

US involvement in the Vietnam War

On August 7, 1964, the US Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin resolution that authorized President Johnson to use conventional military forces in Southeast Asia without a formal declaration of war. US involvement in the Vietnam War can be divided into three stages. The first, in 1945–64, was one of assistance, first to France and then to South Vietnam. The second, in 1964–68, was the escalation of US involvement from 15,000 military advisors to 500,000 soldiers under President Johnson. The last stage, known as Vietnamization, was Richard Nixon's attempt to achieve "peace with honor." US involvement in Vietnam went far beyond containment and the domino theories; it profoundly affected the populace and changed society.

US involvement in Indochina, 1945–65

War in Indochina began immediately after the Second World War. The French wanted to regain control over the Indochinese peninsula (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Thailand), their colonies since the 1880s. During the Second World War, the French ceded control to the Japanese. The United States had supplied guns to Ho Chi Minh, the leader of the tenacious and skilled Viet Minh guerrillas who fought against the Japanese. At war's end, Ho Chi Minh declared Vietnam independent from France. The French, assisted by the British, sent in a joint military force to re-establish French control. President Harry Truman was initially sympathetic to the Viet Minh and was not supportive of the return of French colonial rule. When resistance to the forces of the Viet Minh proved more difficult than they had expected, the French approached the United States to assist them financially but President Truman initially refused. He changed his mind in 1947 but by then everything had changed. The Soviet threat in Europe was real and Truman had responded announcing his containment doctrine. In 1949, Mao Zedong's Chinese communist forces defeated the Nationalist Chinese. The US perception of Vietnam began to change, as they labelled the Viet Minh a communist regime taking its orders from Moscow. Initially, US interest in supporting the French had more to do with securing the situation in Europe than helping to defeat Ho Chi Minh, but that changed in July 1950 at the onset of the Korean War. US soldiers were fighting in the Far East, against an aggressive communist regime with the full backing and support of the Soviet Union. The Truman administration concluded that the situation in Indochina, China and Korea marked a new phase in Soviet expansionism and that nowhere in the world was safe from communism. That same year, Truman gave the French 40 million dollars in economic assistance and military equipment, beginning US involvement in Vietnam. In 1950–54, the United States gave 2.6 billion dollars to the French accounting for half the total cost of the war. In 1954, the French had sent 400,000 troops into Vietnam but were losing the war. The knockout blow came in the spring of 1954 at the Battle of

Dien Bien Phu where 10,000 French troops were surrounded, cut-off and captured by the Viet Minh. The French government pleaded with Eisenhower to send US ground forces to save the situation. Eisenhower stood firm against the advice of Vice President Nixon and his military commanders and refused the request. The defeat ended the French regime. The Geneva Conference was convened to restore peace and unify Vietnam.

In April of 1954, President Eisenhower verbalized his version of containment for Southeast Asia. He claimed that if one nation in the region fell, it was only a matter of time until its neighbours were subjugated one by one by creeping communism. They would fall like dominoes, Eisenhower prophesized, "If the Vietminh won, the remaining countries in Southeast Asia would be menaced by a greater flanking movement," articulating the domino theory of a communist take-over.

When the Geneva Accords were signed in July 1954, South Vietnam and the United States did not sign, but acquiesced to the division of north and south at the 17th parallel. The UN would supervise the terms of the cease-fire: Viet Minh forces below the 17th parallel went north and French forces went south. About 450,000 refugees fled into the south, mainly Roman Catholics who feared a communist government and about 50,000 refugees crossed into the north. The Accords created the independent states of Cambodia and Laos and called for UN-supervised elections in 1956 to form a single government for Vietnam, an election that Ho Chi Minh was certain to win. The United States reluctantly got involved, at this stage covertly. The CIA supported the fledgling government in the South of Ngo Dinh Diem. In 1955, Diem cancelled the elections. Meanwhile eight nations, including the United States, United Kingdom, France and Australia, signed the South East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) that insured collective security of the region against aggression and included specific mention of Cambodia, Laos and South Vietnam, yet excluded all Indochinese states in its membership.

When the elections were cancelled, Ho Chi Minh's guerrilla units, known as the Vietcong, began infiltrating into the South. Diem became president of South Vietnam (The Republic of Vietnam). The Eisenhower administration continued to support the Diem regime and provided equipment, weapons and 1000 US military soldiers as advisors to arm, train and mentor the army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN). The direct involvement of the US military in Vietnam had begun. By 1957, the Viet Cong (VC) began active operations in South Vietnam employing the same tactics they used against the French: controlling the jungle and attacking towns, cities and ARVN military bases then melting back into the jungle. By 1959, the VC had killed 2,600 government officials and controlled large portions of the countryside. The US military had little confidence in the ARVN's fighting ability and sent more advisors, about 8,000 by the time President Kennedy took office in 1961. But it didn't help. The majority of ARVN units were badly led, poorly trained and unmotivated. It was increasingly evident to senior US commanders that without the assistance of US ground forces, the South would lose the war.

President Kennedy's first year in office was a foreign policy nightmare. Despite his guarantee that he would act rather than react to the threat of communism, events undermined his bravado. In 1961, the Bay of Pigs fiasco, the building of the Berlin Wall and a reprimand from Khrushchev in Vienna had made him appear feeble. He needed to change his approach or lose the support of the US public. In November 1961, he committed more forces to Vietnam and sent Vice President Johnson on a fact-finding mission. The result was US covert involvement in the overthrow and murder of the corrupt, authoritarian leader of the South, Diem, who they had originally supported due to his firm anti-communist stance. Although there is some historical debate on the extent of Kennedy's support for actions in Vietnam, it is certain that from this point on, the United States had no other choice but to support the South and start the escalation of its involvement in Vietnam. The course was set when Kennedy went to Dallas on November 22, 1963, and was assassinated. Vice President Lyndon Johnson was sworn in as president of the United States and was thus compelled to follow the unsure path established by the now-dead Kennedy. Shrouded under the pall of the Kennedy tragedy, a little-known war in a Southeast Asian country smaller than Johnson's native Texas was about to take center stage in a drama that would prove the most divisive event in US history since the civil war.

Escalation, 1964–68

Following the Gulf of Tonkin resolution, the US went from assisting South Vietnam to taking control of the war. It was a limited war like Korea, without formal declaration of war and a concerted attempt to keep the conflict localized to the Vietnam. Johnson's decision to escalate the war on the grounds that it was the logical outgrowth of two decades of incremental decisions by his presidential predecessors and it required resolution. Immediately following the Tonkin resolution the military inaugurated "Operation Rolling Thunder", an air campaign to bomb North Vietnam into submission. US bombers flew thousands of missions attacking key North Vietnamese installations, and dropping thousands of tons of bombs. As the air war heated up, so too did the ground war. The US employed helicopters to lift ground forces into remote jungle regions and attack enemy strongholds. The Viet Cong countered by attacking American military installations and ambushing US patrols. US casualties increased and the US public began to question the cost of the war. Johnson questioned the war as well. He wanted to build "The Great Society" that eliminated racism and poverty. He did not want to get dragged into a war that could undermine his domestic agenda. He lamented, "I can't get out, I can't finish with what I've got, So what the hell do I do?"

What he did was try to win the war before the 1968 presidential election so that he could focus on his domestic agenda in a second term. He hoped that the air war would force North Vietnam to negotiate before he committed large numbers of ground troops. By June 1965, the air force was flying 3,600 bombing missions a month and ground forces were increasing incrementally; by the end

Discussion point

War of attrition

The United States military followed a strategy of attrition in Vietnam. Attrition is a strategy that tries to wear down the enemy over a long period rather than defeat them in a decisive battle like Waterloo (1815). It was the strategy employed by General Grant in the US civil war and by Allied generals in the First World War. In Vietnam it was based on the superiority of US technology and a belief that the war could be won by overwhelming fire power. Based on your understanding of the Vietnam War, why did this strategy not work against the Viet Cong?

of 1966, the number was set at 450,000 soldiers. It was evident that the air campaign alone would not win the war. The White House told the people of the United States that they were winning the war and that the sacrifices would soon bring victory but they had to send more ground troops. Johnson was determined to win and refused to be the first US president to lose a war against the communists.

The Tet offensive of January 1968 was the turning point in the Vietnam War. General Westmoreland had told the US public that North Vietnam's forces were being systematically ground down, and it was unlikely they would be capable of launching major attacks against US forces. The reports were more than propaganda, the North was being worn down in a war of attrition and the heavy losses could not be sustained. But the US needed a major victory. Johnson's popularity was fragile and the anti-war movement was gaining momentum. Kennedy had said that the war was for the hearts and minds of the people but support in the US was waning, and a major offensive might turn public opinion against the war. Tet is the Vietnamese New Year and the two sides typically observed a temporary cease-fire. During the lull in the fighting, about 85,000 Viet Cong and North Vietnamese soldiers infiltrated the major cities of South Vietnam. On January 31, the first day of the lunar New Year, they attacked and seized control of important government institutions and even the US embassy in Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) briefly fell to the North Vietnamese. It took several weeks of heavy fighting to clear out the attackers. Losses on both sides were heavy and in the end the Tet offensive was decisively defeated on the battlefield. However, in the living rooms of the United States, the 6 o'clock news TV broadcast showed uncensored combat footage of desperate fighting and a determined enemy that did not appear on the verge of defeat. Westmoreland asked for another 200,000 soldiers to finish the job. Middle America, the heartland of the United States that had opposed the anti-war movement and staunchly supported the president now began to question US involvement.

The Tet offensive was a huge gamble for the North Vietnamese that turned the tide of the war. General Vo Nguyen Giap, supreme commander of the North Vietnamese army said that "The war was fought on many fronts. At that time the most important one was American public opinion." The US had established a number of large military installations called fire bases, in remote jungle locations close to the North Vietnamese supply routes. Khe Sanh was one such base in Quang Tri province, near the Laotian border, garrisoned by 6,000 US marines and ARVN soldiers. During the Tet offensive, the base was surrounded and besieged by an estimated 15,000–20,000 North Vietnamese soldiers for 77 days. The US military feared another Dien Bien Phu. Khe Sanh was supplied from the air and a relief column eventually finally broke through and relieved the embattled marines and the siege ended. The garrison suffered about 4,400 casualties, and the North's casualties were estimated at double that number. In the United States, people wondered how a guerrilla army that was on the verge of collapse could mount a siege of such magnitude and nearly overrun a major American military installation.

On March 31, 1968, President Johnson went on national television and announced he would not run for a second term. He had

achieved considerable milestones notably the passage of civil rights legislation but the escalation of the war had short-changed his domestic ambitions gobbling up a quarter of every tax dollar spent on the Great Society programs. Johnson had tried and failed to fight a war on two fronts. He did, however, suspend the bombing campaign which opened the door to negotiations. Republican candidate Richard Nixon won the November 1968 election promising to restore order on the streets, listen to the silent majority and bring peace with honor and an end to the war.

Vietnamization and withdrawal, 1969–1973

Nixon's policy to turn the war over to the South Vietnamese Army was called Vietnamization. To concurrently increase the ARVN's role in the war and gradually withdraw US ground forces, he sent his chief advisor Henry Kissinger to negotiate a peace treaty that would recognize the permanent division of Vietnam between North and South. Like Korea, the talks dragged on and the United States escalated the war when that happened. The heaviest bombing raids of the war, including the Northern capital of Hanoi and the mining of Haiphong Harbor to stop shipping, leveraged the North Vietnamese back to the table. In 1970, President Nixon authorized secret operations sending ground forces and bombing raids to disrupt North Vietnamese supply routes (the Ho Chi Minh trail) by violating the neutrality of Cambodia and Laos. These tactics worked and the North came back to the negotiation table. Troop withdrawals took place in 1969–72. The last US bombing raid was in August 1972, the Paris Peace Accords were signed in January 1973 and the war was over for the United States. Nixon had been re-elected to a second term in November 1972, hoping to pursue a domestic agenda once the war was ended but the Watergate scandal erupted and ended in his resignation on August 4, 1974. After a brief pause, the fighting began again between North and South in 1975. In early March, the North Vietnamese began a full scale invasion of the South. ARVN forces fought bravely at first, but then collapsed and Saigon was captured on April 30. Vietnam was reunited under the Hanoi government 20 years after the Geneva Accords had split the country.

The domestic impact of the Vietnam War

The 1960s was a period of dramatic change in the United States, and the Vietnam War heightened the growing tensions in US society. This decade witnessed the rise of the middle class, the evolution of the civil rights movement, the women's movement, the rise of the youth culture and government initiatives in social reform. In this atmosphere all was questioned, including the government, and the media—especially television—became a forum for criticism of government policies.

The war became a catalyst for these changes but, more than that, it made the United States reconsider its global image and status. By 1968, the US consensus regarding the containment of communism was weakening and support for the Vietnam War in particular was crumbling. A counterculture had emerged that challenged the status quo and demanded social and political reform.

Discussion point

Compare and contrast the US experience in the Korean and Vietnam wars?

Discussion point

Inequities of the draft

Should all members of a nation be eligible for the draft regardless of education, economic status, gender or race? How was the situation in Vietnam reminiscent of the inequities of the draft during the US civil war?

The youth movement took their disquiet to the streets and protests, sit-ins and music festivals became the gatherings that defined this new generation. Universities became centers for dissent. Young men burned their draft cards, and as many as 60,000 draft evaders went to Canada. Muhammad Ali, the heavyweight boxing champion and Olympic gold medalist declared himself a conscientious objector and was jailed after an all-white jury convicted him of draft evasion. He symbolized injustice for millions of young people who opposed the war, also drawing attention to the high proportion of African Americans who were **drafted**. At the same time, it was alleged that the sons of the elite were being protected by their universities who used grade inflation to prevent them from being called up to serve in the military. There were clear racial and class divisions among those who had to serve and those who did not. Then, to make matters worse, the two men who had captured the imagination of young Americans of all races and promised a brighter future were assassinated: Martin Luther King was assassinated on April 4 1968; followed by presidential candidate Robert Kennedy on June 6 of the same year.

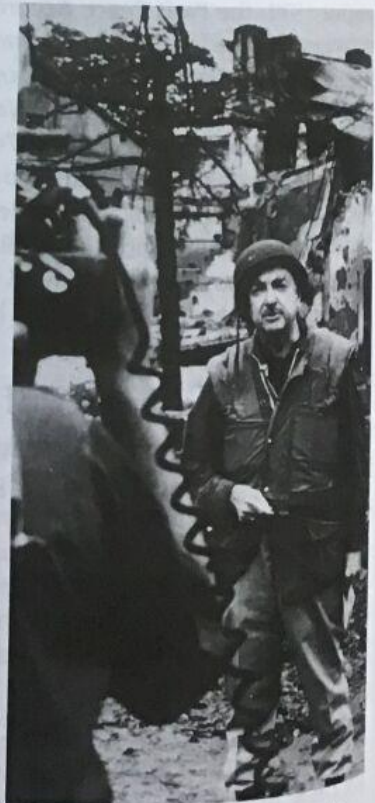
The 1968 Democratic National convention in Chicago had turned into a pitched battle between the police and anti-war protestors. TV coverage showed policemen beating young people with batons. There were thousands of marches, sit-ins and rallies across the country. Nevertheless, a significant majority of middle- and working-class people in the United States considered the youth movement an aberration. They did not like hippies, loud music or tie-dyed clothing. Middle America paid its taxes, voted in elections and supported President Johnson and the war. The CBS newsreader Walter Cronkite was Middle America incarnate, always ending his 6 o'clock news programme with the statement, "And that's the way it is." So, when he turned around and voiced criticism of the war, in an uncharacteristic departure from his standard objective non-partisan role as news reader, his comments rocked the nation. Cronkite had been in Vietnam during the Tet offensive and on February 27, 1968, he hosted a TV documentary on the war, closing with the words:

It seems now more certain than ever that the bloody experience of Vietnam is to end in a stalemate. ... But it is increasingly clear to this reporter that the only rational way out then will be to negotiate, not as victors, but as honorable people who lived up to their pledge to defend democracy, and did the best they could.

Cronkite's disenchantment with the war, made public that February night was a turning point, further galvanizing US public opinion against the war. When President Johnson heard Cronkite's comment he lamented, "That's it. If I've lost Cronkite, I've lost middle America."

Things only got worse for Johnson. On March 16, a company of US soldiers deliberately massacred 350–400 villagers in the tiny hamlet of Mai Lai. The military tried to cover it up, but one of the soldiers went to the press. How could this happen? Who was to blame?

The **draft** was not uniformly applied to all US citizens. African-Americans comprised about 11% of the population but made up 12.6 % of the soldiers in Vietnam and suffered 14.9% of combat deaths. More telling overall was the fact that the majority of soldiers were from low-income backgrounds. Young men from poor backgrounds were also twice as likely to serve in front-line combat units and become casualties than men from better educated, higher-income backgrounds. About 10,000 women served in Vietnam, 83.5% were nurses. Women did not serve in combat units. The women who served were volunteers, but the men were drafted.



Walter Cronkite in Vietnam during the Tet offensive.

The reputation of the US army was in tatters. The company commander, Lieutenant William Calley, and several of his men were charged and faced court martial but the stain of the massacre was permanent. Mai Lai provided fresh fodder for the anti-war movement. In October and November hundreds of thousands of protestors gathered in Washington to demand an end to the war, reminiscent of the freedom march of 1963. The rallies were coordinated with similar events across the country. Some radicals called for a general strike. Nixon vowed not to be swayed by the protests. A more radical movement emerged, the most important group being the Weathermen whose slogan was "You don't need a weatherman to tell you which way the wind is blowing." In October 1969, the group launched a campaign against US imperialism and advocated mass violence. The call for violence was unpopular and did not reflect the growing anti-establishment mantra of the youth counterculture.

The Kent State shootings

On April 30, 1970, President Nixon announced the invasion and bombings of Cambodia by US forces. Nixon had been quoted earlier that he would never consider this course of action. Kent State University in Ohio had been a hot-bed of student protest during the war. On the heels of Nixon's announcement the students began four days of protest, starting May 1, and during the first three days some property had been vandalized and a handful of protesters were arrested. A rally was planned for May 4 which university officials tried to cancel. The Ohio National Guard was on campus to keep the peace. About 2,000 protestors gathered and taunted the guardsmen but were dispersed with tear gas. The crowd reformed and a company of guardsmen wearing tear gas masks and with fixed bayonets advanced on the crowd in a line abreast. Without warning, and for reasons which remains a mystery, they then opened fire. Twenty-nine out of 77 soldiers fired 67 rounds at the students. Nine were wounded and four were killed. The country was thrown into a state of civil unrest. Five days after the shooting, over 100,000 protestors descended on Washington. A student strike closed over 900 university campuses. Then, on May 14, two students were killed by police at Jackson State (Mississippi) under similar circumstances. Nixon blamed communist radicals inciting the students, but his comments sounded hollow. New York Mayor John Lindsay denounced Nixon and claimed the country was on the edge of a spiritual and physical breakdown. Nixon responded by organizing a pro-war march by New York construction workers. His defensive attitude only added fuel to the anti-war movement and criticism of the government. No guardsmen were ever convicted for the shootings. Two weeks after Kent State, songwriter Neil Young's hit song "Ohio" hit the air waves and captured the mood of the times. The real enemy to freedom was the president.

*"Tin soldiers and Nixon's
comin', we're finally on our
own, this summer I hear the
drummin'—four dead in Ohio*

*Gotta get down to it, soldiers
are cutting us down,*

*Should have been
done long ago,*

*What if you knew her, and
found her dead on the ground,*

*How can you run
when you know?"*

"Ohio," lyrics by Neil Young,
recorded May 15, 1970



Kent State shooting, May 4, 1970. Mary Ann Vecchio kneeling over Jeffrey Miller. John Filo, a photography student, took the picture.

The conclusion to the Vietnam War

Between 1964 and 1973 over two million US citizens had served in Vietnam and over 500,000 had resisted the draft. The effect of the war on the United States was divisive. The US belief in itself as the protector of freedom and democracy was shattered. No longer was the nation the unquestioned leader of the free world. Postwar, people in the United States tried to make sense of the war but the nation was bitterly divided over the issues. A clear example of this can be seen in the person of Henry Kissinger. While he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his negotiations in Paris and lauded by many for those efforts, he is condemned by others for his bombing campaigns in Cambodia and considered a war criminal by other. Just as with the war itself, the verdict has yet to be determined. Historians have struggled to determine the legacy and a historical consensus has yet to emerge on the Vietnam War.

The result of the war, in some respects, proved the fears of ideologues who sought to contain communism and prevent the domino effect from taking place. The clear result of the war in Indochina was that the entire peninsula fell to communism. After the fall of Saigon and unification of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos both came under communist rule. In the case of Cambodia the results were especially tragic; the Khmer Rouge under Pol Pot killed approximately 1.5 million Cambodians in the pursuit of its extreme version of socialism.

It can be argued that the Vietnam War was a factor that brought the US and the USSR to the bargaining tables, resulting in the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT), and its link to the beginning of US relations with the People's Republic of China

Activity

Research activity

Photography

? How can a photograph change public opinion and influence historical memory? Research other examples of important photographs in the coverage of the Vietnam War.

Write a 100-word caption to support the documentation of an event or a personal story. Present it to your group with a copy of the photograph.

Activity

Hollywood and Vietnam

Write a film review

The following films from the 1970s and 1980s present a critical view of the war in Vietnam. Write a film review of one of them.

Green Berets (Dir. Ray Kellogg and John Wayne, 1968)

The Deer Hunter (Dir. Michael Cimino, 1978)

Apocalypse Now (Dir. Francis Ford Coppola, 1979)

Platoon (Dir. Oliver Stone, 1986)

Full Metal Jacket (Dir. Stanley Kubrick, 1987)

are indisputable. At the same time, the US and Canada had a vehement disagreement over the war; Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau spoke out against the war and accepted all draft evaders. This is an episode in US history that will continue to be debated.

What cannot be argued is the human cost of the war: approximately 3 million Indochinese civilians died in the war, and military deaths reached nearly 2 million—1.1 million North Vietnamese, 220,000 ARVN, 58,000 US and 2,000 SEATO forces (Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines and Thailand all provided troops). The US was unable to contain communism; in Southeast Asia, the price was too high and even collective security (in the form of SEATO) was ineffective.

Activity

Historiography

The United States and the Vietnam War

Historical opinion remains deeply divided on the lessons, legacy and tragedy of the Vietnam War: Following are the views of five historians that focus on the Vietnam War from the perspective of the United States. Read each and then consider the questions that follow:

Source A

Not ignorance but refusal to credit the evidence and, more fundamentally, refusal to grant stature and fixed purpose to a “fourth-rate” Asiatic country were the determining factors, much as in the case of the British attitude toward the American colonists (during the American Revolution). The irony of history is inexorable. Underestimation was matched by overestimation of South Vietnam because it was the beneficiary of American assistance, and because Washington verbiage equated any non-Communist group with the “free” nations, fostering the delusion that its people were prepared to fight for their “freedom” with the will and energy that freedom is supposed to inspire. Such was the stated anchor of our policy; dissonant evidence had to be rejected or it would have made it obvious that this policy was built on sand. ... A last folly was the absence of reflective thought ... about the balance of possible gain as against loss and against harm both to the ally and to the United States.

Source: Tuchman, Barbara. 1984. *The March of Folly: From Troy to Vietnam*. New York: Knopf.

Source B

The American involvement in Indochina began almost imperceptibly, rather like a mild toothache. At the end, it ran through Vietnam and America like a pestilence. Each president based his policies on exaggerated fears and, later, on exaggerated hopes. Thus each president left the problem to his successor in worse shape than he had found it ... Her leadership lost the respect of an entire generation, universities were disrupted, careers blighted and the economy bloated by war inflation. ... the awesome truth about Vietnam is clear: it was in vain that combatants and civilians had suffered, the land had been devastated and the dead had died.

Source: Stoessinger, John G. 1985. *Why Nations Go to War*. 4th edn. New York: St Martin's Press. pp. 111–12.

Source C

Herein lies Vietnam's most painful but pressing lesson. ... to distinguish between what is desirable and what is possible, ... between what is desirable and what is essential. ... LBJ and his advisers failed to heed this fundamental principle of statesmanship. They failed to weigh American costs in Vietnam against Vietnam's relative importance to American national interests and its effect on overall American power. Compelled by events in Vietnam and, especially, coercive political pressures at home, they deepened an unsound, peripheral commitment and pursued manifestly unpromising and immensely costly objectives. Their failure of statesmanship then proved a failure of judgment and, above all, of proportion.

Source: VanDeMark, Brian. 1991. *Into the Quagmire: Lyndon Johnson and the Escalation of the Vietnam War*. Oxford University Press.

Source D

The war in Vietnam was not lost in the field, nor was it lost on the front pages of the New York Times or on the college campuses. It was lost in Washington D.C., even before Americans assumed sole responsibility for the fighting in 1965 and before they realized the country was at war; indeed, even before the first American units were deployed. The disaster in Vietnam was not the result of impersonal forces but a uniquely human failure, the responsibility for which was shared by President Johnson and his principal military and civilian advisers. The failings were many and reinforcing: arrogance, weakness, lying in the pursuit of self-interest, and, above all, the abdication of responsibility to the American people.

Source: McMaster, HR. 1997. *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Lies that led to Vietnam*. Harper Collins.

Source E

Here then is a provisional verdict. The Vietnam War was a just, constitutional and necessary proxy war ... that was waged by methods that were often counterproductive and sometimes arguably immoral. The war had to be fought in order to preserve the military and diplomatic credibility of the United States in the Cold War, but when its costs grew excessive the war had to be forfeited in order to preserve the political consensus within the United States in favour of the Cold War. The Vietnam War was neither a mistake nor a betrayal nor a crime. It was a military defeat.

Source: Lind, Michael. 1999. *The Genuine Lessons of the Vietnam War*.

Questions

- 1 Source A describes US involvement in Vietnam as "folly." Assess the other four excerpts and determine whether they agree or disagree.
- 2 To what extent do you agree with the historians who consider the failure of the Vietnam War to be a failure of leadership?
- 3 Assess the influence emotion plays in sources B and E?
- 4 With reference to the origin and purpose of these excerpts, why should we treat the views of these historians cautiously?
- 5 What is your historical assessment of the war's impact on the development of the United States? Use your own knowledge and these references to support your position.