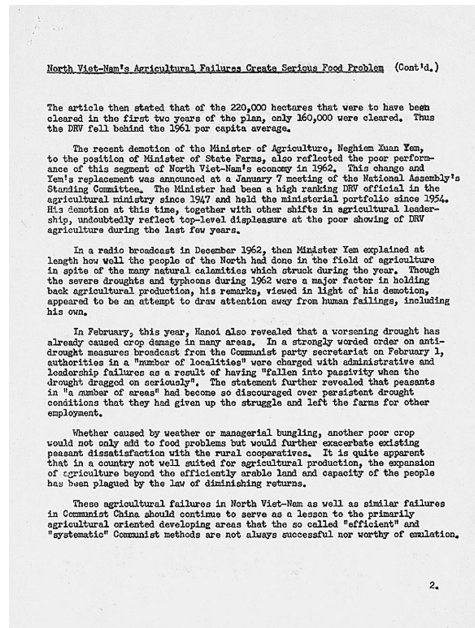
Source-Dependent Questions

- What was the U.S. government trying to promote with the image?
- Why would soldiers be needed to support farmers during the early stages of the conflict?
- What was the intention of the posters created by the United States?
- Why would the U.S. need to employ propaganda techniques like this? Refer back to [Caesar Smith’s interview](#) to help you formulate your response?

Citation Information

“Army Behavior Poster (7 Panels to set) - Vietnamese Army’s Seven Commandments,” U.S. Information Agency, 28 May 1956. Courtesy of National Archives

Letter Detailing Agricultural Issues in North Vietnam, 1963



Courtesy of National Archives, "North Vietnam's Agricultural Failures Create Serious Food Problem," 1963

Description

The letter from the United States government details agricultural issues experienced by the North Vietnamese in the early 1960s. Given the central role agriculture plays in communism these failures were something the U.S. hoped to exploit in their propaganda campaigns.

[Full Transcript of Letter about Agricultural Issues in North Vietnam](#)

[Transcribed Excerpt from a Letter about Agricultural Issues in North Vietnam](#)

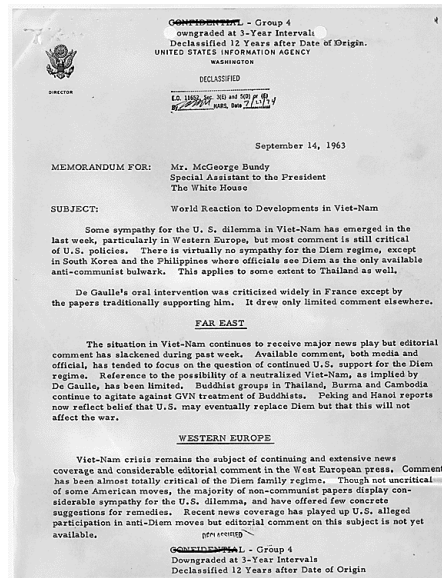
Source-Dependent Questions

- What caused the agricultural issues experienced by the North Vietnamese?
- How did the U.S. plan to exploit the issues experienced by the North Vietnamese?

Citation Information

"North Vietnam's Agricultural Failures Create Serious Food Problem," 1963. Courtesy of National Archives

Memorandum of World's Reaction to Developments in Vietnam, September 14, 1963



Courtesy of National Archives, "World Reaction to Developments in Vietnam," 14 September 1963

Description

The declassified memo comes just a few months before President John F. Kennedy's assassination. During the majority of his presidency, Kennedy threw support, both financially and militarily, to the Ngo Dinh Diem regime. In the memo, the overall disapproval of Diem is clear internationally.

[Transcript of Memorandum of World's Reaction to Developments in Vietnam](#)

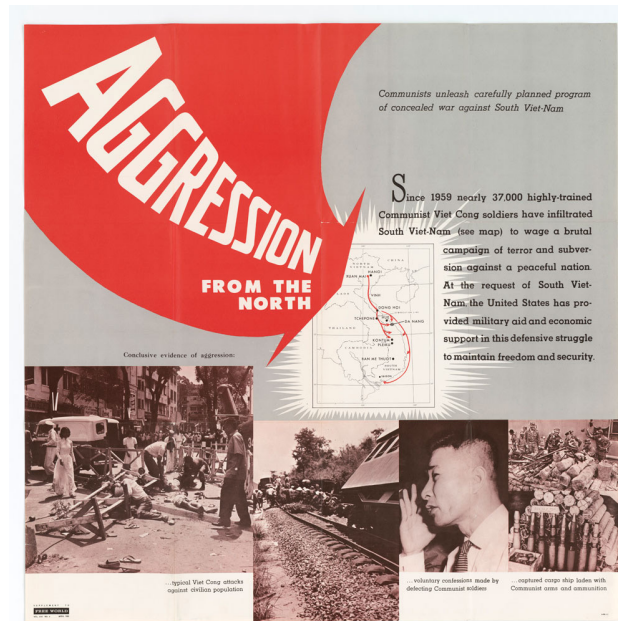
Source-Dependent Questions

- How would you summarize the responses to the Diem regime around the world?
- What specific reservations about the Diem regime go against American ideas?
- How would supporting a regime with the issues Diem appeared to have internationally hurt the U.S.'s standing in the world? Why would this not have mattered to the U.S. at the time?

Citation Information

"World Reaction to Developments in Vietnam," 14 September 1963. Courtesy of National Archives

“Aggression from the North” Propaganda Poster, April 23, 1965



Courtesy of National Archives, “Aggression From the North,” U.S Information Agency, 23 April 1965

Description

A 1965 policy paper entitled “Aggression from the North” described the justification for America’s intervention in Vietnam. It portrayed the war as an invasion by the North Vietnamese with Moscow pulling the strings. Critics insisted it was a civil war instigated by independent actors in the south. This “Aggression From the North” poster comes from a series of visual propaganda distributed by the U.S. Information Agency worldwide.

[Transcript of “Aggression from the North” Propaganda Poster](#)

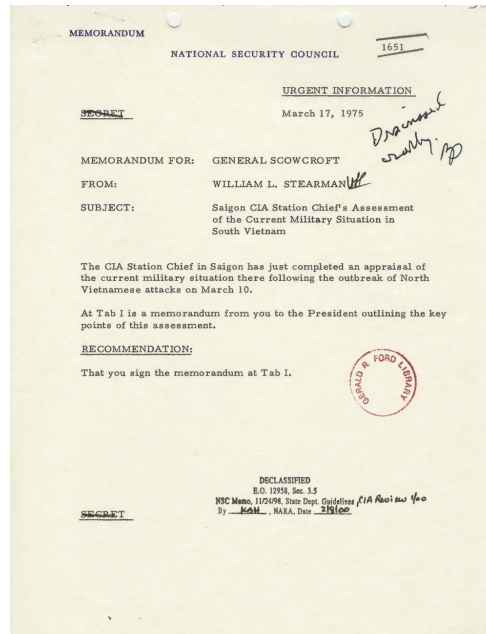
Source-Dependent Questions

- What did the word choice used in the poster show about how the United States wanted to portray the country’s involvement in the Vietnam conflict?
- Consider the images in the poster. Why would the United States feel it was important to share images of the Communist party attacking civilians? How did this poster refute the claims made in the 1963 memo?

Citation Information

“Aggression From the North,” U.S Information Agency, 23 April 1965. Courtesy of National Archives

Saigon CIA Chief's Assessment of Vietnam, March 17, 1975



Courtesy of National Archives, "Memorandum Regarding the Saigon Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)...," Office of the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, 17 March 1975

Description

This item is a National Security Council memorandum from National Security Council staffer William L. Stearman to U.S. National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft, and an accompanying memo from Scowcroft for President Gerald Ford.

[Transcript of Assessment of Vietnam in a National Security Council Memorandum](#)

Source-Dependent Questions

- Consider the last paragraph of the memo. What was the assessment of the CIA chief? What specific evidence did he give throughout the memo to come to this conclusion?
- How did the memo show the use of communist propaganda being used in a similar manner to the United States?

Citation Information

"Memorandum Regarding the Saigon Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Station Chief's Assessment of the Current Military Situation in South Vietnam," Office of the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, 17 March 1975. Courtesy of National Archives

“U.S. Army Veteran Describes the Role of Military Advisors in Vietnam in the 1960s” from Iowa Public Television, September 10, 2017



Courtesy of Iowa Public Television, “U.S. Army Veteran Describes the Role of Military Advisors in Vietnam in the 1960s,” Iowa Experience: Vietnam - Iowa Public Television, 10 September 2017

Description

U.S. Army veteran Caesar Smith explains the political climate of Vietnam after World War II and the role U.S. advisors played in Vietnam prior to the start of the Vietnam War. Smith was a career military officer who served two tours in Vietnam and retired as a major. In 1964, he was a U.S. advisor to South Vietnamese troops. This segment is from “Iowa Experience: Vietnam,” a panel discussion recorded at Iowa Public Television in Johnston, Iowa, on September 10, 2017.

Source-Dependent Questions

- What did Caesar Smith describe as the initial role of the United States in Vietnam? What was the United States’ actual role?
- What does Smith describe as the desire of the Vietnamese people? How does the letter from the Iowa soldier corroborate or contradict these feelings?

Citation Information

“U.S. Army Veteran Describes the Role of Military Advisors in Vietnam in the 1960s,” *Iowa Experience: Vietnam* - Iowa Public Television, 10 September 2017. Courtesy of Iowa Public Television

“The U.S. Exit From Vietnam War: U.S. and South Vietnamese Veterans Share Their Perspectives” from Iowa Public Television, September 10, 2017



Courtesy of Iowa Public Television, “The U.S. Exit From Vietnam War: U.S. and South Vietnamese Veterans Share Their Perspectives,” *Iowa Experience: Vietnam* - Iowa Public Television, 10 September 2017

Description

Military veterans from the U.S. and South Vietnamese share their perspective on how the U.S. exited the Vietnam War, and the lasting impact of the conflict. Caesar Smith was a career military officer who served two tours in Vietnam. Dan Gannon is a Marine Corps veteran who served in Vietnam from 1969 to 1970. He spent more than 300 days in combat, rising to the rank of captain before leaving the military. Hien Van Le spent 21 years in the military. He rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel and was the head of Military Intelligence of the South Vietnamese Marine Corps from 1970 until the Fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975. This segment is from “*Iowa Experience: Vietnam*,” a panel discussion recorded at Iowa Public Television in Johnston, Iowa, on September 10, 2017.

Source-Dependent Questions

- What current connection did Dan Gannon make between Vietnam and current conflicts?
- How did Hien Van Le contradict Gannon’s characterization of the conflict in Vietnam? Whose perspective is more relevant to answer the supporting question? Why?

Citation Information

“The U.S. Exit From Vietnam War: U.S. and South Vietnamese Veterans Share Their Perspectives,” *Iowa Experience: Vietnam* - Iowa Public Television, 10 September 2017. Courtesy of Iowa Public Television