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# Research report

Forum: Historical Security Council (HSC)

Issue: Discussing the prevention of war in Vietnam (1950-1955)

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## **Introduction**

The Vietnam War was born from Vietnam's struggle to free itself from French colonial rule, which led to a significant turning point in 1954 when the country was divided into communist North Vietnam and U.S.-backed South Vietnam. This division, meant to be temporary, intensified the Cold War rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union, each backing different sides in the conflict that they used as one of many proxy wars. The local fight for control soon escalated into a brutal international war. Attempts at peace proved futile throughout the war and ended only with a clear victory. Marked by intense and devastating battles, with far-reaching consequences for both Vietnam and global politics.

## **Definitions of key terms**

### **Cold War**

The Cold War was a period of intense geopolitical tension and rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union, along with their respective allies, following World War II. Lasting from 1947 to 1991, the Cold War was characterized by ideological, political, military, and economic competition between the two superpowers. Still, it never escalated into direct large-scale warfare between them—hence the term "cold" war.

### **Indochina**

The region in Southeast Asia, comprised of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, was colonized by the French in the 19th century. The struggle for independence in this region laid the groundwork for the Vietnam War.

### **Domino Theory**

The US foreign policy aimed at preventing the spread of communism. George F. Kennan brought forth the policy that stated that communism needed to be contained or isolated. This policy was a key justification for U.S. involvement in Vietnam, Korea, Afghanistan, and Germany.

### **Containment Policy**

An idea from the Cold War era conceived by the United States stated that when a country in a region fell to communism, neighboring countries would follow suit.

### **Geneva Accords**

The Geneva Accords were the agreements from the 1954 Geneva Conference aimed at resolving the conflict in Indochina after the First Indochina War. The conference was attended by, France, North Vietnam, South Vietnam, China, the Soviet Union, the United States, and other more neutral participants. The accords planned for Vietnam's division to end in 1956 through national elections. However, this was disrupted when the State of Vietnam refused to hold the elections, leaving the division unresolved and fueling further conflict.

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### 17<sup>th</sup> Parallel

Refers to the line of latitude used by the Geneva Accords to divide Vietnam into north and south.

### Gulf of Tonkin Resolution

A controversial event in August 1964, when U.S. naval vessels were allegedly attacked by North Vietnamese forces. This incident led to the U.S. Congress passing the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which gave President Lyndon B. Johnson broad powers to escalate U.S. military involvement in Vietnam, and as a result, so did China and the USSR.

### Sino-Soviet Split

Domestic instability drives a wedge in the relations between China and The Soviet Union. The relations became so bad that the Cold War went from being a 1v2 (USA vs China x USSR) to a 1v1v1 and the ties between China and the USSR were all but severed.

### NATO

NATO, or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, is a military alliance formed in 1949 by the United States, Canada, and several Western European nations to provide collective defense against the threat of Soviet aggression during the Cold War. Under the principle of collective defense, an attack on one member is considered an attack on all. NATO continues to function as a major political and military alliance, promoting security and stability in Europe and North America.

### Warsaw Pact

The USSR's answer to NATO was the treaty of cooperation and collective defense of the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Poland, Albania, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Hungary, and East Germany.

### Proxy Wars

Proxy wars are conflicts where two opposing countries or powers support different sides, typically through military, financial, or logistical aid, rather than engaging directly in combat themselves. During the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union frequently engaged in proxy wars in regions like Asia, Africa, and Latin America, using local forces or governments to fight on their behalf to avoid confrontation and the risk of nuclear war.

## General overview

The year is 1955, the world is emerging from World War II, the cold war wages behind the scenes and influences various conflicts coming to a boil in southeast Asia. A struggle for the independence of Vietnam known as the First Indochina War was fought and won by The Viet Minh in May of 1954, their victory over France sent the French home leaving two Vietnamese leaders vying for control of a country divided along the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel by the Geneva accords in July of the same year.

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It was during this Indochina war that the French sponsored Bao Dai, a figure who would be the first leader of the Western-influenced half of Vietnam. Bao Dai would later appoint Ngo Dinh Diem to succeed him however Din Diem proved power-hungry and soon became a dictator.

Ho Chi Minh, a founder of the Indochina Communist party, leads the north with support from his Viet Minh and global communist powers Soviet Union and China. Ngo Dinh Diem led the Personalist Labor Revolutionary Party in the South with support from the United States to prevent the spread of communism in the region. The Geneva Accords division of Vietnam came with the stipulation that elections would be held in 1956 to elect a prime minister to unite and lead all of Vietnam. When it became apparent that Ho Chi Minh was the favorite to win this election, leader Ngo Dinh Diem and his backers made it known that they had no intention of letting the election take place. This will prolong the division of the country and may foster growing hostilities between the north and south of Vietnam.

Jumping forward to the early 1970's we see that the seeds of conflict sown in the 50s have led to a brutal war between the north and south. A coup d'état took place in 1963 in South Vietnam which brought forth a change of political party mid-war for the South, yet they continued fighting. The death toll is close to three million lives and will still rise more until 1975. The 1973 Paris Peace Accords had the United States agree to withdraw from Vietnam, the accords also saw the Northern Viet Cong Army (VC) and The People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) agree to peace with the South Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN). These accords were broken almost immediately after the US pulled out and without American support, the southern capital of Saigon promptly fell to the north.

Within the United States, China, the Soviet Union, and all external participants; involvement in the war became a major point of contention for the civilian populations, the divides created at home were foundations for famous events, protests, and movements, and those effects are still felt in the modern day in these countries. The surrounding countries of Laos and Cambodia were not spared of the chaos and battles were fought across borders of the region. Despite his party winning the war Ho Chi Minh never saw peace in Vietnam having died in 1969. The region will go on to heal its wounds however the war will go on to become a symbol of Cold War tensions and a focal point of international debate and cause for further disputes within Vietnam.

## **Major parties involved**

### *Viet Minh*

Viet Minh are legendary Vietnamese freedom fighters who defeated the French with their guerrilla tactics working under Ho Chi Minh. They later went on to join the armies of North Vietnam to push for communist reform.

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### *The State of Vietnam*

South Vietnam's forces were known as the Army of the Republic of Vietnam or ARNV, Capitalist allies funded them to fight the northern forces.

### *The French Republic*

The former colonial rulers of Indochina the French truly are to blame for the unrest in the region. Having founded what would go on to become the South Vietnamese government, they created the opposition and denied the declarations of independence written by Ho Chi Minh. Following their defeat in 1954 they never returned to the Region.

### *The United States of America*

The Superpower of the West, the United States of America's zero-tolerance policy for communism put them in Vietnam to aid the South in the fight. Only with the backing from the land of the free could ARNV maintain the war for the 20 years to come this proved true when post-US withdrawal the southern capital of Saigon (modernly known as Ho Chi Minh City) was captured by the north.

### *Union of Soviet Socialist Republics*

The herald of communism and the strongest ally of North Vietnam at the time the USSR is responsible for economic military diplomatic and technical support to the North throughout the war and after.

### *The National Liberation Front*

Better known as the Viet Cong the National Liberation Front was the guerilla force that terrorized the foreign allies of South Vietnam. They drew inspiration from the Viet Minh and worked in tandem with the official armies of North Vietnam to defeat the South throughout the war.

### *People's Republic of China*

The other huge supporter of North Vietnam during the war was China post Chinese Civil War the People's Republic of China supported their communist neighbors in fighting against the South and by proxy, the West.

### *Laos and Cambodia*

Officially neutral parties, both countries were subject to bombings and invasion throughout the war. The Minh trail was a critical and powerful supply route for the North and it ran through both Laos and Cambodia without them doing much of anything to stop the invasion of their land.

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## Timeline of Key Events

(expand to see more)

- 02/09/1945            Japan surrenders from WWII and loses control of Indochina. The French reestablish control
- 02/09/1945            Ho Chi Minh declares Vietnam independent from France, Him and his army the Viet Minh are prepared to fight the French for their freedom
- 01/10/1946            WAR BEGINS! The first Indochina war is Declared
- 07/12/1947            France fosters a Capitalist alternative to Ho Chi Minh with the Bao Dai Solution and the First Ha Long Bay Agreement setting the stage for future conflict between Bao Dai and Ho Chi Minh's regimes
- 08/03/1949            Elysée Agreement Establishes the Associated State of Vietnam
- 17/01/1950            The People's Republic of China formally recognizes Ho Chi Minh's Democratic Republic of Vietnam and agrees to supply military assistance to the Viet Minh.
- 24/04/1950            President Harry S. Truman approves National Security Council Memorandum. NSC 64, The memorandum conducts Trueman's wish to ensure "all practicable measures be taken to prevent further Communist expansion in Southeast Asia."
- 25/06/1950            North Korea Invades South Korea! The US interprets this as proof that the USSR seeks to take over all of Asia
- 05/03/1953            Joeseph Stalin's death marks the beginning of the Sino-Soviet Split
- 07/05/1954            The Viet Minh win the battle of Dien Bien Phu. The French immediately pulled out of Vietnam.
- 21/07/1954            Geneva Accords and the Division of Vietnam. Vietnam is split along the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel. Ho Chi Min leads the north half and newly appointed Ngo Dinh Diem leads the south.
- 1954/1955            Tensions were built as guerilla soldiers from the north and south engaged in local conflict throughout Vietnam.

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01/10/1955

WAR IS DECLARED, and the Vietnam War takes off

## Previous attempts to solve the issue

There were a total of two attempts to resolve the issue. The first was the Geneva Accords of 1954 which did more harm than good by splitting the country in two.

The second attempt came nineteen years later with the Paris Peace Accords. These accords saw the US, South Vietnam, the Viet Cong, and North Vietnam formally sign an agreement to restore peace in Vietnam. They agreed on a cease-fire throughout Vietnam and the withdrawal of foreign troops from Laos and Cambodia. The most important aspect of the accords however was the agreement that the US would withdraw all troops and dismantle all bases in Vietnam. After the US withdrawal, the North and South Vietnamese forces broke the accords and without the USA the South lost the war within a few years.

Both the Geneva Accords and The Paris Peace Accords are widely regarded as failures by the world today although the US pulling out did end the war it led to the war ending in bloodshed.

## Possible solutions

It is unrealistic to propose a way to prevent the Cold War superpowers from supporting a proxy war in Vietnam yet despite this there might have been a few ways to prevent this tragic war from ever taking place.

1. If President Harry Truman had told the French to get out of Indochina before the French could create opposition to Ho Chi Minh. The result would be that the Division of Vietnam would not have been necessary this would have led to no war in Vietnam. This is however unfavorable for the Americans due to it leading to communism spreading
2. If France had not withdrawn and NATO allies sent support to them French Indochina would not have dissolved, and the Vietnam war would be prevented but the whispers of rebellion would never be hushed.

## Further reading

- Vietnam War general facts:<https://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war/vietnam-war-history>
- Best and most thorough timeline:[https://www.vietnamwar50th.com/history\\_and\\_legacy/timeline/](https://www.vietnamwar50th.com/history_and_legacy/timeline/)

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- Accurate maps and reliable information:<https://www.britannica.com/event/Vietnam-War/French-rule-ended-Vietnam-divided>
- Critical world events from our time setting:<https://www.sechistorical.org/museum/timeline/1950-timeline.php>
- Overkill of information:[chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/History/Vietnam/Vietnam\\_1947-1954.pdf](chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/History/Vietnam/Vietnam_1947-1954.pdf)
- The most informative video on the topic: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oHg5SJYRHA0>

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