Chapter 2

This chapter will examine the American War

A. French colonialism and U.S. support of French re-colonization.

B. U.S. support for France during French Indo-China War

C. U.S. involvement in Vietnam between 1954-64

D. Gulf of Tonkin Incident and U.S. escalation of war: 1964-1968

E. Vietnamization 1972-75

The American War and Anti-Vietnam War Movement

Officially, between 1964 and 1975, the United States waged a war against the country and people of Vietnam. In reality, the U.S. war against Vietnam began decades earlier. This chapter will examine the Vietnam war from 1945 to 1975.

French Colonialism and U.S. Support of French Re-colonization

The Vietnamese refer to what American’s call the Vietnam War as the American War and the American War was tied inextricably to colonialism, specifically French colonialism in Southeast Asia (Semm). Between 1887-1954, France colonized most of modern day Southeast Asia. The countries of Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand made up what the French called French Indochina. The Japanese invasion and occupation of Vietnam during World War II

was among the initial causes in the ensuing breakdown of French control of its Asian colonies. A broad based anti-colonial organization called the League for the Independence of Vietnam, also known as the Viet Minh, formed a resistance movement to the Japanese invasion and occupation. The Viet Minh was a nationalist group that had fought against the French colonial occupation. Ho Chi Minh, the leader of the Viet Minh, sought wartime aid from the United States in exchange for intelligence on Japanese military operations, but the United States did not provide the aid (Karnow). The ambiguity of the United States’ position was based on a promise that it had already made to the French, a promise which contradicted its public position embodied in the Atlantic Charter (FOOTNOTE AND INCLUDE EXPLANATION OF ATLANTIC CHARTE). The U.S. had already promised the French government, the return of their colonial possessions after the war (Zinn).

In 1945, after Japan surrendered to the Allies, Ho Chi Minh and his People’s Congress formed the National Liberation Committee of Vietnam as a temporary government. In Hanoi, with one million people on the streets celebrating the defeat of Japan, Ho Chi Minh issued a Declaration of Independence. The Declaration was based on

the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, the French Revolution, and the American Declaration of Independence. As the American revolutionaries did, the Vietnamese listed their grievances against French rule:

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.”(CITATIONS ALSO CHECK THE CITATION)

Also between October 1945 and February 1946 Ho Chi Minh wrote eight letters to President Truman. One letter reads, “When the Japanese were defeated in August 1945, the whole Vietnam territory was united under a Provisional Republican Government . . . .In five months, peace and order were restored, a democratic republic was established on legal bases, and adequate help was given to the Allies in the carrying out of their disarmament mission.”(CITATION) He goes on to explain to Truman that the French are trying to reestablish control over Vietnam. He says, “This aggression is contrary to all principles of international law and the pledge made by the Allies during World War II.” He asks for U.S. support consistent with its stated principles of the Atlantic Charter and support for U.N. intervention stopping the re-colonizing efforts of the French. He says, “ It is with this firm conviction that we request of the United Sates as guardians and champions of World Justice to take a decisive step in support of our independence.”(citation)

Ho Chi Minh sent another letter to President Truman and to the United Nations. “I wish to invite attention of your Excellency for strictly humanitarian reasons to following matter. Two million Vietnamese died of starvation during winter of 1944 and spring 1945 because of starvation policy of French who seized and stored until it rotted all available rice…Three-fourths of cultivated land was flooded in summer 1945, which was followed by a severe drought, of normal harvest five-sixths were lost…Many people are starving...Unless we receive immediate assistance we face imminent catastrophe….”

President Truman never replied to Ho Chi Minh’s letters. Ho Chi Minh told a journalist, “we apparently stand quite alone…We shall have to depend on ourselves.”

U.S. Support of France During French Indo-China War

The American War was not a war between North and South Vietnam as it was presented to the American people. There was no country of North Vietnam and no country of South Vietnam. Neither was it a war against communism although it was also presented that way to the American people. (PP) It was argued by U.S. leaders that the take over of Vietnam by the Vietminh was proof of the domino theory, “you have a row of dominoes set up. You knock over the first one, and what will happen to the last one is the certainty that it will go over very quickly.”(Footnote) The Pentagon Papers reveal a quite different story FOOTNOTE FOR PENTAGON PAPERS, USE WHAT YOU HAVE AT THE END OF THE CHAPTER..

The primary concern for U.S. leaders at the time was not that Vietnam was the first of many dominoes falling to communism, but that it could become what was called a “rotten apple.” Vietnam, under the Vietminh, the Papers say, was a threat because its aspirations and goals were nationalist, not communist. Vietnam wanted, not only political independence from the French, but economic independence. It wanted to use its resources for its people. This proved a threat to the U.S. and what was called the Grand Strategy, another form of colonialism, because it was argued if Vietnam was successful in gaining both political and economic independence, it could set a bad example for other countries that were fighting wars of national liberation. These other countries could be inspired by the success of the Vietnamese to define their goals independent of a global system. Consequently, the U.S. refused to recognize the government of Vietnam and even supported the French re-colonization of Vietnam, politically, economically, and militarily. (Pentagon Papers, Zinn, Chomsky).

The U.S. kept the promise that it made to the French during the war by providing ships to transport French soldiers back to Vietnam. On October 1946, the French bombarded Haiphong, a northern port city, and an eight-year war began, called the French-Indo China war.. The French were not able to defeat the Vietnamese, in fact, they were not able to fund the war, and could not have continued for eight years without the significant aid it got from the U.S. The U.S. funded 80% of the war’s cost, in the sum of over four billion dollars, and provided several hundred thousand weapons to the French, enough to equip all their French soldiers. But, despite US military aid, the French were defeated at Dien Bien Phu on September 2, 1954, which lead to the signing of the Geneva Accords in 1954 (Zinn, Sheehan, “Hearts and Minds”).

U.S. Involvement in Vietnam Between 1954 and 1964

The Geneva Accords created the conditions for the reunification and independence of Vietnam. The Accords temporarily divided Vietnam at the 17th parallel or the demilitarized zone (Figure 2). According to the Geneva Accords, the 17th parallel would vanish and Vietnam would unite after a democratic election in 1956. In addition, the Accords stated, “these Agreements recognize and guarantee, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Vietnam (Article 6 and 7 of the final Declaration).” The Geneva Agreements prohibited the introduction of additional troops, of military personnel, arms and munitions and the installation of military bases (Article 16 of the Armistice Agreement) and the inclusion of Vietnam in military alliances, this applying to the two zones (Article 9 of the Final Declaration). Yet, the United States, although at Paris during the negotiations, did not sign, nor did it comply with the Geneva Accords (PP).

The Pentagon Papers reveal that the United States knew that Ho Chi Minh would win the election and Vietnam would be unified under a nationalist government. The U.S. then began its more direct involvement in Vietnam. Even before the conclusion of the Geneva Conference, the United States began undermining the agreements. Several weeks before the conclusion of the Geneva Conference, the United States placed Ngo Dinh Diem, a Catholic anti-communist leader who had ties to the French colonial elites, into the presidency of South Vietnam. Diem essentially became a puppet dictator for the United States and successfully blocked the reunification elections. Because he was imposed by the U.S., he had no popular support, so during his rule, he used force to govern.(CITATION )

He was able to pass legislation that allowed him to detain suspected communists. As a result, thousands of “communist sympathizers” were imprisoned, tortured, and/or killed. In addition, Diem placed his own military men in the positions of provincial chiefs. He also used his Presidency to reverse economic policies that had been initiated by the post-WWII government. For example, he reversed the post-colonial land reform programs and returned land to the French and Vietnamese elites (Zinn). As a result, the Diem regime became more and more unpopular and this required the U.S. to support the regime more directly. The U.S. therefore proceeded to increase the number of military “advisers” it had in the country and also to increase its economic support for the regime. (Sheehan).

By 1958 extensive opposition to the Diem regime was growing in the countryside. This opposition became the National Liberation Front (NLF), called disparagingly by the U.S. the Viet Cong. NLF were organizers much more than they were soldiers. According to 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 a 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. According to the Pentagon Papers, the Viet Cong were the only political organization with mass based political support.in Vietnam.

More resistance to the Diem regime came from Buddhist monks who under Diem had begun experiencing religious persecution. Catholic priests began to send private armies to force conversions and if conversions were not successful, these private armies would loot and then destroy the pagodas. The oppression of the Buddhists majority, accounting for between 70-80 percent of Vietnam’s population, resulted in mass protests and demonstrations. In 1963, Buddhist monks began to use non-violent civil disobedience as a mean to protest against Catholic rule. In Hue, May 1963, Buddhists demonstrated against Decree Number 10 of 1958, a law that banned the Buddhist flag. In response, the army and police fired and threw grenades at the crowd resulting to the death of eight monks.(citation)

These events led to a demonstration of 500 monks who protested in front of the National Assembly of Saigon and the beginning of a nationwide hunger strike.(CITATION, WHO ENGAGED IN THE STRIKE) In response, the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) doused chemicals on the heads of praying Buddhist protesters. Days later, Tuich Quag Duc, responded by drenching himself with gasoline and burning himself to death on a busy road intersection in Saigon (Figure 4). Many other Buddhist monks began to commit suicide in the same way. In response to the protests, Diem imposed Martial Law and the army began to raid and close down pagodas and temples. Over fourteen hundred Buddhist monks were arrested and hundreds of Buddhist monks “disappeared.” (citation)

Despite the reactionary nature of the Diem regime, the U.S. continued to support it and continued to give the same ideological justification for this support: the domino theory. Robert McNamara, who became the key architect in the escalation of the American War reported to Kennedy in 1961: “The loss of the South Viet-Nam to Communism would involve that the transfer of a nation of 20 million people from the free world to the Communism bloc…. The United States would view any renewal of the aggression…with grave concern and seriously threatening international peace and security…that the government itself assistance in the military, economic and political forces.” **\*Quote doesn’t make sense.**

The U.S. accelerated its commitment to the Diem regime by increasing its troop commitment by eleven thousand and initiating and directing a counterinsurgency program called the Strategic Hamlet Programs or Operation Sunrise. This program forced the mass transfer of the rural Vietnamese population into relocation camps. There were two goals in the program. The goal of the program was twofold. First, it was to separate the peasants from the NLF in order minimize the influence of the NFL and, secondly, it was to deny the NLF the resources and aid that they were receiving from the villages and villagers. The second goal involved the tactic of burning the villages, from this tactic came the term “zippo job.” (citation). Homes were burned, water poisoned, crops burned, food stores poisoned and animals killed. This second goal also involved another tactic which was the shelling of villages by ARVN artillery. Because many civilians escaped the forcible relocation program, this tactic resulted in killing many civilians. (Quote from my notes from BSL).

The program was a failure for many reasons. It was riddled with corruption, it was based on ignorance of the population, its cultural beliefs and its relation to the Vietcong. Ignoring all of the more important factors that led to its failure, Robert McNamara reported that the program was an ultimate failure because the hamlets “did not meet minimum security standards” and the program was eventually ended in 1966.

The U.S began what it called Operations Trail Dust in 1962, which was a series of operations involving chemical warfare, clearly violating the Geneva Conventions of 1925. The Conventions prohibits the use of chemical or biological warfare, “recognizing the prohibition, embodied in the pertinent agreements and relevant principles of international law, of the use of herbicides as a method of warfare.”(Cite) The operation’s objectives were to destroy crops, rid the Vietcong of jungle coverage, and to expose the Ho Chi Minh Trail. These chemical agents, known as “rainbow herbicides,” were sprayed from airplanes. The most common herbicide used was Agent Orange. U.S. ‘Experts’ at the time, claimed that these chemical agents were harmless, short-lived in the environment, and a “prototype smart weapon.”

**[DOW and Monsanto, the chemical corporations who produced the agents, knew about the harmful effects of the herbicides and defoliants in humans. In addition, by 1968, numerous studies were published about the long-term harmful effects of the agents on humans and vegetation. Yet, herbicidal warfare in Vietnam did not cease until 1972. (recheck source on the date) Ranchhanders, U.S. soldiers who expelled the agents, released a total of 200 million gallons of defoliants and herbicides. The agents are known to cause kidney damage, various forms of cancers, diabetes, neuropathies, and birth defects. Years after the war, Vietnamese and American veterans’ babies are being born stillbirth or with birth defects such as Down Syndrome and Spina Bifida. The agents are still present the in the Vietnam’s ground today.**

**Operation Trail Dust resulted in the destruction of about 14 percent of Vietnam’s total land area equating to about 25 million acres of land destroyed, the size of Massachusetts. By the end of the war, the use of herbicides by the U.S. turned Vietnam into the largest dioxin contaminated site in the world] SHOULD THIS BE A FOOTNOTE? OR SOMEWHERE ELSE.**

The United States abandoned the unpopular Diem regime **IN WHAT YEAR** and supported a coup and the assassination of Diem. The U.S. then supported a series of puppet governments none of which had any more popular support then the Diem regime and none of which were any more successful in ending the popular insurgency. By late 1963, there were more than 16,000 U.S. advisors in Vietnam, but despite this increase, General Westmoreland, the commander of U.S. troops in Vietnam, requested more troops. As General Maxwell Taylor said, “The ability of the Viet Cong continuously to rebuild their units and to make good their losses is one of the mysteries of guerrilla war…Not only do the Viet-Cong units have the recuperative powers of the phoenix, but they have an amazing ability to maintain morale. Only in rare cases have we found evidences of bad morale among Viet-Cong prisoners or recorded in captured Viet-Cong documents.”(CITATION) However, it was not until a controversial incident occurred that the military leaderships request for more troops was answered affirmatively.

Gulf of Tonkin Incident and the Escalation of the American War: 1964-1968

In August of 1964, there were allegedly two attacks on two different U.S. destroyers. These attacks, according to the allegations made by U.S. authorities, were unprovoked and occurred on international waters in the Tonkin Gulf (Figure 6). U.S. authorities claimed that on August 2nd, three North Vietnamese patrol torpedo (PT) boats fired torpedoes at the USS Maddox. Two days later, the C. Turner Joy was allegedly attacked by PT boats. According to the Pentagon Papers, the attack was quickly reported as a radar signal error. In *Legacy of Ashes*, the NAMEAUTHOR, in the first attack, two U.S. destroyers were actually firing at each other and could not see because of the heavy fog. In fact, as Senator Gurening claimed WHEREANDWHEN, the CIA was conducting a covert operation attacking North Vietnamese coastal facilities. The Maddox was not on a “routine patrol” on international waters, the Maddox was on a special electronic spying mission in Vietnamese territorial waters and no torpedoes had been fired at the U.S. ships. However, the alleged attacks on the USS Maddox and C. Turner Joy were used as justification to massively escalate the American war.(PP)

Three days after the Tonkin “attacks,” a congressional resolution was passed in the House with only two dissenting votes. This resolution gave the President the power to “take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.”(CITATION) The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution allowed Johnson to wage war against Vietnam without securing a formal Declaration of War from Congress. In retaliation for the “attacks” of the USS Maddox and C. Turner Joy, President Johnson approved Operation Pierce Arrow, the bombing of North Vietnam’s coastal facilities and authorized the increase bombing of the south. In addition, according to the Pentagon Papers, Johnson authorized the secret bombing of the Laotian trails, near the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Furthermore, Johnson authorized the most massive bombing campaign in U.S. history, Operation Rolling Thunder. [**The United States dropped 643,000 tons of bombs within the first two years. The tonnage reached almost a quarter million. Targets expanded to the Ho Chi Minh Trial in Laos and factories, farms, and railroads in the North. Yet, 95 percent of the bombs were dropped in south Vietnam.]**FOOTNOTE

Most importantly, though, the alleged attacks on U.S. ships and the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution gave the U.S. the justification, popular support and the legal framework to engage in a massive military buildup in Vietnam. By 1965 the U.S. had 200,000 American soldiers in Vietnam, and in the next year, an additional 200,000 soldiers were sent to Vietnam. By early 1968, there were more than 500,000 American troops in Vietnan.

As Johnson escalated the American war, he spoke publicly about the need to win the “hearts and minds” of the Vietnamese people, however the strategic goal was to kill as many of the enemy as possible.(CITATION, SHEEHAN) And the tactics employed were designed to do that. However, because the war was popularly supported and an insurgency, the “enemy” frequently became “anyone who ran” or “anyone who was still there”, or anyone who was killed. “Body count” became the measure of success. (CITATION)

The tactic of defoliation was continued and accelerated as mentioned earlier as was the use of napalm. The tactic of declaring areas “free fire zones” and then sending troops on “search and destroy” missions in the “zones” became common. The initial phase of this tactic involved the clearing of the area of non-combatants by various means, leaflets, loud speakers, and then entering the areas and killing anything that was still there. All persons remaining were considered “enemy.” The free fire zones and search and destroy missions led to massive destruction of villages, crops, and animals. And to the killing of many civilians. In one area, ZINN ON DAMGE TO ONE AREA.

The U.S. military continued “carpet bombing,” high altitude saturation bombing, of both North and South Vietnam. Seven million tons of bombs were dropped during the war. Ninety-percent of the bombs were drooped in the South. The total number of bombs accounted for four times the number of bombs dropped during WWII combined. QUOTE ZINN ON BOMBS DROPPED ON SOUTH VIETNAM. In addition, the CIA in Vietnam orchestrated a secret program called “Operation Phoenix.” This was designated a targeted assassination program. At least twenty thousand civilians suspected to be communist undergrounds were executed without trial. ZINN ON SUCCESS IN ONE VILLAGE

The United States declared that it was winning the war because the goal had been killing the enemy and the success rate was being measured by “body count.” And the body count statistics given to the American public at this time led many to believe that final defeat of the enemy was near. WHAT DO PP SAY ABOUT WHAT THE US REALLY THOUGH. Other means for measuring the war effort were not as conclusive and in fact they suggested the opposite. For example, the NLF continued to be successful in occupying and redistributing land among the peasants. In 1967, a secret congressional report said, “the Viet Cong was distributing about five times more land to the peasants than the South Vietnamese government, whose land distribution program had come to a virtual standstill,” The report said, “The Viet Cong have eliminated landlord domination and reallocated lands owned by absentee landlords and the G.V.N. (Government of Viet Nam) to the landless and others who cooperate with the Viet Cong authorities. (Zinn)” The truth about the success and failure of the America war was revealed in 1968 in what is called the Tet offensive. Although the offensive was a significant military defeat for the insurgency, it was an much greater propaganda defeat for the U.S.

The Tet Offensive was carried out BY WHOM, VIET CONG AND NORTH VIETNAMESE REGULARS? on January 30th and the 31st in 1968 and it revealed to the American public that the United States was not winning the war nor was it winning the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese people. Tet is the celebration of the Lunar New Year on the first day of spring and is the most important national holiday for the Vietnamese. The Offensive involved a coordinated attack on 150 cities, hamlets, and military installations in the south such as Saigon, Hue, and Khe Sanh. (Dispatches and 1968) (Figure 8) Battles went on all over the south for nearly 2 months and in the end, the Viet Cong lost seventy per cent of it soldiers (58,000/84,000). The attack, however, revealed the Vietnamese determination to win and it created more popular support for the resistance. Furthermore, it created a decline of support for the war with the American public. **Support in the war in 1965 was 52 percent and by1968 it declined to only 32 percent. (FOOTNOTE)**

Another event in 1968 served to undermine the war effort and its publicly stated goal of winning the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese people. This second event was the My Lai massacre and was an example, not an exception, of consequences of the “search and destroy” missions. QUOTE ZINN ALSO TIGER FORCE. Within a twenty-four hour period, five hundred non-combatant villagers, women, children, and elderly, were killed by U.S. forces engaged in a ‘search and destroy”. News of the massacre was not revealed in the American press until November 1969. News of the My Lai Massacre created further decline for support from GIs and the American public.

[**The story of the massacre was revealed in May 1968 in two French newspapers and another published by the North Vietnamese delegation to the peace talks in Paris. The American press did not pay any attention, except for Seymour Hersh, then working for an anti-war newspaper agency in Southeast Asia, wrote about the massacre.]FOOTNOTE The only person convicted for the mass murder was platoon leader Lieutenant William Calley, a low ranking officer. His sentence was reduced to only three years in house arrest.]ALL OF THIS SHOULD BE FOOTNOTE**

There was not only the growing public disenchantment with the war; there was a growing disenchantment with the war among the American governing class. Clark Clifford, WHOSE SEC OF DEF AND WHEN, stated, “I could not find out when the war was going to end: I could not find out the manner in which it was going to end. I could not find out whether the new requests for men and equipment was going to be enough, or whether it would take more and, if more, how much…All I had was the statement, given with too little self-assurance to be comforting, that if we persisted for an indeterminate length of time, the enemy would choose not to go on.”(CITATION)

Vietnamization

In 1969, Richard Nixon became the 37th President of the United States. His campaign promise was to “end the war [in Vietnam] and win the peace.” Nixon’s plan to end the war was called Vietnamization. His stated goal was to withdraw U.S. troops and to turn the fighting of the war over to ARVN forces that were strong enough to defend the Saigon government. In the fall of 1969, Nixon asked for public support of the new policy, “To you, the great silent majority of my fellow Americans—I ask for your support. Let us be united for peace. Let us be united against defeat. Because let us understand: North Vietnam cannot defeat or humiliate the United States. Only Americans can do that.”(CITATION BUT NOT REALLY AN APT QUOTE).

According to Howard Zinn, the reality of Vietnamization was quite different than the stated goal. It was true, according to Zinn, that the goal was to withdraw U.S. troops from Vietnam and turn the ground fighting over to ARVN, but this was mainly to end the most unpopular aspect of the war, and regain support for the war at home. The reality was that the U.S. continued its economic, political and military support, training, weapons, and advising, for the Saigon government (and continued it until the very end, 1975). But Vietnamization was really a a plan to win the war by increased bombing, and not just increased bombing of North Vietnam, but expanded bombing and expanded ground military operations into adjoining countries.

In early 1970, the U.S. began bombing Cambodia and U.S. troops also invaded it. In 1971, the U.S. expanded bombing into Laos and supported an ARVN invasion of that country. Both of these ventures ended in military and public relations failure. By 1973, the U.S was forced to admit that it was unable to win the war and agreed to a settlement. The Saigon government, however, refused to accept the settlement and the U.S. made one last attempt to win the war by bombing Hanoi and Haiphong. This was again a military and public opinion failure and the U.S. was forced to sign a peace agreement (WHICH SAID WHAT). The U.S. then withdrew its forces and the Saigon government fell in 1975.(Zinn)

Appendix

In all, 8,744,000 Americans served in the Vietnam War, compared with 4,743,826 who served in World War II.CAN’T BE RIGT Over 58,000 troops died or remain missing.

The Pentagon’s final estimate of killed and wounded civilians in South Vietnam between 1965-1972 ran from 700,000 to 1,225,000, while Senate numbers was 1,350,000. (Vietnam Experience) In a seven year period 1965-1971, the area of Indochina, slightly the larger than Texas, “was bombardment by a tonnage of munitions amounting to approximately twice the total used by the U.S. in all the theater of the World War II.” By the end of the war 21 million bomb crater in south Vietnam. 1,200 square miles was bulldozed flat, striped of all life. By 1972, about have of the nation’s rural population had refugee status.

APPENDIX

[Nixon approved Operations Linebacker I and II, the use of B-52 bombers in the North. Each B-52 carried up to 54,000 pounds of bombs, its combined force could kill people in deep caves and underground shelters. Operation Linebacker II resulted to 20,000 tons of bombs dropped on Hanoi and Haiphong. The policy not only did not end the war, it escalated other wars in neighboring countries, Laos and Cambodia. Nixon expanded the bombing campaign to include Laos and Cambodia. The Nixon Administration aided the Laos government in military aid and advisors. As the war in Vietnam escalated, the Ho Chi Minh Trial in Laos became a top priority to the United States. The American war in Laos became a “secret war” fought by the CIA. The Hmong, a tribe in the northern part of Laos, allied with the Lao government. The Hmong lost 10,000 and 100,000 fled as refugees during the war. By the end of 1971, after the peace treaty was signed, the North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao engaged in ethnic cleansing of the Hmong. Like the Hmong, other indigenous people, known as the Montagnards of the Central Highlands were recruited (including children), in the Civilian Irregular Defense and allied with US Special Forces. The Montagnards, with the total population of one million, lost 200,000 during the Vietnam War. In addition, their lands were located near “free fire zones,” which resulted to 85 percent of their population being forced to resettle. Tensions between Laos and Vietnam intensified long after the Vietnam War ended.

In 1962, Prince Sihanook, ruler of Cambodia, allowed NVA and VC forces to set up base camps near the eastern border and in 1965 he cut diplomatic relations with the United States. But by 1969, he accepted the aid of the West to remove NVA and VC forces. By March, Nixon authorized secret offensive strikes in Cambodia known as Operation Menu, three months before the Vietnamization program. After the bombing of Cambodia, a coup occurred and General Lon Nol seized power. When troops started to withdraw troops in June 1970, the country experienced a three-year civil war with NVA and Khmer Rouge forces.

By 1975, the Khmer Rouge pushed General Lon Nol’s troops to retreat to the capital, Phnom Penh. Thereafter, the Khmer Rouge took over 70% of the countryside. The United States sent B-52 strikes to prevent the Khmer Rouge from overtaking the capital. The fighting resulted in more than 100,000 deaths and thousands of refugees. When the Paris Peace Accords were signed in 1973, the NVA allies withdrew (created the animosity and invasion in 1978 and control of the country for 20 years) and the Khmer Rough became the most radical communist force in Southeast Asia. B-52 bombing ceased and the capital fell on April 17, 1975.

The leader of the Khmer Rouge, Saloth Sar, adopting the name Pol Pot, planned to transform Cambodia into a Democratic Kampuchea by destroying all Western influence and creating an agrarian utopia. “The regime abolished money, evacuated cities and towns, prohibited religious practices, suspended formal education, newspapers, and postal service. The regime proposed to wage a class war and to turn the economy around by abolishing class distinctions, destroying prerevolutionary institutions, and transforming the population into unpaid agricultural workers.” The regime started a genocidal rampage towards “intellectuals” and liquidated “all sorts of depraved cultures and social blemishes.” An estimated 30% of the population, 2 million Cambodians, was slaughtered in, what was known as, the “killing fields.” Many of them were driven into forced marches or labor projects, died from famine, disease, mistreatment, or exhaustion.

APPENDIX

On June 30, 1971, after 15 days in court, the Supreme Court of the United States allowed the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* to continue publishing Pentagon Papers. The 3,000 page document divide in four volumes is an archive of government decision-making on Indochina for three decades; from World War II to May 1968, the same month as the peace talks in Paris. Robert S. McNamara, the Secretary of Defense, commissioned the RAND Corporation to write a top-secret history of the role of the Untied States in Indochina. Daniel Ellsberg, an investigator for the RAND Corporation, leaked the papers after he secretly copied the document. Ellsberg faced 12 federal felony charges and a possible 115 years in prison. Yet despite the risk, Ellsberg hoped “exposing secrets five presidents had withheld and the lies they told might have benefits for our democracy that were worthy of the risks.” The Pentagon Papers, following the Oval Office crimes toppled Nixon and the papers became a crucial document in ending the war.