

## Compilation of Essays on Vietnam War for 4E (New Syllabus)

1. 'Ho Chi Minh was able to consolidate his hold on North Vietnam because he was ruthless against his opponents and potential opponents.' How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer. [10]

*Yes, I agree with the statement that the Ho was able to consolidate his hold on North Vietnam in the mid-1950s by being ruthless in the immediate aftermath of the Geneva Conference. He murdered opposition in the North on the pretence of land reform. Hundreds of thousands of innocent people paid for it with their lives. It resulted in executions of landlords and reactionaries estimated at 13,500. They were also ruthless in dealing with opponents and potential opponents, executing thousands of them. Hence, Ho was able to consolidate his hold on North Vietnam in the mid-1950s by using force, which included even carrying out show trials on the large landowners who opposed the land reforms. This allowed him to eliminate his opponents and potential enemies which makes him the undisputed leader of North Vietnam.*

*No, I disagree with the statement. To consolidate his power, Ho Chi Minh introducing land reforms that redistributed land from large landowners to peasant farmers. Land reform in North Vietnam was accomplished from 1954 to 1956 by confiscating and redistributing land owned by landlords to poor and landless peasants. At that time a large percentage of agricultural land was owned by large landowners and the majority of the rural population of Vietnam owned only small plots of land or was landless. The early success of the land reform program gave Ho a strong base of support among the 80 percent of the Vietnamese people who lived in rural areas. The support for Ho by a large number of rural dwellers was an important factor in him consolidating his hold on North Vietnam in the mid-1950s*

*In conclusion, though to maintain control, Ho Chi Minh suppressed political opposition, it mainly ensured he defeated his enemies and potential opponents. It is primarily his implementation of radical land reforms that helped him mainly solidify his power in North Vietnam. This is because by redistributing land from colonial authorities and local landowners to peasants, Ho Chi Minh gained the loyalty of the rural population, which constituted the majority of North Vietnam's demographic. Hence, this strengthened his base of support among the peasantry which enabled him to consolidate his hold on North Vietnam.*

2. "The Viet Cong was responsible for outbreak of the Second Indochina War." How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer. [10]

Yes, the Viet Cong (VC) was responsible for the outbreak of the Second Indochina War due to their nationalistic goal to reunify Vietnam. The Viet Cong emerged in South Vietnam as a strong communist-led guerrilla force seeking to overthrow the South Vietnamese government and reunify the country under communist rule. They believed in Ho Chi Minh's vision of a united, communist Vietnam. The VC comprised both North Vietnamese regular soldiers and South Vietnamese civilians sympathetic to communism. They effectively utilized the Ho Chi Minh Trail to transport troops and supplies, significantly bolstering their insurgency efforts. Their tactics included making rural areas unsafe for government forces and effectively attacked American supply bases. In response, South Vietnam implemented the Strategic Hamlet Program, relocating peasants into fortified villages to reduce VC influence. Hence, the aggressive actions by the Viet Cong intensified the conflict, contributing to the outbreak of the Vietnam War.

No, the United States was responsible for the outbreak of Vietnam war. The U.S. feared a communist takeover which was exacerbated by China's first atomic bomb test in 1964. The primary reason for U.S. involvement was rooted in its Cold War containment policy. This policy aimed to prevent the spread of communism, particularly in Southeast Asia. USA feared that a communist victory in Vietnam would lead to a domino effect, where neighbouring countries would also fall to communism. This led to increased military advisors and economic aid, eventually committing the U.S. to full-scale conflict in Vietnam to uphold South Vietnam as a non-communist state. Thus, the U.S.'s commitment to containing communism was pivotal in sparking the outbreak of the Vietnam War.

No, China was responsible for the outbreak of the Vietnam War. This was because after the communist victory in China in 1949, Mao saw the USA as his greatest threat. Vietnam, if aligned with the U.S, could potentially serve as a base for attacks or influence against China. Therefore, supporting a communist Vietnam would create a buffer against perceived U.S. aggression in the region. Thus, Mao was eager to support any state that created an anti-US buffer in Vietnam especially if it was a communist one. Another reason why Mao wanted to help North Vietnam to show support for another communist state. He also believed involvement in the Vietnam War could help unite the Chinese people behind his leadership just like in the Korean war. Mao also sought to bolster his domestic support and legitimacy by portraying China as a leader in the global anti-imperialist struggle. Involvement in the Vietnam War was similar to China's participation in the Korean War, as a way to rally domestic unity and support

for the Communist Party. Thus, China's involvement to support North Vietnam was the reason for the outbreak of the Vietnam War.

*In examining the causes of the Vietnam War, it becomes clear that the United States' involvement played a pivotal and decisive role compared to the contributions of China and the Viet Cong. The United States' commitment to the policy of containment, driven by Cold War anxieties and the perceived threat of communism spreading throughout Southeast Asia, led to substantial military, economic, and political interventions in support of South Vietnam. On the other hand, China's motivations were largely defensive, concerned with maintaining a communist buffer in Vietnam against potential U.S.-led aggression, rather than actively initiating or escalating the conflict.*

3. The Vietnam War was a result of Cold War considerations.' How far do you agree with this statement?? Explain your answer. [10]

*Yes, I agree that Cold War considerations contributed to the Vietnam War due to the actions of the USA. Despite the authoritarian and corrupt nature of Ngo Dinh Diem's government, the Americans continued providing military and economic aid to South Vietnam because of Diem's hardline stance against communism. This was in line with the domino theory. The US was wary of communism spreading from North to South Vietnam. Should this happen, they feared that communism could then spread to the rest of Southeast Asia. Thus, the Americans supported Diem even when he refused to hold the unification elections that had been agreed to under the Geneva Accords. American economic and military support also enabled Diem to crackdown effectively on his opponents, many of whom were supporters of North Vietnam, by arresting and executing them. Ho Chi Minh thus encouraged his supporters to unite with other opponents of Diem to form the Viet Cong. He supported this armed resistance movement's goal of bringing down the South Vietnamese government through providing them with troops and equipment. The Vietcong's guerilla campaign greatly increased the scale of the insurgency in South Vietnam. This brought about greater US involvement to support South Vietnam, contributing to even greater tensions between North Vietnam and the USA that eventually led to the Vietnam War.*

*I agree due to the actions of **China and the USSR**. Their actions exacerbated tensions in Vietnam due to the support they provided North Vietnam. Both countries supported North Vietnam because they hoped that a victory by North Vietnam would strengthen the influence of communism in Asia. In addition, after the Sino-Soviet split, both powers were jostling to be the leader of the communist world. Thus, they were eager to gain the favour and allegiance of Ho Chi Minh. China's support was also driven by security*

concerns. It supported communist North Vietnam to create an anti-US buffer in Vietnam. Thus, both countries provided massive military and economic aid to North Vietnam. This support enabled North Vietnam to provide substantial support for the Vietcong, leading to the intensification of the armed insurgency against the South Vietnamese government. As the South Vietnamese government's grip on power weakened, the USA also decided to increase its military involvement to counter what it saw was communist aggression, worsening hostilities between the USA and North Vietnam and leading to the Vietnam War.

I disagree because it was the **struggle between Ho Chi Minh in North Vietnam and Diem in South Vietnam to unify the country under their own rule that led to the outbreak of Vietnam War.** In 1955, Diem had refused to hold the unification elections that had been agreed to as part of the Geneva Accords. Instead, he held a rigged referendum on a proposal to remove the last Emperor of Vietnam and install himself as President. Diem's rule was deeply unpopular as he was authoritarian and oppressed the people. He was intolerant of any opposition, especially from the communists and treated them harshly by imprisoning and sometimes executing them. This led to the formation of the Viet Cong to oppose his rule, causing tensions to rise in South Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh realised that it would not be possible to reunify the country under his rule as long as Diem was in power and so he supported the Viet Cong's goal to overthrow Diem's government and unify the country under North Vietnam. Using the Ho Chi Minh Trail, North Vietnam supported the Viet Cong with weapons, food and troops. The Viet Cong attacked South Vietnamese government forces, officials and buildings. They also attacked US Air Force supply bases. Concerned that these attacks would destabilise Diem's government and lead to a communist takeover, the USA increased military support of South Vietnam. The increased support from North Vietnam for the Viet Cong and the growing U.S. military involvement to support Diem thus escalated tensions, ultimately leading to the full-scale Vietnam War. Hence, it was the aims and action of the two Vietnamese leaders that led to the outbreak of the Vietnam War

In conclusion, I believe that it was the conflicting visions of South and North Vietnam that was the underlying reason for the Vietnam War. It was because of South Vietnam's desire for a unified non-communist Vietnam that led to its refusal to hold unification elections and crack down on communist supporters. Likewise, it was North Vietnam's desire to unify Vietnam under communist rule that led to the North responding to Diem's repressive measures by supporting the Vietcong's armed insurgency. This fundamental clash in visions provided the basis for external players to be involved and meant that South and North Vietnam would likely accept the support of their respective allies to help them achieve their goals. This then served to intensify the scale and intensity of the conflict, culminating in the Vietnam War.

- 4 'It was primarily the strengths of the Viet Cong that led to their victory in the Vietnam War.' How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer. [10]

Yes, the **strengths of the Viet Cong** played an important role in helping them secure a victory. For a start, there was generally **greater popular support** in Vietnam for Ho Chi Minh, compared to the South Vietnamese. Ho Chi Minh was seen as a patriot that fought for Vietnamese independence in both WWII as well the first Indochinese War. This was especially the case when contrasted with the corrupted Ngo Dinh Diem's regime which was seen as a lackey to American interest. The Viet Cong also secured victory due to being adept at **guerilla warfare and being familiar with the terrain**. They were able to eliminate the American in a series in well dug out tunnels and traps. More importantly, the Viet Cong had an **unbreakable spirit**. The war took on very different significance for the combatants. For the Americans, this war was far away from home, and some did not see the point of being involved. Others outright opposed the war. **On the other hand, the Vietnamese saw this as a war of national survival. They were prepared to accept heavy casualties, like what happened in Tet Offensive, which was not something that the Americans were willing to accept.** It was the willingness to take on the heavy casualties, that led to Americans questioning the purpose of the war and the subsequent withdrawal of American troops in Vietnam.

No, another factor leading to the defeat of the Americans in Vietnam War was **the role played by the media**. Vietnam was one of the most televised wars in history with many images of the war being publicised on magazines, newspapers and televisions. This included images such as **Vietnamese victims of napalm attacks as well as the public execution of a Vietcong agent on the streets of Saigon**. This made Americans questioned the intent of the war, given the cost of civilian lives. Another horrific episode that took place during the Vietnam War was the **My Lai massacre** where an entire village of civilians were massacred due to suspicion of being in cahoots with the Viet Cong. **The Tet Offensive was also widely reported in USA. The Viet Cong launched a surprise attack on South Vietnamese targets during the Vietnamese lunar new year and was able to quickly capture Saigon and some key radio broadcast stations.** Given the amount of money that the American government has invested in the war and with nearly half a million Americans deployed for the war, this attack shocked the American public as the Viet Cong captured the capital with ease. **This quickly caused Americans to question further investment into the war since it was obviously not paying off.** Coupled with many American news stations turning against the war as well as the anti-war demonstrations, this **culminated in the American policy of Vietnamisation, which saw the**

*withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam. With no American support, South Vietnam fell quickly, and the Viet Cong won the Vietnam War.*

*In conclusion, I disagree that the Vietnam War was won due to Viet Cong's strengths. Going by pure military outcomes, the Americans were in fact, winning the war. The war was very high-tech, with usage of napalm and Agent Orange, all of it had devastating effect on the Viet Cong. The Americans had more equipment and going by basis of body count, the Americans were clearly winning. Even the famed Tet Offensive cost more Vietcong lives than American casualties. However, none of the above mattered as the reality of the war mattered less than the perception of the war. The American media portrayed the war as one that is of high cost to the Americans, both from resource investment as well as soldier's deaths. The media also portrayed questionable American foreign policy, supporting a previously unpopular Ngo Dinh Diem and a regime which conducts public execution. The wartime atrocities such as My Lai further fuelled people to turn against the war, so in the end, despite the military success, the public relations nightmare was what cost American to lose the war.*