I. US Empire and Vietnam: "The myth of the good empire"

1. “The Story” began for some of us in 1964

1. Tiny democracy of South Vietnam invaded by Communist North Vietnam.

2. U.S. needs to intervene

a. as the “good empire” in defense of democracy

b. stop the spread of communism, a monolithic totalitarianism

spreading by force and subversion throughout the world

c. domino theory

3. In an act of war, North Vietnam attacked the U.S., right to self-defense.

4. War going well: evening body count

B. “A Bright Shining Lie”

1. Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers (PP)

2. Pentagon Papers

a. reality: Vietnamese independence a threat to grand strategy

b. “rotten apple”:

i. political and economic independence

ii. resources for its own people

iii. Declaration of Independence

1. Empire’s involvement
   1. Despite Atlantic Charter, Roosevelt reassures France

2. "Top Secret - Sensitive" " It is thoroughly understood that French sovereignty will be re-established as soon as possible throughout all the territory, metropolitan or colonial, over which flew the French flag n 1939."

C. Ho Chi Minh the nationalist leader of Vietnam

1. US ally in WWII - Vietminh

2. After WWII: Declaration of Independence based on US and French

They have enforced inhuman laws…they have built more prisons than schools. They have mercilessly slain our patriots, they have drowned uprising in rivers of blood. They have fettered public opinion…they have robbed us of your rice fields, our mines, our forests, and our raw materials…They have invented numerous unjustifiable taxes and reduced our people, especially our peasantry, to a state of extreme poverty…from the end of the last year, to the beginning of this year…more than two million of our fellow-citizens died of starvation...The whole Vietnamese people, animated by a common purpose, are determined to fight to the bitter end against any attempt by the French colonialists to reconquer our country.”

3. Eight letters to the US listing their grievances and

asking to be recognized

a. injustice

b. massive starvation

4. US ignored request for recognition, literally

5. Ho Chi Minh

a. French attempting to recolonize

b. US commitment violation of international law and the Atlantic Charter

C. US support of France

1. Chinese and British forces occupied Vietnam at end of WWII. U.S. persuades them to leave.

2. U.S. provides transportation for French soldiers to return and

and recolonize Vietnam

3. 1946 French bombed Haiphong in attempt to retake

Vietnam

4. French Indochina eight year war

5. French lost and by the end of the war US was

paying 80% of cost of war, incl 300,000 weapons

6. US Covert intervention 1953

a. “Third Force”

b. Undermine communism

i. violence against civilians

ii. blame it on communists

7. 1954 during battle of Dienbenphu

a. French trapped

b. US offers two atomic bombs to French, the offer

is rejected

c. US considers using atomic weapons itself seeks

support from British - no

D. Geneva Peace Accords

1. Temporary settlement of the Vietnam into North and

South in 1954

a. National elections to reunify in 1956 (Art 14)

Accords stated, “these Agreements recognize and guarantee, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Vietnam (Article 6 and 7 of the final Declaration).”

b. No new troops (Article 16)

c. No new bases (Article 18)

3. US realizes that Ho would win (PP)

a. Joint chiefs of staff, US Congress

b. Ho would win election, imperial powers would lose Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand

4. US decides on policy to undermine Peace Accords

a. creates country: **Pentagon Papers: "South Vietnam was essentially a construction of the United States."**

b. set up puppet government in 1954

i. US put Diem a Catholic from New Jersey in charge of a Buddhist country

ii. no popular support

iii. only support from U.S. and the colonial elite

5. Diem

a. oppression of peasants economically

b. reversed land reform returned 1,500,000 acres to

French land owners

c. repression of dissent through military with US

support: 60,000 political prisoners

d. cancelled the elections

E. Resistance

1. 1958 guerilla activity started

2.1960 the National Liberation Front was organized,

or Viet Cong

a. mass based political-social organization in over

2500 villages

b. **Pentagon Papers 1962: Only the Viet Cong had**

**any wide based popular support**

U.S. government analyst Douglas Pike, “in the 2561 villages of South Vietnam, the National Liberation Front created a host of nation-wide socio-political organizations in the country . . .the purpose of this vast organizational effort was…to restructure the social order of the village and train the villages to control themselves.” By 1962, there were an estimated 300,000 NLF members

3. 1961 Kennedy

1. covert operations in the North,

b. more "advisors" to 16,000 which violated Peace Accords

III. The American War

A. Pacification (early 60s)

1. US military strategy to defeat the Viet Cong: two part

a. kill them

i. not battles, but attrition

ii. body count becomes all important

iii. if they are dead they are VC

iv. RW: ‘someone counted the arms and legs

and divided by four’

b. deny them support

i.BSL: “Terrorize the peasants out of supporting

the Viet Cong”

ii. RW: “After dark, they are Viet Cong.”

2. Method:

a. rules of engagement: shoot anyone that runs

b. 1961-62 US began bombing, napalming, and defoliating with Agent Orange (cancer causing agent - dioxin)

3. Goal:

a. destroy villages

b. destroy crops and animals

c. destroy jungle cover

d. force peasants to relocation camps aka "concentration camps" “strategic hamlets”

e. Colin Powell: this is what we did, films of it

“Hearts and Minds”

4. “Unintended consequences”: “Bright Shining Lie”

a. Vann: “the bombing kills many more civilians than it ever does VC and as a result makes new VC”

b. Porter: “it was not a question of killing some

noncombatants, it was a question of killing

mostly noncombatants.”

B. Resistance to Diem and Pacification

1. Buddhist monks protesting forced conversions to Catholicism in Hue 1963

2. Buddhist monks immolating themselves

3. increased resistance from Viet Cong and aid from

north

C. Losing but . . . Amazing- David attacks Goliath - Gulf of Tonkin August of 1964

1. “The Story”:

a. we were attacked, act of war

b. torpedo boats unprovoked attack

2. Lie,(PP)

a. destroyer was in Vietnamese territorial waters

b. spy mission

c. covert operation to infiltrate the North

d. “no attack”

3. Gulf of Tonkin Resolution

a. gave president power to wage war

b. without declaration of war,

c. Supreme Court was supremely silent

D. Johnson: As the “good empire” we are going to pursue a policy to win the "Hearts and Minds" of the Vietnamese people

1. US increased bombing of SV

2. US began saturation bombing of NV

3. troop build up 1965 200,000, by 1968 there were 550,000

3. massive bombing of SV began,

a. 7,000,000 tons

b. 20 million bomb craters

c. more than 4x the number of bombs dropped in

WWII (Europe and Asia)

d. one 500lb for every person in south where

e. 90% of the bombs were dropped on SV

f. reparations $87 per rubber tree and $34 per

civilian

4. napalm

a. jellied gasoline with phosphorous

b. Fallbrook

5. Agent Orange and Operation Ranch Hand

a. 20 million gallons of herbicide incl11.2 million gallons of Agent Orange a defoliate meant to

i. destroy jungle as cover

ii. poison rice crops

b. In Vietnam 400,000 deaths and 500,000 birth defects

c. also cancers, immune-deficiency diseases

d. dioxin still in environment - fish, plants, animals,

e. produced, sold, and profited - Dow Chemical

f. sprayed it on our own men

i. 270,000 exposed (cancers: Hodgkin’s disease, prostate, respiratory)

ii. 20,000 awarded $180 million in class action

iii. 6000 compensation from government

g. "The largest contamination of dioxin in the world . . ."

5. Free fire zones -- anyone or anything in the area were considered enemies

a. notify villagers in advance by loudspeaker

from helicopter or leaflets

b. no warning if troops had received fire

c. once civilians move out 'free fire zone'

d. rule ineffective, ignored, civilians didn't understand

e. refugee camps full, no more refugees, but

continue search and destroy

6. Search and destroy -- villages that were suspected of

sympathy were destroyed, people killed, including women and children --

a. "Kill them all and let God sort them out."

b. one area: 167 villages 130 destroyed

7. My Lai 4, in Quang Nai Province, Operation County Fair

a. killed 450 to 500 mostly women, children, and aged, raped and sodomized

b. cover up - truth / every unit of brigade size

has its My Lai: Oran Henderson Colin Powell

c. Senate Foreign Relations Committee Sen John Kerry re: war crimes

d. Kerry plus 150 honorably discharged and

highly decorated

e. American troops: 'raped, cut off ears, cut off heads, taped wires to genitals, cut off limbs, blew

up bodies, randomly shot civilians, razed villages

like Germans in Russia, shot cattle, livestock, dogs

for fun, poisoned food stocks,

8. Operation Phoenix 25,000 civilians were executed by

CIA without trial and 40,000 to concentration camps

a. Pro-administration analyst, we undoubtedly killed many innocent civilians

b. one village several hundred names, killed several

hundred but no one on the list

9. American Red Cross found systematic brutality in prisoner camps with US soldiers participating in the brutality

E. This doesn't look good, I have a better idea

1.Viet Cong in congressional report 1967, they are redistrubuting land to peasants -- hearts and minds

2. McNaughton: "There may be a limit beyond which many Americans and much of the world will not permit the US to go. The picture of the world's greatest superpower killing or seriously injuring 1000 non- combatants a week, while trying to pound a tiny backward nation into submission , on an issue whose merits are hotly disputed, is not a pretty one. **It could conceivably produce a costly distortion in the American national consciousness.”**

3. A Great Idea flood the rice fields cause massive starvation and then provide relief: John McNaughton, Asst Sec of Defense

F. Much of this is on TV, after Tet 1968

1. journalists with tv camerman in the fighting

a. soldiers killed over 50,000 and 200,000 +

injured

b. body bags

c. US soldiers burning villages and food

d. napalmed children

e. My Lai

f. Saigon police chief shooting unarmed bound

civilian in the head

2. Michael Herr “Dispatches”

3. Neil Sheehan “Bright Shining Lie”

4. David Halberstam “The Best and the Brightest”

G. Vietnamization

1. already illegally bombed Laos - 75,000 tons of bombs 1964-68, basically destroyed the Plain of Jars and its society

2. Nixon elected to withdraw with honor “end the war and win the peace”

3. Vietnamization: reality

a. ground war over to ARVN, to pacify American public opinion

b. massive bombing of Cambodia, Laos, and North Vietnam 800,000 tons of bombs

c. Dec 1971: largest bombing campaign in history: Hanoi and Haiphong

d. Christmas bombing

I. Maximum bleeding

1. 1973 one last attempt at massive bombing of

NV civilian targets

2. 1975 Vietnamese forces take over country

3. LBJ: "I wanted to leave the footprints of America there."

4. maximum bleeding

a. 2-3 million killed

b. destroyed environment

c. destroyed villages and agricultural infrastructure

d. "no water buffalo"

5. Carter: no reparations, the destruction was mutual

J. MLK: