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**The Vietnam War as a Cold War Proxy: Its Role in the U.S.-Soviet
Rivalry and Global Impact**

Introduction:

In the public consciousness, the Cold War is often regarded as this conflict fought in the shadow. Nothing but an ideological and geopolitical standoff between the two superpowers, which are the United States and the Soviet Union. A war characterized by espionage, intel, and information warfare rather than direct military engagement. This view has contributed to the idea that the Cold War was a "war without bloodshed." And while it is true that the U.S. and the Soviet Union never directly engaged with each other in a full-scale war, the reality of the Cold War was far bloodier than this narrative leads us to believe. Numerous proxy wars were fought during this period. Bloody wars fought by developing nations, where local conflicts sustained and encouraged by the funding and strategic interests of the The United States and The Soviet Union. These wars are often dismissed within the context of the Cold War and they have led to immense human suffering and bloodshed. With young American and Soviet soldiers occasionally finding themselves directly involved. One of the more important example of these proxy wars was the Vietnam War. It lasted from 1955 to 1975. It was primarily a conflict between North Vietnam which was backed by the Soviet Union and China. And South Vietnam which was supported by the United States and its allies. However, this war was far more than a local insignificant conflict. As it was a critical battleground in the global Cold War. This resulted in far-reaching consequences for U.S. and Soviet relations and the broader geopolitical landscape. For the United States, this was a war to slow the spread of communism. This research will

explore how the Vietnam War essentially functioned as a Cold War proxy. As well as how it reflected the broader dynamics of U.S.-Soviet rivalry during this period.

Literature Review:

The Vietnam War is an extensively studied event as an important phase in the United States' history. It is regarded as a key conflict within the context of the Cold War's broader geopolitical influence. Lawrence (2008) asserts that the war cannot be fully and accurately understood without considering its global context. Particularly, the rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union at the time. This literature review compares and examines key perspectives on the Vietnam War. It focuses on this conflict as one of the many Cold War proxy conflicts and the involvement of the superpowers.

Proxy Wars:

The Vietnam War is often considered as one of the more significant proxy wars of the Cold War. Lawrence (2008) states that the United States recognized Vietnam as a large piece to protect if it were to stop the spread of communism. The United States heavily believed in the "domino theory". Which suggests that the fall of Vietnam to communism would be the beginning of the end. A massive boost to the spread of communism throughout Southeast Asia (p. 4). This concept guided U.S. policy as well as it helped justify its growing military involvement in the Southeast Asian region. Lawrence notes that the war served as a test of the United States' influence and credibility in the global ideological battle between capitalism and communism. In contrast, the Soviet Union was more reserved in its involvement. According to Lawrence (2008),

the USSR indeed provided material and logistical support to the Northern Vietnam forces. But he also states that they refrained from committing troops, hoping to avoid direct confrontation with the U.S forces. (p. 3). This indirect involvement exposes the nature of Cold War proxy wars. Where the two superpowers sought to influence the outcome of these regional conflicts without risking direct military engagement.

U.S. and Soviet Involvement

Lawrence (2008) provides a detailed account of U.S. involvement in Vietnam. He argues that US policy makers were motivated by both ideological as well as strategic concerns. Presidents Kennedy and Johnson escalated U.S. involvement in the region due to the fear that a capitalist loss in Vietnam would have global consequences, especially in the Asian continent (p. 5). However, Lawrence challenges this point of view, as he suggests that U.S. leaders greatly underestimated the nationalist motivations of the local Vietnamese communists. Who were as motivated by the desire for independence as by communist ideologies (p. 6). This miscalculation led to the escalation of a conflict which American policymakers believed they absolutely could not afford to lose. On the other side of this war, Lawrence (2008) states that the USSR's involvement was largely influenced by its competition with China for leadership in the communist future. While it is true that both of these powers supported the Northern Vietnam forces, the rivalry did complicate the dynamics of the war. Lawrence also points out the fact that the Soviet Union sought to increase its influence in Southeast Asia. However, it made sure that its involvement was minimal to avoid becoming too entangled in the conflict. This was due to its delicate relations with China (p. 8). All of these points demonstrate the complexity of the Cold War's international influence. Even allied communist regimes had competing interest in the context of this conflict.

Global Impact

The global impact of the Vietnam War extended way beyond the U.S.-Soviet rivalry. Lawrence (2008) asserts the fact that this war significantly affected the global balance of power in relation to decolonization movements (p. 12). The defeat of the U.S. in Vietnam was an inspiration for similar and contemporary national liberation movements. Especially in Africa and Latin America where revolutionary leaders saw Vietnam as proof that even a superpower could be toppled. The war also contributed to the escalation of global anti-war protests. These protest further damaged the U.S.'s international reputation, and led questioning of its foreign policy. Furthermore, Lawrence (2008) discusses how the Vietnam War influenced the Non-Aligned Movement. As newly independent countries tried to avoid becoming pawns in the Cold War struggle (p. 14). The war showed the real risks for Third World countries in getting too close with either superpower. This led many nations to adopt more neutral stances in global politics. These consequences had long-lasting effects on Cold War diplomacy as well as the strategic calculations of both the U.S. and the USSR.

Research design:

This research will adopt a qualitative approach rather than a quantitative one. It shall focus on the analysis of historical texts as well as academic works. It shall explore how the Vietnam War functioned as proxy war between the U.S. and the Soviet Union in the context of the Cold War.

The data will likely consist of quotes and interpretations by scholars and experts in the academic field rather than numerical or quantitative information. As this research does not involve the collection of new data. Instead, it will primarily rely on secondary sources. This entails the use of declassified documents, books, and academic journals. Sources will primarily consist of historical accounts of American as well as Soviet involvement in the Vietnam War as well as analysis of certain policies. This study will also make use of secondary literature which explores the influence of the Vietnam War on Cold War politics. Research methods will involve content analysis of the sources mentioned above in order to identify key themes and the most relevant patterns in how the superpowers engaged in the Vietnam War. These methods involve comparing perspectives from Western and Eastern sides. They also aim to examine the broader geopolitical implications. As for practicalities, it seems the main challenge may be the availability of declassified Soviet documents or limited access to particular archives. However, with the use of well-documented secondary sources, these challenges may be mitigated. As for the time constraints, the research is confidently feasible within the timeframe allocated to its completion.

Implications:

This research seeks to contribute to a more historically accurate public understanding of how proxy wars influenced the dynamics of the Cold War. By taking a closer look at the war's role in the rivalry between the US and Soviet Russia, this study will evidently offer some new perspectives concerning the strategic approaches adopted by the United States as well as The Soviet Union during the Cold War. It will also expose the often dismissed but inarguably great influence of third world nations in this conflict. This research is important as it shows the

interconnectedness of local and global politics in the context of the Cold War. As it provides a deeper explanation of how these proxy wars influenced the trajectory of the Cold War.

References:

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