

## *Vietnam War*

Shortly after World War II the United States quietly entered a conflict that would escalate dramatically in the 1960s & 1970s. The Vietnam “quagmire” proved very unpopular within the United States and was almost unanimously condemned by other nations around the globe, including America’s allies. It has been called unnecessary, and is widely considered the United States’ most controversial and disappointing war.



### FRANCE

*This French selection offers some background to the Vietnam War, highlighting the international dimensions of the conflict and its origins in French colonialism.*

#### *B. The Indochina War*

- During their occupation of Indochina, the Japanese encouraged anti-French feelings. **In September 1945**, the Vietminh, led by **communist Ho Chi Minh**, declared the Independence of the Democratic Republic of

Vietnam. France reacted by sending troops commanded by General Leclerc who regained control of Cochinchina by the end of 1945. In March 1946, France finally agreed to recognize the Republic of Vietnam, while keeping it within l'Union Française. But against the wishes of Ho Chi Minh, the French High Commissioner, Thierry d'Argenlieu, proclaimed a Republic of Cochinchina. To deal with the unrest which resulted from this tougher stance, the French bombed Haiphong (November 1946), resulting in hundreds of dead. The following month, as a reprisal, Europeans were slaughtered in Hanoi—this was the beginning of the Indochina War.

- A difficult war was fought against guerilla forces well-armed by the USSR while in France, where communist propaganda called it "*une sale guerre*" [a dirty war], people were indifferent. Moreover, France did not have the support of the United-States who considered it a backward colonial fight. But everything changed in 1949–1950 when the Chinese revolution and the Korean War brought fears of communism sweeping through Asia. The Indochina War then lay within the framework of the Cold War. The USSR and China increased their support to the Vietminh while the United States gave financial aid to France.

- However, this aid was not enough to defeat the Vietminh. After the death of Stalin in 1953, the Americans wanted to settle the whole of the problems in Asia with a conference expected to take place in Geneva. France then tried to put herself in a position of strength and concentrated her troops around the entrenched camp of Dien Bien Phu so the Vietnamese army could be lured and crushed. But the trap closed on the French who were forced to surrender by May 7, 1954, after a 54 day fight. In July during the Geneva Conference, France recognized the independence of Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, which was divided into two parts.\*



## VIETNAM

*This Vietnamese selection resembles textbooks from both Communist Cuba and North Korea in its vocabulary and style, despite the normalization of relations between Vietnam and the U.S.*

\*Lambin, Jean-Michel. *Histoire—Tales*. Paris: Hachette, 2001, 224.



### Chapter 13

After the failure of the French Army at Dien Bien Phu, when they saw that they could not realize their prolonged conspiracy, they widened and internationalized the Indochina War. Not abiding by the Geneva Accords concerning Indochina, America under Eisenhower "filled the vacancy" in southern Vietnam.

General Collins, who was appointed ambassador in southern Vietnam, went to Saigon on November 7, 1954 bringing with him a plan sketched out in Washington that included six main points:

- Dismiss the French and the French forces that are still in southern Vietnam.
- Kill revolutionary forces, destroy the Geneva Accords, cut Vietnam into two.
- Help Diem to build a legal/judicial administration, with three branches: political, economic, and military.
- Help Diem build a National Army including equipment and leadership.
- Advance many economic policies aimed at transforming southern Vietnam into a market economy.
- Provide incentives for American companies to come in and develop the southern Vietnamese economy.

Through the puppet administration and puppet army America was able to realize the plan and change South Vietnam into a new kind of colony and an army base, then use South Vietnam as a springboard to attack the North to prevent the revolutionary wave for liberation of our people and socialist revolution in Southeast Asia.\*

After the "General Uprising" (1959–1960) in the South, there continued more uprisings coupled with political battles and artillery battles against the American enemy. During that time, world wide, ethnic liberation movements were getting stronger, directly threatening the colonial system of imperialism. In order to counter this, Kennedy—who had just been in-

\* Lam, Dinh Xuan, et al. *Lich Su 12: tap hai*, Vietnam: Nha Xuat Ban Giao Duc, 1997, 126–27.

augurated in Washington (the beginning of 1961)—established special forces to fight “reactionary activity” and to carry out the war of invasion in southern Vietnam. America started a new method of war in Vietnam, a “special war.” \*

“Special war” was a new form of a war, carried out by a puppet army, directed by the American army and dependent on American artillery, equipment, technology and transportation and meant to fight against our revolutionary forces and our people. The basic ploy of the “Special War” was to “use Vietnamese people to fight Vietnamese people.” †

## Chapter 14

Beginning in March 1965, facing the danger of the total destruction of its “Special War” forces, violent America brought its expeditionary forces and vassal army with its artillery and war technology into South Vietnam to strengthen its war of invasion. It had become an occupying force. The “total war” in South Vietnam widened into a “War of Destruction” in the North.

“Total war” in reality began from the middle of 1965 in the form of a new kind of war of invasion by the American army and the vassal‡ and puppet armies. Among them, the American army held the most important role and did not stop increasing its numbers and equipment, to fight our revolutionary forces and our people.§

The Vietnamization of forces and Asianization of the American War took place at the beginning of 1969, having just elected a president who just stepped into the White House, Nixon. Nixon came up with a theory that carried his name—“the Nixon theory”—that offered a new strategy of “practical prevention.” Following a new path, America decided to “Vietnamize” the war [or “Laotianize” the war, “Khmerize” the war].

“Vietnamizing” the war was a new American form of invasive war car-

\* “Special War” has to do with the United States training armies in other countries to fight their own wars.

† Lam, Dinh Xuan, et al. *Lich Su 12: tap hai*. Vietnam: Nha Xuat Ban Giao Duc, 1997, 137–38.

‡ A footnote in the original text lists five countries that participated alongside and supplied the “vassal” army: Korea, Thailand, Philippines, Australia, and New Zealand.

§ Lam, Dinh Xuan, et al. *Lich Su 12: tap hai*. Vietnam: Nha Xuat Ban Giao Duc, 1997, 142.



ried out mainly by a puppet army that would be coordinated with American forces. America would still call the shots through a network of advisors, giving dollars, artillery, technology and transportation to fight against our revolutionary forces and our people.

In accordance with this "Vietnamization" of the war, the American army and vassal armies extricated themselves from the war to lessen the flow of American blood in the war, at the same time increasing and taking full advantage of the flow of blood of the puppet army, to make the Vietnamese blood flow. That was the new goal and meaning of America in the war. In reality, there was a plot to use Vietnamese people to kill Vietnamese people.\*

### Chapter 15

Concerning the Paris Accords and Vietnam, we "drove the Americans out" and still the enemy "did not fall completely." On March 29, 1973, the American army finally left our country completely. But because the enemy still did not fully "surrender" America continued to maintain administrative power over their "double agents" or "minions" in southern Vietnam, so they still kept more than 20,000 army consultants masquerading as civilians who established an undercover army command post, which continued to assist the army and economy for the enemy.

Continuing to receive the advice and direction of the Americans—though not as before—the enemy leadership proudly destroyed the Paris Accords. They mobilized all the forces to carry on a campaign to submerge our native land, continued to launch new operations in already liberated areas, and erased the whole form of the Paris Agreement. In reality those activities were strategies to "Vietnamize" the war and were aimed against the revolutionary forces and our people in South Vietnam.†

The War of Resistance against the Americans to rescue our country ended with the Spring Battle of 1975: the historical Battle of Ho Chi Minh.

It was a great patriotic war, a war of national liberation to protect our nation. The war had lasted more than two decades (7-1954 to 4-1975),

\* Lam, Dinh Xuan, et al. *Lich Su 12: tap hai*. Vietnam: Nha Xuat Ban Giao Duc, 1997, 151–52.

† Lam, Dinh Xuan, et al. *Lich Su 12: tap hai*. Vietnam: Nha Xuat Ban Giao Duc, 1997, 168–69.

longer than any war in history, and we had to fight one of the most powerful nations, America.

Five generations of American presidents with their legs bound together oversaw four different American plans of imperialist attack and invasion. They directly invested almost \$676 billion in the war in Vietnam (compared with \$341 billion in the Second World War and \$54 billion in the Korean War), and if you include the indirect costs it comes to almost \$920 billion. At its peak, they mobilized 550,000 active workers, along with workers from five other countries that totaled 70,000. There were more than 1 million enemy puppet soldiers in southern Vietnam either directly fighting or in supportive roles. On both sides of our country (North and South) they dropped more than 7 or 8 million tons of bombs, more bombs than were dropped in any previous war.\*

Our victory is a source of inspiration to all revolutionary movements in the world, for all nationalities who are fighting imperialism.†



## CANADA

*U.S. textbooks have often portrayed Canada during this period as simply the main destination for American draft dodgers. The Vietnam War did indeed have a significant impact on Canada, but as this text explains, it went far beyond accepting those who refused to serve in the U.S. military. These Canadian texts portray a Canada deeply conflicted by its own policies and unsuccessful in its efforts to distance itself from U.S. foreign policy.*

It was not only the configuration of world politics that had altered by the 1960s. So had the policy of the United States. President Kennedy and his successor, Lyndon B. Johnson, were actually more hard-bitten and confrontational Cold Warriors than their predecessors, Truman and Eisenhower. Kennedy authorized dirty tricks by the CIA in foreign countries with no compunction or apology when they were exposed. His only

\* Lam, Dinh Xuan, et al. *Lich Su 12: tap hai*. Vietnam: Nha Xuat Ban Giao Duc, 1997, 176–77.

† Lam, Dinh Xuan, et al. *Lich Su 12: tap hai*. Vietnam: Nha Xuat Ban Giao Duc, 1997, 179.



regret about the abortive 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba by US-backed Cuban exiles, for example, was that it had failed. Most important, however, both Kennedy and Johnson permitted their governments to become ever more deeply involved in the quagmire of Southeast Asia. Like Korea, Indochina had been partitioned into communist and non-communist states after the Second World War. When the French government proved incapable of retaining its colonial control against armed 'insurgents' from the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam, governed by Ho Chi Minh), Canada in 1954 had become involved in attempts at international control. From the outset Canada had deceived itself into believing that it had a free hand to carry out its work without either upsetting the Americans or appearing to act merely as a lackey of the United States.

When the American administration gradually escalated both US involvement and the shooting war in Vietnam after 1963, Canada's position became increasingly anomalous, both on the commission and outside it. Lester Pearson was still hoping to mediate in April 1965 when he used the occasion of a speech in Philadelphia to suggest that the American government might pause in its bombing of North Vietnam to see if a negotiated settlement was possible. He was soon shown the error of his ways in no uncertain terms. In a private meeting with Lyndon Johnson shortly thereafter, the American president shook Pearson by his lapels and criticized Canadian presumptuousness with Texas profanity. Canadians now sought to distance themselves from the policies of the "Ugly Americans", although never by open withdrawal from the American defence umbrella.\*

In English Canada, what really ignited the revolt of youth was the war in Vietnam. In retrospect, the extent to which Vietnam dominated the period becomes even clearer than it was to contemporaries. The war became the perfect symbol for the sixties generation of everything that was wrong with mainstream American society. It was equally exportable as an emblem of American evil, representing everything that the rest of the world hated about the United States, including its arrogant assumption that it was always morally superior. Vietnam was central to the Canadian counterculture in a variety of ways. Hostility to American policy in Vietnam fuelled

\* Bumsted, J.M. *A History of the Canadian Peoples*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1998, 411-12.



Canadian anti-Americanism, as a paperback book about the United States entitled *The New Romans: Candid Canadian Opinions of the U.S.* demonstrated in 1967. This hostility also connected young Canadians with the burgeoning American protest movements. Many Canadian university faculty members recruited during the decade were Americans, most of them recent graduate students critical of American policy. They were joined in their sympathies by an uncounted number of American war resisters (some said as many as 100,000 at the height of the war), the majority of whom sought refuge in communities of university students or hippies in large Canadian cities.\*

During the Pearson years, the only episode that jeopardized Canada's status in Washington was a speech made by the prime minister in 1965 at Temple University in Philadelphia. Pearson advocated that the American temporarily cease bombing North Vietnam in an effort to seek diplomatic solutions in Indochina. President Lyndon Johnson, meeting Pearson afterwards, grabbed him by the shirt collar and shouted, "You pissed on my rug." It was a rough reception for a prime minister whose country had compromised its role in the International Control Commission to defend America's view of the Vietnamese conflict and to spy on North Vietnam for the Americans. A report in 1962 prepared by Canada and co-signed by India, desperate for American goodwill because of border wars with China, was regularly produced by American officials wishing to demonstrate North Vietnamese atrocities, of which there were no doubt many. That the report ignored the equal or greater human rights abuses in South Vietnam appeared to be of as little interest to official Canada as it was to the United States.†

\* Bumsted, J.M. *A History of the Canadian Peoples*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1998, 336-37.

† Finkel, Alvin, et al. *History of the Canadian Peoples: 1867 to the Present*, v. 2. Toronto: Copp Clark Pittman, 1993, 604-05.