

Committee: Joint Crisis
Topic: Joint Warfare in South Vietnam



Theme of Conference:

Last year, at Austin High’s inaugural conference, we challenged delegates to “compromise and collaborate” in order to come to equitable solutions. While our topics were of great nuance, they offered little complexity when it came to negotiation itself. The current roster of topics is thematically centered around the overcoming of this simplicity, including topics of debate that require successful delegates to not only understand relevant content and their national perspective but that they apply heightened diplomatic skills. A simple compromise that allows two sides of a debate to meet in the middle becomes problematic with topics like euthanasia or intellectual property theft. Creativity, as well as a willingness to negotiate from new angles, will be required if acceptable, or novel, solutions are to be found.

As delegates, we believe you will find, both through the deliberate encouragement of the chairs and execution of our background guides, that our topics this year will elevate debate beyond simple compromise.

I. Rationale

The conflict in Southeast Asia spanning from November of 1955 to April of 1975 has always defied definition. Estimates state fewer than half of American combatants stand today, the same is likely true for their Vietnamese counterparts. Each veteran that passes is a loss for our first-hand memory, and with this in mind, its definition may seem impossible. Not as former participants, but as historians, the momentous task of remembrance falls on a new generation.

A grand total of 72 nations and two revolutionary groups made up what escalated from a small insurgency to one of the largest armed conflicts of recorded history, as well as the longest war the United States has ever been involved in with a final duration of over 17 years. The War itself officially ended on April 30th, 1975, with the capture of Saigon upon the joint invasion by the North Vietnamese Army and the Viet Cong, almost two years after the United States ended its direct involvement. The final death toll by the end of the almost twenty-year-long fight

reached well over a million, half of which were civilians, with many times more people injured or displaced (Rosen). A civil war for independence, a Cold War proxy, and an anti-colonial insurgency all at once, the conflict in Vietnam through the sheer number of interests rapidly grew into a campaign of total war. One of the biggest elements of the War was the ideological battle that waged between the Capitalist Democracy system of the West, which was championed by the United States, and the One-Party Communist ideology that was in place in the USSR as well as the People's Republic of China. The roughly 45 years over which this Cold War took place were undoubtedly the closest humanity has come to total self-destruction yet, with tensions peaking during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis.

In the midst of these rising tensions and the fear of Communist ideology spreading through Southern Asia like wildfire, the United States (under Lyndon B. Johnson) would begin its Joint-Warfare policy with the Southern Vietnamese less than two years later. The United States, the USSR, and China, the second communist power, were all preparing for the possible war for regional dominance. By 1965, the standoff was between three powers due to the Sino-Soviet split; Maoist China, the USSR, and the Eastern Bloc were all vying against one another for control of Vietnam.

II. Background of the Topic

To understand the Vietnam War, one has to look back to decades prior, a possible starting point being the First Indochina War waged between France and the Việt Minh, a communist Vietnamese independence movement led by Ho Chi Minh. This conflict began on September 2nd, 1945 with the reading of the Declaration of Independence of Vietnam by Ho Chi Minh, spurring French martial action which arrived at the nation in early 1946. By January of 1950, the USSR, US, and PRC had all made statements of diplomatic recognition making clear the separate factions they supported within the conflict; the Việt Minh government was backed by the USSR and PRC, while the opposing Bao Dai government received American and French backing. Four months later, the USSR and China backed the North Korean invasion across the 38th parallel into Western-backed South Korea. The Cold War was heating up.

Four years later, with the French public growing angry and the Việt Minh making huge advances -particularly in a decisive victory at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu- the First Indochina

War had all but ended. Finally, in July of the same year, the multinational Geneva Conference was held with the aim of settling residual issues from both the First Indochina War as well as the Korean War. Establishing the 17th parallel as the DMZ border between North and South Vietnam and the removal of French forces in the issued 1954 provisions the conference was seen as a great success by France, a sentiment shared by few fellow nations. Two of the nine representatives in attendance refused to accept the final 1954 accords, these being the US and the southern State of Vietnam, with both parties insistent on a series of UN-monitored free elections to unify North and South Vietnam. This was a want shared by all nations attending, but one they would be unable to agree upon until 1956, when a final conference declaration was issued. Even though their wants had been met, the US and the State of Vietnam did not accept the declaration with the Western members of the conference having lost a common goal at this point. Shortly after the initial 1954 accords, Ngô Đình Diệm was appointed Prime Minister of the State of Vietnam. Less than a year later, in a fraudulent referendum, Diệm deposed the former head of state, declaring himself President of the newly formed Republic of Vietnam.

The United States was quick to back Diệm who was a vocal anti-communist with political connections to US political figures. In compliance with the Geneva Conference, the Việt Minh were to leave the southern Republic of Vietnam to return to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. However, these orders were not truly carried out, with a large number of Việt Minh remaining in the south. Soon after, the reunification elections previously described failed to materialize due to lack of any actual structure agreed upon as well as Diệm's refusal to take part. Instead, Diệm launched his 1955 "Denounce the Communists" campaign aiming to eliminate communist remnants and opposition (Alpha). This campaign killed or imprisoned an estimated 12,000 people from 1955 to 1957 and by 1959, that number rose above 40,000. The combination of repressive campaigns, which were at times harmful programs, and Diệm's outspoken support for Catholicism in opposition to the Buddhist majority resulted in the inception of many insurgent groups. These dissidents were backed by Northern Vietnamese support and soon allied themselves with the remaining Việt Minh troops. In 1959, with the end of the "Denounce the Communists" campaign, Diệm issued Law 10/59, enabling death sentences for any found guilty of political violence. When in effect, the law put any and all of those opposed to the Diệm

administration in danger of prosecution. Two years prior in 1957, Diêm visited the United States where in addition to massive praise, he received a pledge of continued American support from President Eisenhower. While these events took place, the Kingdom of Laos had been fighting up until this point- a disorganized and divided group of communist guerrillas in the Laotian Civil War. Then in 1957, the Pathet Lao emerged as an actual political force under Souphanouvong, this newly organized communist movement received USSR and Chinese backing but was also given military assistance from the northern Democratic Republic of Vietnam. This northern assistance came by a northern invasion as well as the beginning of the Ho Chi Minh Trail, a system of transport and logistics that would prove invaluable in South-Eastern Asia for the next two decades.

The United States then welcomed a new President, John F. Kennedy, winner of the 1960 election. Kennedy made his position on Vietnam, as well as communist uprisings as a whole, in his Inaugural address where he stated his promise to "pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, in order to assure the survival and success of liberty" (NARA). Kennedy was a proponent of the "Domino Theory" since his days as a US Senator, in 1956 stating "Burma, Thailand, India, Japan, the Philippines and obviously Laos and Cambodia are among those whose security would be threatened if the Red Tide of Communism overflowed into Vietnam" (NARA). The same year, 1960, was when the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam was formed. Commonly called the Viet Cong, it was comprised of the remaining northern soldiers as well as the numerous dissidents and insurgency groups in the southern Vietnamese countryside. The staunch anti-communist sentiments of the Kennedy Administration were further solidified after a 1961 summit in Vienna, where he and the USSR Premier, Khrushchev, met to discuss the pressing matters of Berlin, Laos, and the Bay of Pigs Invasion. This meeting only deepened the Soviet and American rift and yielded no productive result. Several months before this meeting, the USSR announced its promise to support all "Wars of National Liberation" serving a clear statement to the West regarding the Soviet dedication conflicts such as the one brewing in Vietnam (Marlantes). At this point, the United States has only 900 troops stationed in South Vietnam. October of the same year, newly appointed Defense Secretary, Robert McNamara, wasted no time in pushing for escalation, suggesting the

deployment of 200,000 US troops to respond to the growing threat posed by the Viet Cong. In Laos, the Pathet Lao and the Laotian government reached a cease-fire, viewed as a failure by US officials and obviously only a temporary delay. While in South Vietnam, Diệm won his re-election campaign by a vast margin due to in no small part the previously passed Law 10/59. Surviving and defeating an attempted coup, Diệm's authoritarian policies only became more severe. In a series of moves enraging US politicians, Diệm killed 77,500 and imprisoned 270,000 by the end of 1961.

The years of 1962 and 1963 are characterized best by rapid escalation on either side of the war, with the United States becoming deeply involved and setting up the path for a massive military campaign and the communist bloc focused on expansion in Southeast Asia, and the USSR and China embroiling themselves in fierce competition to determine which of the two will dominate in Southeast Asia. January of 1962 started with the beginning of the American Operation Ranch Hand soon followed by the American-Southern Vietnamese Strategic Hamlet Program. The Program was Diệm's and the United States' effort to combat the growing communist dissidence in the countryside as well as limiting and reversing the influence that had previously been widespread in the Southern Vietnamese countryside. The American Department of Defense estimates the Viet Cong to number over 20,000 individuals, 5 times the amount estimated the year prior. 1962 finishes with Ho Chi Minh visiting the People's Republic of China, where he warns of American aggression and possible danger for China if the US is able to expand its influence further into Southeast Asia. While earlier that year China had called for peace talks to be held and an end to the conflict, in reaction to Ho Chi Minh's visit, China offers to equip more than 100,000 troops of the North Vietnamese Army with Chinese equipment, weapons and gear far beyond what had been accessible previously.

1963 was the worst year for political stability in South Vietnam experienced so far, with the two defining events being Diem's overthrow and the overwhelming success of the Viet Cong. January 2nd was the Battle of Ap Bac in South Vietnam, with the Viet Cong winning a considerable victory against joint South Vietnamese and American forces. China later states its support of North Vietnam and a promise to respond with troops if the United States attacks. While these events unfold, Diem's situation grows worse. From May to November of 1963

Diem's regime repressed and killed protesting monks of the majority Buddhist religion, now called the Buddhist Crisis and widely regarded as the last straw for the United States regarding Diem's regime (Alpha). June 11th of the same year, a monk burns himself alive in a crowded public intersection. Captured by an American journalist, this image would be seen worldwide. President Kennedy later states in July that the US will not withdraw from South Vietnam, citing the Domino Theory and its guarantee if the US left South Vietnam. While the Viet Cong continues making advances and having clear victories, Diem declares martial law and raids Buddhist temples nationwide, possibly killing hundreds and arresting thousands. The United States, in outrage, begins serious consideration for regime change, and in less than 3 months Diem is arrested and shot; The Strategic Hamlet Program has proved itself unsuccessful and has ended. The 22nd of November, 1963 at 12:30 PM Central Time, President Kennedy is assassinated and later that day on Air Force One, Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson is sworn in as president of the United States. By the year's end, there were 16,000 US troops in Vietnam and over 40,000 North Vietnamese operatives had infiltrated the South.

1964 was President Johnson's first full year as US President, the Pathet Lao and the Khmer Rouge both become much bolder and aggressive in this year, and South Vietnam begins the year reeling from Diem's assassination and the political turmoil that followed. The Communist Party of Vietnam adopts Resolution 9 on January 20th, a secret resolution declaring total war on South Vietnam in the aim to be the victor before the United States can deploy a substantial presence of troops. This reflected a shift in the Northern Vietnamese political scene, with a drastic militant shift in goals and leadership. A Southern Vietnamese military junta is overthrown in a bloodless coup led by Nguyen Khanh, a Southern Vietnamese military figure. Mid-March a memo from Macnamara is sent to Johnson, stating that up to 40% of South Vietnam is under communist control and that the new government is ineffective. Also convincing President Johnson to provide finance for 50,000 more men in the South Vietnamese Army as well as preparing the American Air Force to be ready to launch a bombing campaign in Southeast Asia, both measures are approved by Johnson. The North Vietnamese combined military force is estimated at almost half a million men, not including reserve militias and the huge Viet Cong force. Australia increases its presence in Vietnam as well, sending additional

military advisors to South Vietnam and Westmoreland is appointed General of the American-South Vietnamese combined forces. August 2nd of the same year saw one of the most crucial moments in the history of the conflict, when the USS Maddox allegedly received fire from the North Vietnamese Navy and Johnson orders airstrikes in retaliation, a move receiving almost unanimous congressional support. China mobilizes military units to its border with North Vietnam in response as well as supplying multiple fighter jets and impromptu bases for the North Vietnamese. The US Congress soon passes The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, passing the senate 98-2, effectively giving President Johnson approval to use all forms of conventional warfare in Southeast Asia without the approval of Congress in order to assist all members of SEATO, the Western collective defense in Southeast Asia. China soon has its first successful nuclear weapons test, the UN proposes negotiations that are ignored and Johnson is re-elected President of the US. South Vietnam, now governed by a High Military Council, declares Nguyễn Cao Kỳ and Nguyễn Văn Thiệu Prime Minister and President of South Vietnam respectively. Late in the year, North Vietnam deploys 3 full troop regiments to assist the Viet Cong in South Vietnam, the first official Northern Vietnamese military deployment. President Johnson declares, "I myself am ready to substantially increase the number of Americans fighting in Vietnam."

III. Crisis Situation

On July 29th, 1965, the conflict in Vietnam escalated far beyond all involved parties' original expectations. The most involved foreign parties, operating with varying regional influence, are as follows: the United States, led by President Lyndon B. Johnson, the People's Republic of China under the purview of Chairman Mao Zedong, and the USSR headed by Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev. South Vietnam has seemingly achieved a stability that will prove to be lasting with President Nguyễn Văn Thiệu and Prime Minister Nguyễn Cao Kỳ leading the nation. Once bitter rivals, the two are at this point successfully cooperating. Ho Chi Minh remains the Leader of the North Vietnamese and previously-cut Soviet support has returned, reinvigorated to challenge the Chinese dominance in the region, with either side equipping the 300,000-500,000 North Vietnamese troops with either nation's top weaponry.

The Soviet-Sino split renders tensions between the two powerhouses at a new high, with outrage on the Soviet side regarding the disputes over the USSR-Chinese border. With both

nations openly denouncing one another and the PRC preparing for its internal Cultural Revolution, the border between these two nations could become another massive conflict with one wrong move. Meanwhile, Laos is swamped in an ongoing civil war with the Pathet Lao after the ending of their earlier armistice; the USSR, North Vietnam, South Vietnam, PRC, and the US are all heavily involved, backing either side. North Korea, though still undergoing recovery from the Korean War, is finalizing the establishment of its bureaucracy. Although a supporter of North Vietnam, the country has yet to make any actions thus far. Cambodia prepares itself for inevitable conflict as Pol Pot leads the Khmer Rouge through the gathering of forces in the Cambodian jungle, receiving massive support from the USSR and China. The Viet Cong in South Vietnam has had a series of successes in a military campaign against the previously dysfunctional South Vietnamese government.

The Western bloc seems to finally be a serious force in Southeast Asia, with US President Johnson raising the number of troops in Vietnam to 125,000 and the draft to 35,000 monthly. Operation Ranch Hand, the American campaign of destroying North Vietnamese foliage, is in full effect as the United States and South Vietnam reach a little over a year into their joint-warfare commitment and the South Vietnamese military force rises over 500,000 troops. Kittikachorn has ascended into office as Prime Minister to become the military dictator of Thailand and has pledged his military support to the Southern Vietnamese effort as well as his dedication to eradicating communism. Australia's Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, has promised to upgrade the military commitment of Australia in South Vietnam, stating a communist victory there is a sure threat to Australia itself. Park Chung-hee of South Korea, who had been trying to send troops to Vietnam since 1954 has had his first deployment of 20,000 combat troops make land in South Vietnam. Chung-hee has also stated his intention to deploy tens of thousands more monthly. The final aspect of the global stage at this moment is the United Nations, while even with the Secretary-General repeatedly calling for peace, the conflict escalates further and the UN seems to have accepted they can't stop what is in effect.

IV. Involved Blocs and Delegates

The Vietnam War was composed of two main ideological blocs. In the most direct sense, this war is one of proxies, the hallmark of warfare throughout Cold War's various global conflicts.

The communist bloc was composed of a total of 29 nations and 2 major revolutionary groups, the largest coalition of communist allies in a proxy war ever witnessed. Four nations were the main military forces involved, more specifically: North Vietnam, The People's Republic of China, the USSR, and North Korea. In addition to these four nations were three groups who were other essential forces to the communist bloc these groups being the Viet Cong, the Khmer Rouge, and the Pathet Lao. The representatives of each of these groups and their associated group are as follows: Ho Chi Minh and North Vietnam, Hoàng Văn Thái and North Vietnam, Võ Nguyên Giáp and North Vietnam, Văn Tiến Dũng and North Vietnam, Kim Il-sung and North Korea, Mao Zedong and China, Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev and the USSR, Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge, Trần Văn Trà and the Viet Cong and finally Souphanouvong and the Pathet Lao. The communist bloc differs from their opposition in the fact that their global leader is not agreed. With the USSR and China both proving themselves as global powerhouses vying for the ability to prove themselves as the leader of communism globally. This competition resulted in the Soviet-Sino Split, starting in 1956 this was a bitter end to positive political relations. The previously mentioned Khmer Rouge and Pathet Lao are the communist revolutionary parties of Cambodia and Laos respectively. Both nations bordering the combined North and South Vietnamese region and led by Western-backed monarchies, these countries would be crucial to the war effort on either side as well as limiting or expanding the communist influence depending on which side's view is considered. The Viet Cong, sometimes referred to as the National Liberation Front, was a pro-communist organization with guerilla, paramilitary, and regular army forces. The Viet Cong or NLF were based in South Vietnam as well as Cambodia. Generally regarded as an offshoot of the North Vietnamese Army, this group would prove invaluable to the communist nations and their war effort.

The second bloc involved was the anti-communist bloc Even larger than the communist bloc, it consisted of 43 total nations, championed by the United States of America. The five main

nations involved in the Vietnam War were the USA, South Vietnam, Thailand, Australia, and South Korea, all united by the common goal of limiting communism's spread and working towards its defeat. Thai volunteers, Australian ground troops, and South Korean soldiers all participated in the Vietnam War, with South Korea offering its military support in the mid-1950s. The representatives of each of these groups and their associated group is as follows: Lyndon B. Johnson and the United States, William Westmoreland and the United States, Robert McNamara and the United States, William W. Momyer and the United States, Nguyễn Văn Thiệu and South Vietnam, Nguyễn Cao Kỳ and South Vietnam, Cao Văn Viên and South Vietnam, Park Chung-hee and South Korea, Thanom Kittikachorn and Thailand and finally, Robert Menzies and Australia.

The Western anti-communist bloc was unified under a clear leader, the United States, which is why the anti-communist bloc largely followed US policy. Ideologically, this entailed the Domino Theory and the Containment Policy. The former, coined by US President Dwight D. Eisenhower as “considerations that might follow what you would call the ‘falling domino’ principle. 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. So you could have a beginning of a disintegration that would have the most profound influences.” As an analogy for the spread of communism in Southeast Asia, this theory justifies immediate action even in the face of great cost. This theory fits the larger policy of Containment, originating from US President Harry S. Truman in the late 1940s; It was the driving force for all American and Western efforts to limit communism and fight communist uprisings globally.

Communist Bloc

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V. Note to the Delegates

Feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns. Contact me at my email at denkojackson@gmail.com

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