

SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES ON

The Second Indochina War (Focusing on the period 1964-1975)

Learning Outcomes

- Analyse the factors contributing to the involvement of external powers in the Second Indochina War from 1964-1975.
- Analyse the differing actions and conditions that shaped outcome of the Second Indochina War.
- Analyse the impact of the Second Indochina War on Cold War developments in Asia.

Brief Timeline

1954 The Battle of Dien Bien Phu - Giap defeated the French force based there. A ceasefire was agreed at Geneva that splits Vietnam into North and South.

1955 The pro-American Ngo Dinh Diem became President of South Vietnam in October. Diem starts to arrest anyone suspected of being in the Viet Minh (North Vietnamese communists) and America agrees to train Diem's army.

1956 South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem began to campaign against political dissidents.

1957 The People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) started a campaign of guerrilla warfare in South Vietnam. Weapons and men from North Vietnam began infiltrating the South. American military advisors were killed in Vietnam - they were first US casualties of the war.

1960 American aid to Diem increased. The National Liberation Front (NLF) was formed. It was known as the Vietcong or VC for short.

1961 President Kennedy pledged extra aid to South Vietnam.

1962 The number of US military advisors in South Vietnam rose to 12,000.

1963 The Vietcong, the communist guerrillas operating in South Vietnam, defeat units of the ARVN, the South Vietnamese army. President Diem was overthrown and then killed in a US-backed military coup.

1964 The Gulf of Tonkin incident - the US says that North Vietnamese patrol boats have fired on two US Navy destroyers. US Congress approved the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which authorises military action in the region.

1965 Operation Rolling Thunder began. The first US combat troops were sent to Vietnam in March. By the end of the year, there are 20,000 US troops stationed there.

1966 US troop numbers in Vietnam rose to 400,000, then to 500,000 the following year.

1968 Tet Offensive - on 31 January, 70,000 North Vietnamese and Vietcong forces launched a co-ordinated series of fierce attacks on more than 100 cities and towns in South Vietnam. More than 500 civilians died in the US massacre at My Lai. Secret peace talks begin in Paris. By 1968, there were 540,000 US troops in Vietnam.

1969 Ho Chi Minh passed away. The policy of Vietnamisation began as President Nixon starts to reduce US ground troops in Vietnam as domestic public opposition to the war grows. Nixon ordered the secret bombing of Cambodia. The My Lai massacre, which the US Army tried to coverup, was made public in November.

1970 Nixon's national security advisor, Henry Kissinger, and Le Duc Tho, for the Hanoi government, started talks in Paris. US troops in Vietnam were reduced to 280,000.

1971 140,000 US troops in Vietnam remained. Lt William Calley convicted of murder at My Lai and jailed.

1972 The Christmas bombing of Hanoi

1973 A ceasefire agreement in Paris was reached. The US troop pull-out was completed by March.

1975 Fall of Saigon

1. Background: Second Indochina War

- The Second Indochina War (called the Vietnam War in the US or the American War in Vietnam) began as a conflict between the United States-backed South Vietnamese government and its opponents, both the North Vietnamese-based communist Vietcong (National Liberation Front) and the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN), known in the US West as the North Vietnamese Army (NVA).
- The conflict began in 1955 and lasted until 1975 when the North Vietnamese conquered South Vietnam.
- 1964 was a significant year in development of the Second Indochina War because it marked the beginning of the escalation of the US military efforts in Vietnam.
- The Second Indochina War ended on 30 April 1975 with the capturing of Saigon, the capital of South Vietnam, by the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) and the Vietcong. The event marked the end of the Vietnam War and the start of a transition period to the formal reunification of Vietnam into the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

2. US involvement in the Second Indochina War

- In 1954, the French were finally defeated by the Viet Minh at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu.
- This defeat was formalised in the Geneva Agreement.
- The agreement temporarily separated Vietnam into two zones - a northern zone, officially known as the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, to be governed by the Viet Min, and a southern zone, the Republic of Vietnam, governed by the anti-communist government led by Ngo Dinh Diem.
- Because of the fear of the domino theory, the US government began to support South Vietnam economically and militarily to contain the spread of communism.
- Under Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy, the USA had given millions of dollars to and sent military advisers to support the Republic of Vietnam.
- With training and equipment from American military and the CIA, Diem's security forces cracked down on North Vietnamese sympathisers in the south, whom he derisively called Viet Cong (or Vietnamese Communist), arresting some 100,000 people, many of whom were brutally tortured and executed.
- By 1957, the Viet Cong and other opponents of Diem's repressive regime began fighting back with attacks on government officials and other targets, and by 1959 they had begun engaging the South Vietnamese army in firefights.
- In December 1960, Diem's many opponents within South Vietnam—both communist and non-communist—formed the National Liberation Front (NLF) to organise resistance to the regime. Though the NLF claimed to be autonomous and that most of its members were not communists, many in the US assumed it was a puppet of Hanoi.
- By 1962, US military advisers grew to more than 12,000, which increased to 16,000 in 1963. Kennedy also sent 300 helicopters with US pilots.
- On 1 November 1963, the South Vietnamese government was overthrown in a coup and President Diem was assassinated, possibly with the support of CIA and the tacit approval of the Kennedy administration who became frustrated with Diem's ability to unite South Vietnam. .
- Before Kennedy was assassinated on 22 November 1963, he wrestled with the idea of escalating US involvement in Vietnam to stabilise the country and defeat the communist insurgencies.
- Lyndon B. Johnson, Kennedy's vice-president, became president of the United State after Kennedy's assassination.

3. Reasons for the escalation of US involvement in 1964

- Johnson's decisions on the Vietnam War were influenced by the need to gather support for his domestic policies [great society] and presidential bid, and the US foreign-policy priority of containing Communism during the Cold War.

3.1. Containing communism

- President Johnson believed in the 'Domino Theory' and the threat of world domination by the communists.
- President Johnson view the political developments in Vietnam through the lens of history, and recalled how appeasing Hitler led to WWII, and how President Truman failed to take decisive actions to prevent the loss of China to communism
- Johnson feared that South Vietnam would soon fall into communist hands, which would result in the fall of dominos in the rest of Asia.
- Evidently, even after the death of Diem, the new South Vietnamese government continued to experience political instability, military losses to North Vietnam and constant raids by the Vietcong.
- Hoping to apply more pressure on the communists, the Johnson administration began to pursue a more vigorous programme of US military and economic support for South Vietnam, which included a more aggressive propaganda offensive as well as sabotage directed against North Vietnam with the support of the US military.
- It was also for the Johnson administration that the US was committed to contain communism in Asia against the growing Soviet and communist Chinese threats.

3.2. Gathering support for President Johnson's domestic policies and presidential bid

- In 1964, Lyndon Johnson had to run for election. Johnson only became president after the death of Kennedy in November 1963.
- Hence, it was important for Johnson to secure his electoral legitimacy. In addition, winning the election was important to President Johnson who wanted to enact his 'Great Society' welfare programme, which he could only do so if remained the US president.
- To win the election, Johnson needed to secure votes from the conservatives. Republican presidential candidate Barry Goldwater attacked by President Johnson for being soft on the communists.
- Therefore, it was imperative that Johnson proved he was a tough leader who could stand-up to communism by escalating US military involvement in Vietnam. The opportunity came in August 1964 with the Gulf of Tonkin Incident.

4. Escalation of US involvement

4.1. Gulf of Tonkin Incident (1964)

- On 2 Aug 1964, the US destroyer Maddox was fired by North Vietnamese patrol boats in the Gulf of Tonkin.
- The US Congress thus passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution which gave the new President Johnson (1964) a 'blank cheque' to send all the support he felt necessary to help South Vietnam.

4.2. Operation Rolling Thunder (1965-68)

- US hoped that a selection of strategic targets in North Vietnam to be bombed will put enough pressure on the North to stop supplying the Vietcong, and end the war and start negotiations.
- It was hoped that this would bring the conflict to an end at a low cost.
- Rolling Thunder became more and more extensive but fail to have any impact on the war.
- Strategic bombing was ineffective against North Vietnam because, as a largely agricultural country, it lacked military and industrial targets.
- The start of Rolling Thunder saw the first arrival of US combat troops in Vietnam.
- Johnson feared communist reprisals for the bombing campaign and sent troops to protect US bases.
- Within nine weeks, 99,000 US soldiers were in South Vietnam.
- Between 1965 -68, US soldiers gradually took over from the South Vietnamese army in the role of fighting the war.
- With their morale and confidence low, South Vietnamese forces were relegated to a supporting role.
- By 1968, the number of US forces in Vietnam surpassed 500,000.

4.3. Impact of US military escalation on the development of the Indochina War

- The US military forces were military superior to the Vietcong and North Vietnamese and played an important role in delaying the defeat of South Vietnam.
- However, the Americans were portrayed by communist propaganda as being colonialists, just like the French, who were present to pillage and rob the Vietnamese of their land, dignity and freedom.
- In the same vein, the South Vietnamese politicians and generals were puppets of the Americans and cared nothing for the ordinary Vietnamese welfare.
- The incessant US bombing of Vietcong and North Vietnamese positions led to the destruction of a large number of towns and villages, and killed an estimated two million Vietnamese people.
- Coupled with the allegations of wartime atrocities committed by US soldiers against unarmed civilians, such as the My Lai massacre, the communists were able to indoctrinate the peasants and workers with nationalistic ideas that they had to oust the puppet government and the Americans.
- It was thus ironic that US military intervention allowed the communists to better mobilise the masses to support the communist cause in defeating the Americans and the South Vietnamese military, so as to bring about justice and a better future to ordinary Vietnamese.

5. Reasons for the 'De-Escalation, Negotiation, And Vietnamisation' of the Indochina War (1968-1973)

- On 31 March 68, President Johnson suddenly announced that he was “taking the first state to de-escalate the conflict’ by halting the bombing of North Vietnam, and that the United States was willing to negotiate peace with the communists.
- He also announced that that he did not intend to seek re-election for a second term as the US President.
- Republican President Richard Nixon, who succeeded Johnson, decided to embark on the strategy of ‘Vietnamisation’ which included the withdrawal of US troops and provision of high-quality weapons and training for the South Vietnamese to combat the PAVN and Vietcong.
- There were two important reasons for the shift in strategy towards de-escalation and Vietnamisation: the US media effect and the domestic political costs of US military involvement in Vietnam.

5.1. US media effect

- The 2nd Indochina War became the ‘first television’ war as news report of the war were brought to the television screens of American living rooms.
- Often, the news included images of US soldiers killing and being wounded and killed, displaced civilians and destroyed Vietnamese villages.
- The negative news coverage led to the disaffection among the US populace about the cause and direction of the US military involvement in Vietnam.
- On 31 January 1968, 70,000 North Vietnamese and Vietcong forces launched a co-ordinated series of fierce attacks on more than 100 cities and towns in South Vietnam.
- Although the US soldiers were able to repeal the attack and inflict heavy casualties on the attackers, which almost led to the wiping out of the Viet Cong, the disturbing images on the TV screen were in sharp contrast to the official reports by the US government and military leadership that the US was winning the war and would be out of Vietnam soon.
- The media began to discredit the military official reports on the progress of the war. This had damaging effects on the Johnson administration.

5.2. Domestic political costs of US military involvement in Vietnam

- As the US military escalated its involvement in Vietnam, the anti-war movement in the US grew in tandem and became a broad social movement.
- The movement was unhappy with how young lower and middle-class whites and minorities were drafted into the war, only to return home seriously maimed or in body bags.
- By 1967, according to Gallup Polls, an increasing majority of Americans considered US military involvement in Vietnam to be a mistake
- Against the backdrop of increasing disaffection with his administration’s leadership and negative media coverage, President Lyndon Johnson announced in March 1968 that he would not stand for re-lection and would commence ceasefire negotiations with the North Vietnamese.

6. Nixon’s Vietnamisation of the Indochina War

- Understanding that the domestic mood was against US military involvement in Vietnam, Republican Presidential candidate Richard Nixon campaigned in 1968 on winning an ‘honourable peace’ in Vietnam.
- Nixon was elected president and took office in January 1969. Unlike Lyndon Johnson, President Nixon was determined that Vietnam would not ruin his presidency, as had been the case with Lyndon Johnson.
- The Nixon plan was to “de-Americanise” the war, an approach that became known as Vietnamisation.
- It involved building up the South Vietnamese armed forces so that they could assume greater combat responsibility while simultaneously withdrawing US combat troops.
- The US military role would shift from fighting the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong to advising the South Vietnamese and sending in a massive influx of military equipment and weaponry. Perhaps most important, Nixon changed the political objective of US intervention from guaranteeing a free and independent South Vietnam to creating the opportunity for South Vietnam to determine its own political future.
- Vietnamisation along with negotiation with North Vietnam were Nixon’s twin pillars for achieving ‘peace with honour’.

7. Peace negotiation stalemate (1968-1972)

- The Paris peace negotiations begun in 1968 between the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam), the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam), the United States, as well as the Provisional Revolutionary Government (National Liberation Front/Viet Cong). However, by 1972, the negotiations were deadlocked.
- The main point of contention was who would have political power in South Vietnam if a ceasefire were announced.
- The North Vietnamese negotiators demanded the following in the case of a cease-fire: the dissolution of the government of South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu, the disbanding of the South Vietnamese army, and the installation of a coalition government.
- The U.S. refused to consider the North Vietnamese demands and steadfastly supported Thieu and his government.
- At the same time, the South Vietnamese were making their own demands. Over 100,000 North Vietnamese troops had already occupied territory in South Vietnam. South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu demanded that the North Vietnamese recognise the sovereignty of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam), which would make the continued presence of the North Vietnamese troops in the south illegal.
- The North Vietnamese refused Thieu's demands, saying that they would not recognize Thieu's government and would not remove their troops. They thus walked out of the negotiations.

8. Christmas bombing (December 1972)

- US President Nixon issued an ultimatum to North Vietnam to send its representatives back to the conference table.
- When the North Vietnamese rejected Nixon's demand on December 18 1972, Nixon gave the order to launch Operation Linebacker II, an intensified bombing campaign of North Vietnam that became known as the "Christmas bombing."
- Over the next 11 days, the bombing continued unabated, with an estimated 20,000 tons of bombs dropped over North Vietnam.
- On December 28 1972, North Vietnamese officials agreed to Nixon's conditions for reopening the negotiations, which led to the end of the US bombing.

9. Paris Peace Accords

- After more than four years of negotiation, the Paris Peace Accords was signed on 27 January 1973 between the US, South and North Vietnam to establish peace and end the war in Vietnam.
- The accords led to the withdrawal of the US military, the dismantling of all US bases within 60 days and a ceasefire between the North and South Vietnamese forces.
- It was agreed that the Demilitarised Zone at the 17th Parallel would remain a provisional dividing line, with eventual reunification of the country "through peaceful means."
- According to the agreement, South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu would continue in office pending elections.
- Agreeing to "the South Vietnamese People's right to self-determination," the North Vietnamese said they would not initiate military movement across the DMZ and that there would be no use of force to reunify the country.
- In addition, the Vietcong was allowed to retain its 'zones of control' in South Vietnam, which allowed them to reorganise themselves while the ceasefire was in place.

10. Fall of Saigon

- The Paris Peace Accords effectively removed the U.S. from the conflict in Vietnam. However, the agreement's provisions were routinely flouted by both the North Vietnamese and the South Vietnamese government, eliciting no response from the United States, and ultimately resulting in the communists enlarging the area under their control by the end of 1973.

- North Vietnamese military forces gradually built up their military infrastructure in the areas they controlled and two years later were in a position to launch the successful offensive that ended South Vietnam's status as an independent country.
- begun almost immediately in its aftermath due to a series of mutual retaliations, and war had come again in March 1973.
- President Nixon had promised President Thieu to aid the South with air support should it be under serious threat from North Vietnam.
- However, the Case-Church Amendment was approved by US congress in June 1973 to prohibit US military activity in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia unless the US president received Congressional approval in advance.
- In August 1974, Nixon resigned his presidency due to the Watergate scandal and was succeeded by Gerald Ford.
- By December 1974, South Vietnam was on the verge of collapse. President Ford was unable to convince a hostile Congress to make good on Nixon's earlier promises to South Vietnam.
- The US Congress refused to provide assistance by citing strong domestic opposition to the war, and the fear of losing US military equipment to the North by the retreating South Vietnamese forces.
- President Thieu subsequently resigned, accusing the US of betrayal for not keeping to its words.
- On 30 April 1975, Saigon ultimately fell to the North Vietnamese army and the Vietcong.
- Without US support, Cambodia also fell the Khmer Rouge on 17 April 1975 and Laos to Pathet Lao on December 1975.

11. Reasons for fall of Indochina to communism

11.1. Impact of US premature withdrawal from South Vietnam

- President Nixon thought that he had won an honourable peace by thinking that his promise of economic and military aid and threat of renewed bombing would deter the North Vietnamese from attacking the south.
- In reality, the North Vietnamese communists and the Vietcong were encouraged by US withdrawal and was aware that strong US domestic opposition and the Watergate scandal meant that it was difficult for the US government to re-intervene in Vietnam.
- The Paris Peace Accords already gave the North Vietnamese and Vietcong the strategic advantages as the Vietcong was permitted to maintain and consolidated its forces in NLF 'zones' within South Vietnam after the signing of the accords, which served as launching pads for future attacks.
- In addition, Nixon's announcement of U.S. troop withdrawals from Vietnam just hours after informing US allies of the decision deeply antagonised several of those governments.
- Australia, the strongest US ally at the beginning of the war, responded by disengaging from Vietnam even more rapidly than the United States.
- Without the guaranteed support of the US and its allies, the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) was ill-prepared to the waves of attacks by the Vietcong and PAVN.

11.2. The 'Vietnam War syndrome'

- The US public aversion to overseas military involvement, now dubbed the "Vietnam Syndrome" also led to the defeat of South Vietnam.
- The passing of the Case-Church amendment of 1973 to prohibit US military activities in Indochina if there was no congressional approval clearly reflected the anti-war mood in the United States.
- This was followed by a reduction in material aid to not just South Vietnam, but also the Khmer Republic (capitalist Cambodia) and the Kingdom of Laos, which psychologically and materially affected their military defence.
- Combined with the impact of the world oil crisis and inflation of 1973-74, the results were devastating for South Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.
- As the triumphant North Vietnamese commander, Gen. Van Tien Dung, wrote later, President Nguyen Van Thieu of South Vietnam was forced to fight "a poor man's war."
- Ultimately, when the South Vietnam was on the verge of collapse, the US Congress further rejected President Ford's request for another bombing campaign to defend the South.

12. Roles of other actors: USSR, China, and the domestic actors in Vietnam.

- While the US was in many ways responsible for the communist victory in Indochina War, Soviet and Chinese support for the communist cause as well as Vietnamese themselves also contributed to the geopolitical outcome of the 2nd Indochina War.

13. Reasons for Soviet involvement in the Second Indochina War

13.1. Soviet initial reluctance to support North Vietnam

- Despite North Vietnam acknowledging the Soviet Union as leader of the "socialist camp", USSR was reluctant to support North Vietnam before 1964.
- Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev had limited interest and patience with the North Vietnamese as he thought North Vietnam was tilting to China's side in the unfolding Sino-Soviet split.
- Khrushchev therefore refused to provide aid to North Vietnam as he was suspicious of North Vietnamese and perceived them to be 'Chinese half-breeds'.

13.2. Reasserting Soviet ideological leadership (Fall of Khrushchev and the rise of Leonid Brezhnev and Alexei Kosygin)

- In October 1964, Khrushchev was ousted by his colleagues. Leonid Brezhnev and Alexei Kosygin who succeeded Khrushchev wanted to prove that USSR was still the leader of the socialist camp and increase the confidence of its allies in its leadership amidst the ideological challenge posed by Mao's China.
- Supporting socialist North Vietnam also helped the new leader strengthen their domestic political legitimacy in the eyes of Soviet cadres and citizens.
- In the mid-1960s, North Vietnam was the target of heavy US bombing. Not only did Hanoi need Soviet weapons, particularly advanced anti-aircraft missiles to protect itself from US bombardment, its leaders were never fully comfortable with North Vietnam's sole dependence on Chinese support.
- Thus, the North Vietnamese leaders shifted away from its pro-Chinese stand and began to court the Soviets for military and economic aid.

13.3. Soviet military and economic support from 1965 to 1975

- In February 1965, Soviet Premier Kosygin made a historic trip to Hanoi and signed a defence pact, pledging to increase its military support in North Vietnam. This aid included aircraft, radar, artillery, air defence systems, small arms, ammunition, food and medical supplies.
- They also sent Soviet military personnel to North Vietnam. It is estimated that some 15,000 Soviet personnel served in Vietnam as advisers and occasionally as combatants though the actual number was never fully disclosed.
- In 1966 there were widespread reports that North Vietnamese fighter pilots, air crews and anti-aircraft gunners had received training in the Soviet Union. It was subsequently revealed that around 3,000 Soviet personnel served in North Vietnam in 1964-65 and that some were responsible for shooting down US planes.
- The military aid increased after the 1968 Tet offensive and the delivery of substantial amounts of Soviet air defence equipment before the bombing halt that year. In November 1968, the Soviet Union and North Vietnam signed a new set of military and economic agreements.
- The USSR agreed to supply deliveries of food, petroleum, transportation equipment, iron and steel, other metals, fertilisers, arms, munitions and other commodities, for strengthening North Vietnam's defences.
- In addition, Soviet weapons such as weapons, machine guns, artillery, tanks and anti-aircraft missiles were particularly vital to the Vietcong to conduct their military campaigns in the south.
- According to some analysts, by the late 1960s more than three quarters of the military and technical equipment received by North Vietnam was coming from the Soviet Union. And unlike the equipment

and weapons supplied by China - which demanded deferred payment - most Soviet assistance was supplied as aid rather than loans.

- Economic aid from the USSR exceeded \$300 million annually during the 1968 to 1971.
- When Hanoi began preparations for the 1972 spring offensive, military assistance jumped sharply again in 1972, reflecting an upsurge in deliveries of ground forces equipment and air defence equipment.
- The aid was vital in helping the North defeat the South after the withdrawal of US troops in 1973.

14. China's relations with North Vietnam in the 1950s

- In the 1950s, China enjoyed a close relation with North Vietnam
- The Chinese government, under the administration of Mao Zedong, took an active role in the First Indochina War. In April 1950, Viet Minh formally requested military aid including equipment, advisors, and training for the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN).
- The PRC began to send their advisors and later form the Chinese Military Advisory Group (CMAG) to assist the North Vietnamese forces in return. This helped the North Vietnam defeat the French in the First Indochina War.

Reasons for China's involvement in the Second Indochina War

14.1. Security concerns

- Throughout the 1950s and most of the 1960s, Mao considered the United States the primary threat to China's security and revolution.
- The US also had a foothold in South Vietnam. Mao was afraid that if North Vietnam was defeated by the South, China would have to contend with a US-friendly capitalist Vietnam at the Southern borders of China.

14.2. Demonstrating China's leadership in the third world

- Vietnam was an ideological battleground that reflected the larger Sino-Soviet split in the 1960s.
- Mao wanted to show that China was ideologically superior to the Communist Party of Soviet Union and could lead the international socialist movement.
- China also portrayed itself as the 'natural ally' of the people in the third world who were engaging in revolutionary struggles to liberate themselves from Western imperialism.
- Supporting North Vietnam was crucial in demonstrating China's global ideological and anti-imperialist leadership.

14.3. Strengthening Mao's domestic political legitimacy

- Mao's support for North Vietnam strengthened his revolutionary credentials at home.
- Mao could prove that he was still committed to the revolutionary cause, both at home and abroad, by using Vietnam as another anti-imperialistic rallying point to unite his people behind his leadership and to silence the moderates who were challenging Mao's position in power.

15. China's military and economic support (1950s to 1964)

- After the creation of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam's official name), China began providing economic assistance to North Vietnam)
- China helped to rebuild North Vietnam's transportation and agricultural systems that were devastated by the war with France, and a grant of \$200 million for various project.
- When North Vietnam began its arms struggle to support the insurgencies in the south, China offered military aid totalling 320 million yuan between 1956 to 1963.

15.1. China's military and economic support (1964 to 1975)

- To help confront US military escalation in the war after the Gulf of Tonkin incident, China's People's Liberation Army troops entered North Vietnam in July 1964 to defend North Vietnam.
- The total number of Chinese troops in North Vietnam between June 1965 and March 1968 amounted to over 320,000.
- Because of its proximity with North Vietnam, China was able to provide much-needed military and material aid. Apart from weapons, China also provided uniforms, shoes, rice, meat and other 687 other different items.
- This allowed North Vietnam to continue its military campaigns against the American soldiers and the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN).

15.2. Gradual decline in Chinese military support (1973 to 1975)

- China continued to provide military assistance to North Vietnam, up till to 1975, even though Chinese support began to wane after 1973 as a result of the Sino-US rapprochement and the signing of the Paris Peace Accords in January 1973.
- In particular, the Sino-US accommodation appalled North Vietnam, and were opposed to China's acceptance of Nixon's overture.
- Vietnamese General Vo Ngyuen Giap even alleged that the Chinese government promised the US it would not intervene if the US bombed Vietnam during the meetings between the American and Chinese governments.
- It was believed that President Nixon, emboldened by the Sino-US rapprochement, ordered the US army to carry out an intensive bombing campaign of North Vietnam.
- The PRC's diplomatic protest to the US Christmas bombing of December 1972 was noticeably more restrained than usual though the Chinese did continue to provide military and economic assistance to North Vietnam.
- China was also wary of the détente between US and USSR and feared that its recent rapprochement with the he US could be jeopardised.
- To maintain its relations with the US, China urged North Vietnam to withdraw from South Vietnam so that a peace settlement with the US could be reached.
- The North Vietnamese refused and fighting ensued until peace teams were finally agreed at the Paris Conference in January 1973. This time the North Vietnamese was allowed to keep its troops in the south after the US forced had withdrawn.
- China officially withdrew its last troop from Vietnam in August 1973. By then, 1100 Chinese soldiers had lost their lives and 4200 had been wounded.
- It should nevertheless be acknowledged that Chinese military supply continued to flow to North Vietnam till 1975, and was essential for North Vietnam to defeat the south.
- The provision of guns for instance fell from the height of 233,500 in 1973 to 141,800 in 1975 while artillery pieces fell from 9,912 to 4,880.

16. Domestic factors that shaped the outcome of the war

16.1. Political and military strengths of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam)

- North Vietnam launched a successful war of attrition to defeat the US-backed South Vietnam.
- Though the PAVN was militarily less-equipped than the Americans, the battle-hardened PAVN who defeated the French in 1954 was confident that they could defeat another imperial power, the United States.

- North Vietnam was much better governed than the repressive rule of the South Vietnamese government. Freed from French colonialism, land redistribution and industrialisation greatly benefited ordinary North Vietnamese.
- The North Vietnamese also won the propaganda war by portraying South Vietnamese government as an undemocratic and oppressive regime and the United States as the imperialist power.
- In 1959, when the National Liberation Front and the Vietcong was formed, the North Vietnamese provided military and logistical support to the Vietcong along the Ho Chi Minh trail that ran from North and South Vietnam through Cambodia and the Kingdom of Laos.
- By the 1960s, with the support of the north, the Vietcong controlled the majority of the villages in the South, and were popular among the rural people that constituted about 90 percent of the South Vietnam's population.
- Although the US was militarily superior to the communists, the PAVN and Vietcong was able to inflict sufficient casualties on the Americans to undermine the army's morale, and support for the war at home.
- The strategy was also to keep the US troops busy in the hinterland, away from people in the villages who provided support to the Vietcong.
- Throughout the countryside, the political cadres of the NLF surreptitiously enlisted vast numbers of peasants in "mass associations" of farmers, students, women, and urban workers, and engaged them in rigorous indoctrination classes, where they stressed how they were fighting a war of liberation against the Americans and the puppets South Vietnamese government.
- During the Tet Offensive, up to 45,000 PAVN and Vietcong died in the battles. However, it was a successful psychological victory because Tet demonstrated to the American publics that communists were not going to be defeated.
- Because of the negative news of the Tet Offensive, the American public began to oppose the US military involvement in Vietnam, forcing the US government to de-escalate its involvement and pursue peace negotiations with North Vietnam.
- The ensuing US withdrawal after the signing of the Paris Peace Accords allowed the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong to consolidate their positions and launched several concerted military campaigns to defeat the south.

16.2. Weaknesses of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam)

- The South Vietnamese government political elites were hamstrung by political infighting and ruled their country ineptly.
- With their ongoing military campaign to withstand the attacks by the Vietcong and the PAVN, inflation soared and living standards of ordinary South Vietnamese plummeted, which eroded the support of the South Vietnamese towards their government.
- While the urbanites generally support their government anti-communist position, the rural people of South Vietnam were resentment of the government's rule and exploitation, and the US artillery and air bombing permitted by the South Vietnamese government left many villagers homeless.
- The Viet Cong also managed the South Vietnam's rural economy and won the hearts of the rural folks in South Vietnam by distributing medicine and food to grateful villagers.
- Thousands of rural South Vietnamese, marginalised and dispossessed by the corruption and brutality of the Diem and Thieu regimes, enlisted to fight with the Vietcong.
- Those unable to fight - including women, children and the elderly - gave support in other ways, promising to provide food, safety and information about enemy troop movements.
- As for the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN), though the ARVN outnumbered the communists, were better supplied and had vastly superior firepower, the ARVN had a weak will to fight.
- The generals and senior commanders tended to be political appointees on the grounds of loyalty and cronyism and were competent to lead the military ranks and files.
- Corruption was also rampant, with some, according to a historian, 'raising it almost to an art form'.
- After the US withdrawal and cutback of US aid, morale and supplies in ARVN faded away. Desertion increased, including military officers, and only 65% of registered military personnel were present.
- President Nguyễn Văn Thiệu, the commander-in-chief, also led the military campaign poorly.
- The ARVN were required by President Thieu to remain in their positions and not surrender, which actually stretched the ARVN thin across South Vietnam, and made them easy targets of the PAVN.

17. Impact of the Second Indochina War

US military involvement saved the rest of Southeast Asia from communism

- Despite the Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam falling to communism in 1975, the US intervention should not be seen as a complete failure.
- In Lee Kuan Yew's own words, "The US act made it possible for non-communist Southeast Asia to put their own houses in order. In 1975, they were better able to stand up for the Communists. Had there been no US intervention, the will of these countries to resist them would melt, and Southeast Asia would most likely be communist."
- In 1970, Indonesian President Suharto also told US officials and a journalist that the Indonesian military forces were able to counter the communist coup of 30 September 1965 because they were encouraged by the introduction of US combat troops in Vietnam.
- Have the 1965 coup succeeded, Indonesia would have fallen to communism. Communist forces would then threaten Philippines.
- Hence, the US intervention in Vietnam was a strategic victory for the rest of Southeast Asia, but no in Indochina itself.