

**SBSMUN 2018**

**COMMITTEE:  
VIETNAM WAR  
CABINET**

**CRISIS AT HAND:  
US-VIETNAM WAR**

**FREEZE DATE- August 4, 1964(After the Gulf of Tonkin  
Incident has occurred, before any resolution was passed by  
the US)**

Dear delegates,

We are going to convene on the 27<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> of July in order to re-write history as we know it. You will be in the driving seats for the creation of this alternate history, and though it is no easy task, I'm looking forward to innovative solutions to the monumental problems that the crisis at hand has brought with it.

This war cabinet is going to be a chess match. There's going to be strategies, tactics, anticipation, actions and consequences. You need to think on your feet, respond swiftly to threats and capitalise on opportunities, and as a collective, direct this committee into achieving its goals.

That being said, I have several expectations from you all. As delegates, you're all expected to be decent and polite at the very least. Yes it is a war cabinet, yes it can get very heated, but no one is allowed to disrespect any other member of committee in any way. For the purpose of awards, awards will be given not on the basis of how dominating you are, not on the basis of how much better you can drown out those around you, but they will be given out on the basis of how efficiently and effectively you can put forward your points. You will be marked on your manner- way of speaking, matter- content of your speeches, and method- structure of your speeches. Lastly, yes, facts are important and everything in committee will need to have a factual basis, but I urge you all to go beyond the statement of facts and into the logical analysis of them.

As the executive board, we'd further expect you to be able to answer several substantive questions, some of them regarding-

1. Effective mobilisation of more manpower and resources
2. Retention of existing manpower and resources
3. Methods to deal with the larger allies of our enemy
4. Expansion of ideology and countering conflicting ideologies
5. Mobilisation of our own allies

Further, in your directives, you're expected to elaborate on not only the "what" but also the "how". Directives which include aspects like a detailed plan of action, methods of financing etc.. will really help bring clarity to the executive board and the committee.

Lastly, this background guide is a mere, bare skeleton of what the Vietnam War really was. As delegates, you're recommended to go far beyond this guide in your attempts to develop a holistic perspective on the events that transpired, and the ideologies that backed them. The references used in the making the background guide have been listed below.

I hope to be part of a dynamic, engaging conference with you all.

Siddhartha Rai Tandon

Chairperson, Vietnam War Cabinet

**NOTE-** This background guide may contain facts and figures from beyond the freeze date. They are included only to give some perspective. Once the conference starts, these facts will be disregarded. Further, this background guide may contain views that are contrarian to our actual stance on certain issues. These have been included only for informative purposes.

## Introduction

The Vietnam War was a long, costly and divisive conflict that pitted the communist government of North Vietnam against South Vietnam and its principal ally, the United States. The conflict was intensified by the ongoing Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. Estimates of the number of Vietnamese soldiers and civilians killed vary from 800,000 to 3.1 million. Some 200,000--300,000 Cambodians, 20,000--200,000 Laotians, and 58,220 U.S. service members also died in the conflict.

Opposition to the war in the United States bitterly divided Americans, even after U.S. military involvement ended on 15 August 1973 as a result of the Case--Church Amendment passed by the U.S. Congress. The capture of Saigon by the Vietnam People's Army in April 1975 marked the end of the war, and North and South Vietnam were reunified the following year. The war exacted a huge human cost in terms of fatalities.

## VIETNAM WAR- TIMELINE

### VIETNAM BACKGROUND: UNEASY FRENCH RULE

- **1887:** France imposes a colonial system over Vietnam, calling it French Indochina. The system includes Tonkin, Annam, Cochin China and Cambodia. Laos is added in 1893.
- **1923-25:** Vietnamese nationalist Ho Chi Minh is trained in the Soviet Union as an agent of the Communist International (Comintern).
- **February 1930:** Ho Chi Minh founds the Indochinese Communist Party at a meeting in Hong Kong.
- **June 1940:** Nazi Germany takes control of France.
- **September 1940:** Japanese troops invade French Indochina and occupy Vietnam with little French resistance.

- **May 1941:** Ho Chi Minh and communist colleagues establish the League for the Independence of Vietnam. Known as the Viet Minh, the movement aims to resist French and Japanese occupation of Vietnam.
- **March 1945:** Japanese troops occupying Indochina carry out a coup against French authorities and announce an end to the colonial era, declaring Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia independent.
- **August 1945:** Japan is defeated by the Allies in World War II, leaving a power vacuum in Indochina. France begins to reassert its authority over Vietnam.
- **September 1945:** Ho Chi Minh declares an independent North Vietnam and models his declaration on the American Declaration of Independence of 1776 in an (unsuccessful) effort to win the support of the United States.

### **THE FIRST INDO-CHINA WAR**

- **July 1946:** Ho Chi Minh rejects a French proposal granting Vietnam limited self-government and the Viet Minh begin a guerrilla war against the French.
- **March 1947:** In an address to Congress, President Harry Truman states that the foreign policy of the United States is to assist any country whose stability is threatened by communism. The policy becomes known as the Truman Doctrine.
- **June 1949:** The French install former emperor Bao Dai as head of state in Vietnam.
- **August 1949:** The Soviet Union explodes its first atom bomb in a remote area of Kazakhstan, marking a tense turning point in the Cold War with the United States.
- **October 1949:** Following a civil war, Chinese Communist leader Mao Zedong declares the creation of the People's Republic of China.

- **January 1950:** The People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union formally recognize the communist Democratic Republic of Vietnam and both begin to supply economic and military aid to communist resistance fighters within the country.
- **February 1950:** Assisted by the Soviet Union and the newly Communist China, the Viet Minh step up their offensive against French outposts in Vietnam.
- **June 1950:** The United States, identifying the Viet Minh as a Communist threat, steps up military assistance to France for their operations against the Viet Minh.
- **March-May 1954:** French troops are humiliated in defeat by Viet Minh forces at Dien Bien Phu. The defeat solidifies the end of French rule in Indochina.
- **April 1954:** In a speech, U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower says the fall of French Indochina to communists could create a "domino" effect in Southeast Asia. This so-called domino theory guides U.S. thinking on Vietnam for the next decade.

### **THE GENEVA ACCORDS**

- **July 1954:** The Geneva Accords establish North and South Vietnam with the 17th parallel as the dividing line. The agreement also stipulates that elections are to be held within two years to unify Vietnam under a single democratic government. These elections never happen.
- **1955:** Catholic nationalist Ngo Dinh Diem emerges as the leader of South Vietnam, with U.S. backing, while Ho Chi Minh leads the communist state to the north.
- **May 1959:** North Vietnam forces begin to build a supply route through Laos and Cambodia to South Vietnam in an effort to support guerrilla attacks against Diem's government in the south. The route becomes known as the Ho Chi Minh Trail and is greatly expanded and enhanced during the Vietnam War.
- **July 1959:** The first U.S. soldiers are killed in South Vietnam when guerrillas raid their living quarters near Saigon.

- **September 1960:** Ho Chi Minh, facing failing health, is replaced by Le Duan as head of North Vietnam's ruling communist party.
- **December 1960:** The National Liberation Front (NLF) is formed with North Vietnamese backing as the political wing of the anti-government insurgency in South Vietnam. The United States views the NLF as an arm of North Vietnam and starts calling the military wing of the NLF the Viet Cong—short for Vietnam Cong-san, or Vietnamese communists.
- **May 1961:** President John F. Kennedy sends helicopters and 400 Green Berets to South Vietnam and authorizes secret operations against the Viet Cong.
- **January 1962:** In Operation Ranch Hand, U.S. aircraft start spraying Agent Orange and other herbicides over rural areas of South Vietnam to kill vegetation that would offer cover and food for guerrilla forces.
- **February 1962:** Ngo Dinh Diem survives a bombing of the presidential palace in South Vietnam as Diem's extreme favouritism toward South Vietnam's Catholic minority alienates him from most of the South Vietnamese population, including Vietnamese Buddhists.
- **January 1963:** At Ap Bac, a village in the Mekong Delta southwest of Saigon, South Vietnamese troops are defeated by a much smaller unit of Viet Cong fighters. The South Vietnamese are overcome despite their four-to-one advantage and the technical and planning assistance of U.S. advisers.
- **May 1963:** In a major incident of what becomes known as the "Buddhist Crisis," the government of Ngo Dinh Diem opens fire on a crowd of Buddhist protestors in the central Vietnam city of Hue. Eight people, including children, are killed.
- **June 1963:** A 73-year-old monk immolates himself while sitting at a major city intersection in protest, leading other Buddhists to follow suit in coming weeks. The United States' already declining confidence in Diem's leadership continues to slide.

- **November 1963:** The United States backs a South Vietnam military coup against the unpopular Diem, which ends in the brutal killing of Diem and his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu. Between 1963 and 1965, 12 different governments take the lead in South Vietnam as military coups replace one government after another.

- **November 1963:** President Kennedy is assassinated in Dallas, Texas. Lyndon B. Johnson becomes president.

### **AMERICA ENTERS THE VIETNAM WAR**

- **August 1964:** *USS Maddox* is allegedly attacked by North Vietnamese patrol torpedo boats in the Gulf of Tonkin (the attack is later disputed), leading President Johnson to call for air strikes on North Vietnamese patrol boat bases. Two U.S. aircraft are shot down and one U.S. pilot, Everett Alvarez, Jr., becomes the first U.S. airman to be taken prisoner by North Vietnam.

## **IDEOLOGY**

The Marxist–Leninist state is a one-party state wherein the communist party is the political vanguard who guides the proletariat and the working classes in establishing the social, economic and cultural foundations of a socialist state, a stage of historical development enroute to a communist society.

Economic aspects-

- emancipation of men and women from the dehumanisation caused by mechanistic work culture
- emancipation from (material necessity)
- planned economy to co-ordinate the means of production
- distribution of goods and services required throughout society

Social aspects-

- national welfare with universal healthcare, free public education



- development of the proletariat's education and their class consciousness
- reformation of family law eliminates patriarchy from the legal system
- eliminating the capitalist value system
- elimination of the societal atomisation

Ho Chi Minh Thought is an ideology that adapts Marxism–Leninism to the specific social, political and economic conditions of the Vietnamese people. It considers the peasantry to be the most popular force of the nationalist movement, which was the basis for the struggle for national liberation.

## **Cold war**

During World War II, the United States and the Soviet Union fought together as allies. However, the relationship between the two nations was tense. Americans had long been wary of Soviet communism and concerned about Russian leader Joseph Stalin's purportedly tyrannical, blood-thirsty rule of his own country. For their part, the Soviets resented the Americans' decades-long refusal to treat the USSR as a legitimate part of the international community as well as their delayed entry into World War II, which resulted in the deaths of tens of millions of Russians. After the war ended, these grievances ripened into an overwhelming sense of mutual distrust and enmity. Post-war Soviet expansionism in Eastern Europe fuelled many Americans' fears of a Russian plan to gain international control. Meanwhile, the USSR came to resent what they perceived as American officials' bellicose rhetoric, arms build-up and interventionist approach to international relations. In such a hostile atmosphere, no single party was entirely to blame for the Cold War; in fact, some historians believe it was inevitable.

In 1950, a National Security Council Report known as NSC–68 had echoed Truman's recommendation that the country use military force to "contain" communist expansionism anywhere it seemed to be occurring. There was growing fear of a domino effect; if one country turned to communism, the others in the region would be under threat too. In 1956 John Kennedy wrote in a book that he was convinced the South Vietnam was essential to the freedom of the entire region of South East Asia.

In other words, it was a clash of drastically different beliefs and ideology – capitalism versus communism – each held with almost religious conviction, which formed the basis of an international power struggle with both sides vying for dominance, exploiting every opportunity for expansion anywhere in the world.

The reason it was called the “Cold” war is because it was never directly fought between the two large superpowers. It was, in fact, fought in smaller proxy wars between other nations.

### **People’s Republic of China’s role**

People’s Republic of China (PRC) was the first country that recognized the Democratic republic of Vietnam (DRV) led by Ho Chi Minh back in January 1950. In the same year, they also sent weapons and military advisors to assist the Viet Minh in their war against the French. Prior to the recognition and support, the Chinese communists and Viet Minh had been co-operating in their respective struggles during 1946-49, up until the Chinese communists won the civil war in 1949.

In the 1954 Geneva Accords, following the Soviet Union, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai urged the Viet Minh to accept a temporary partition of Vietnam at the 17th parallel. China continued to provide military aid and support to North Vietnam years after the first Indochina war.

### **Soviet Union’s role**

In the aftermath of the World War II, the Soviet Union paid little attention to the communist movement (Viet Minh) in Vietnam who was largely outside Moscow’s sphere of influence. The situation changed dramatically when the Chinese communist won the civil in mainland china in October 1949 and fostered the communist movement further to Asia.

Although Moscow belatedly recognized Ho’s government in January 1950, they rejected his request to back North Vietnamese movement for independence against the French.

Instead, Joseph Stalin encouraged Mao Zedong to assist North Vietnam, which he did in the First Indochina War and through the rest of the 1950s.

The death of Stalin in March 1953 and the stabilization of events in Europe drew Moscow's attention back to Southeast Asia. Similar to Beijing, Moscow who feared U.S. direct intervention in Vietnam urged Ho Chi Minh to accept the temporary division of Vietnam of the 1954 Geneva Accords and focus on building the country's military and economy instead.

## **US Leadership**

President John F. Kennedy assumed office on January 20, 1961, following an eight-year career in the Senate. In his inaugural address, Kennedy proclaimed "Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, in order to assure the survival and the success of liberty." Kennedy came into the presidency determined to reenergize the foreign policy establishment.

In April 1961, a short few months into his administration, Kennedy authorized a clandestine invasion of Cuba by a brigade of Cuban exiles. The CIA covert operation had been formulated and approved under President Eisenhower. Relying on faulty intelligence, the operation collapsed in two days with the defeat and capture of anti-Castro forces at the Bay of Pigs. The spectacular failure of this Cold War confrontation was a setback for Kennedy, and one he became determined to overcome. Though he took full responsibility for the failed operation, the CIA's reputation was tarnished and Kennedy soon replaced DCI Allen W. Dulles with John A. McCone. Similarly, the Bay of Pigs fiasco affected Kennedy's respect for the advice of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, placing a strain on the civil-military relationship that would remain under stress throughout the administration. McNamara's management reforms in the Pentagon, the administration's focus on counterinsurgency warfare, and finally the policy toward the war in Vietnam all found the uniformed military leadership in disagreement with the administration.

Tensions with the Soviet Union dominated U.S. foreign policy. Kennedy first met formally with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev in June 1961 at the Vienna Summit to discuss Berlin, Laos, and disarmament. Ailing and unprepared, Kennedy came across as an inexperienced adversary to his Russian counterpart. The two continued a series of both formal and public exchanges as well as more informal and very confidential exchanges—the “pen pal” correspondence. The channel was intended to give the two men a chance to informally exchange ideas under the heightened pressure of the Cold War. Still, the construction of the Berlin Wall in late 1961 and the military standoff between U.S. and Soviet troops there kept both nations on high alert.

The Cold War reached a frightening apex when in late 1962 the Soviet Union gave the Cuban Government medium-range ballistic missiles to defend against another U.S. invasion. American intelligence photographed Cuban missile sites, leading to a naval blockade and quarantine of Cuba. The tense thirteen days of the Cuban Missile Crisis tested the mettle of the Kennedy administration and his team of trusted advisers. Khrushchev agreed to remove the missiles, averting nuclear war, but resolving little between the two nations.

Kennedy avoided war in Laos, rejecting a military proposal to send American troops to fend off a communist insurgency there. However, he authorized sending troops and military advisers to the U.S.-backed nation of South Vietnam and steadily increased their numbers throughout his presidency. The administration was determined not to lose either the nation of South Vietnam or the broader region of Southeast Asia to communism, cementing its military commitment to Vietnam.

Kennedy’s assassination in November 1963 brought his Vice President, Lyndon B. Johnson to the presidency. Dean Rusk continued to serve as Secretary of State and stressed to the new President the necessity of continuity in foreign policy. President Johnson vowed to the nation that it would keep its commitments “from South Vietnam to West Berlin.” Johnson retained Kennedy’s close group of advisers and the National Security Council under Bundy continued to prove vital to foreign policy decision-making. Walt Rostow replaced Bundy as National Security Advisor in 1966.

President Johnson continued the U.S. military commitment to South Vietnam.

## **Some key aspects/events-**

### **Geneva Accords**

The Geneva Accords of 1954 created the independent states of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam) and the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam). The Geneva Conference was convened to discuss both the lingering issues of the Korean War and the Indochina issue, but the legacy of the conference was the agreement produced regarding Vietnam. With a goal of ending the war between France and the Viet Minh, the conference began discussions of Indochina on May 8, 1954, the day after the French defeat at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu. Representatives from the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, China, France, Cambodia, Laos, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), and the State of Vietnam (a small southern polity under former emperor Bao Dai, which received Western backing) all took part in the conference. On July 20, 1954, France signed a cease-fire agreement with the DRV, Laos, and Cambodia which granted independence to all three while partitioning Vietnam at the seventeenth parallel between the southern State of Vietnam (soon transformed into the Republic of Vietnam) and the northern Democratic Republic of Vietnam. For 300 days, the peoples of both nations were granted unrestricted movement to adjust to the new political situation. Hundreds of thousands migrated during this time, particularly Catholics wary of the communist North. The Geneva Accords also called for a 1956 general election across Vietnam as part of a peaceful reunification plan. The general election was never held.

### **Ho Chi Minh Trail**

The Ho Chi Minh Trail was the principal supply route by which the Democratic Republic of Vietnam funnelled supplies and troops south into the Republic of Vietnam. The path was not one singular road, but rather a series of roads, bridges, trails, and depots that formed a network into the South. Continual construction was carried out with Soviet and Chinese support, turning the initially rough trail into a veritable gateway to the south, albeit a well-concealed one. The trail snaked through Laos and Cambodia, entering South Vietnam primarily in the Central Highlands. Movement along the route was conducted primarily at night, and trucks stopped in camouflaged posts along the way to avoid American bombing.

## **The Gulf of Tonkin Incident\***

The Gulf of Tonkin Incident occurred in August 1964. North Vietnamese warships purportedly attacked United States warships, the U.S.S. Maddox and the U.S.S. C. Turner Joy, on two separate occasions in the Gulf of Tonkin, a body of water neighboring modern-day Vietnam. President Lyndon Baines Johnson claimed that the United States did nothing to provoke these two attacks and that North Vietnam was the aggressor. Subsequent reports show that the United States actually provoked these attacks by supporting South Vietnamese commandos operating in North Vietnam and by using U.S. warships to identify North Vietnamese radar stations along the coastline of North Vietnam. There remains no doubt that the North Vietnamese attacked the U.S.S. Maddox in the first incident, which occurred on August 2, 1964, although it does appear that the United States provoked this attack.

The second attack, which took place on August 4, 1964, continues to be the subject of debate. There are witnesses who say the attack took place, and those who said it did not. Because it took place during the night, the details are uncertain. Operational commanders on the two ships in the Gulf of Tonkin that night were convinced an attack did take place. Eyewitness evidence from highly trained, experienced sailors, marines, and commanders reveals radar detection of torpedo boats, searchlights from a North Vietnamese boat, thick black smoke from the target, and lights from boats moving at high speeds. A detailed investigation and testimony to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations included a ranking North Vietnamese commander who reported he participated in the attack and stated that it did take place. However, the National Security Agency (NSA) chose to declassify more than 140 top-secret documents and oral history interviews and concluded that there was no second attack on U.S. ships in Tonkin by the North Vietnamese torpedo boats. This was based on historian Robert Hanyok's research and analysis citing no concrete signal intelligence evidence of an attack. There was no naval command-and-control communications or target-radar emissions as there had been in the August 2nd attack. He said there was only confused and conflicting testimony of the men on board and the

equipment involved in the incident. Over the years, interviews have taken place to clarify the events related to the incidents.

\*We believe that the military action carried out by the United States was largely unprovoked.

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