

UNITED NATIONS  NATIONS UNIES

Ch. 2 – US Foreign Policy, 1945-72

Learning Intentions

In this section, you should understand:

- US foreign policy in relation to Berlin, Korea, Cuba and Vietnam.
- Truman's role in US foreign policy.
- Case Study: Lyndon Johnson and Vietnam, 1963–8.

Introduction

The American political landscape underwent dramatic changes from the era of Franklin D. Roosevelt through to Ronald Reagan. From 1945 to 1989, these years witnessed seismic shifts in the U.S. political system, government policies, and global outreach. To comprehend this evolution, one must have a foundational understanding of the American Constitution and the principles of 'separation of powers' and 'checks and balances' that underpin the governance system in the United States. It is against this backdrop that the power dynamics of the Presidency itself have evolved, impacting domestic and foreign affairs profoundly.

US Foreign Policy and the COLD WAR

Truman Takes Over - Using the Atomic Bomb

When Truman took over as President after the death of Roosevelt in April 1945, the Second World War was still in progress. One month later, war concluded in **Europe** (May 1945) but the war against **Japan** continued until August 1945.

In July 1945, Truman met **Stalin** face to face for the first and only time. This was at **Potsdam** in Germany, where little was agreed. Truman could not afford to be seen to be weak when dealing with Stalin, particularly as some thought too much had been given away by **Roosevelt** at the **Yalta Conference** (February 1945). At Potsdam, Truman issued a warning to Japan to surrender unconditionally or face *'prompt and utter destruction'*.

When Japan refused to surrender, Truman decided to bomb **Hiroshima** on 6 August, followed three days later by the bombing of **Nagasaki**. About 130,000 people were killed, mostly civilians, and as many again died over the next five years from the effects of radiation. Japan surrendered on 15 August, six days after the bombing of Nagasaki.

Why did Truman decide to drop the Atomic Bomb?

There were many **reasons** for Truman's decision to drop the atomic bomb. As commander-in-chief of the armed forces, he felt it was his duty to put **an end to the fighting**. He believed that this was the only way to stop the fighting as soon as possible. Otherwise it would involve a **land invasion** of Japan, which would result in the loss of hundreds of thousands or even millions of American and Japanese lives. Truman saw how the Japanese had fiercely defended the Pacific islands; they also used **kamikaze pilots** and some regarded them as *'savages, ruthless, merciless and fanatic'*.

Truman's decision to use the atomic bomb had huge effects on US foreign policy. Now nuclear weapons could wipe out all people, especially after the USSR developed its own bomb in 1949. The US-USSR competition in the Cold War led to an **arms race** with wide political and economic effects. This was supported by a **policy of deterrence** - to maintain a strong nuclear force so that the Soviet Union would be deterred from attacking the US.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why did Truman decide to drop the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki?
2. What effect did this decision have on US foreign policy?

U S Foreign Policy and the Soviet Union:
TRUMAN DOCTRINE AND MARSHALL PLAN

How did US Foreign Policy develop under Truman?

When Truman took office, he had very little knowledge or experience of foreign affairs. However, he had **definite views** - he disliked dictatorships and countries which behaved aggressively toward other countries. These views led to his mistrust of the Soviet political system.

Because of his inexperience, Truman relied on his **senior officials** for advice:

- By 1946 they believed that the Soviet Union could **not be trusted**.
- Instead of acting defensively, the Soviet Union was acting **aggressively**.
- The Soviet Union should be faced with **firmness** so that war would not break out again.
- The US should **not appease** Russia like Hitler had been appeased before the Second World War. In Truman's view, *'Unless Russia is faced with an iron fist and strong language another war is in the making ... I'm tired of babying the Soviets.'*

Stalin's actions seemed to confirm these conclusions. Stalin imposed a **Soviet-controlled puppet government** in Poland, as well as **Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria** who were loyal to the Soviets. These countries became known as the '**satellite states**' as they were under the control of Moscow. In a major speech **Stalin** said that *'monopoly capitalism caused the Second World War'* and that it should be replaced by Communism to avoid future wars. Soon senior officials give afterwards, **spies** were arrested in Canada for trying to steal atomic secrets for the Soviet Union. These events confirmed to Washington officials that *'The ultimate aim of the Soviet foreign policy is Russian domination of a Communist world.'*



Diagram taken from *Artefact*, 2nd Edition by [Eimear Jenkinson](#) and [Gregg O'Neill](#) (educate.ie)



Kennan's Long Telegram and the Policy of Containment

Crucial to the development of US foreign policy at this time was **George Kennan's Long Telegram** (February 1946). Kennan was based in the US embassy in Moscow and was one of the few well-trained experts in Russian history and language. In Kennan's view, the Russians were using Communism as a cover for military growth, oppression at home and expansion abroad. He concluded that the only way to deal with Soviet Communism was to **contain it** – *'firm, vigilant containment'*.

This secret memo was reinforced a few weeks later by **Winston Churchill's** speech in Missouri (March 1946), where he referred to the **Iron Curtain** descending across the continent of Europe and called for firmness against the Soviet Union. *'From what I have seen of our Russian friends and allies during the war, I am convinced that there is nothing they admire so much as strength, and there is nothing for which they have less respect than weakness, especially military weakness.'*

These ideas shaped the new **policy of containment** developed under Truman - that the US should contain Communism where it existed and not allow it expand any further.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why did Truman mistrust the Soviet political system?
2. What advice on foreign policy did senior officials give Truman?
3. How did events in Europe and Asia seem to confirm this?
4. What was the message of Kennan's Long Telegram?
5. What did Churchill mean by the 'iron curtain'?

Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan

Truman was influenced by these arguments. Over the next year he took a progressively firmer stand against the Soviet Union. In 1947 he passed the **National Security Act** which unified the armed forces under the Secretary of Defence. This Act also set up the **CIA** (Central Intelligence Agency) and the **National Security Council** (NSC) to advise the President on foreign policy.

However, it was Britain's failure to continue helping Greece and Turkey which led to the full development of US foreign policy. America believed that the downfall of **Greece** and **Turkey** would lead to the spread of Communism all along the Mediterranean and into Iran, which provided much of Western oil. Truman played up the Communist threat to ensure congressional support for \$400 million of military aid to Greece and Turkey. In his speech to Congress, he said, *'I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free people who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.'* This became known as the **Truman Doctrine**.

Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan

The Truman Doctrine was complemented by the **Marshall Plan** (European Recovery Program) to give economic aid to Western Europe. Truman said they were *'two halves of the same walnut'*. Marshall, the Secretary of State, said in his speech at Harvard University announcing the Plan, *'Our policy is directed not against any country or doctrine, but against hunger, poverty, desperation, and chaos.'* Truman and Marshall hoped that Marshall Aid would rebuild the European economy and strengthen Western Europe to stand up to Communism. It would also help Europe to import American goods.

Its passage through Congress was eased when Stalin refused to accept any economic aid for Russia and when he forced Eastern European countries to refuse it also. Stalin felt the Plan was part of a US plot to encircle the USSR and undermine Communism.

Effects of Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan

The effect of the Plan was to speed up the economic recovery of Europe after the war. It showed that the US was not going back to **isolationism**, as it did after the First World War. Instead it was still committed to Europe. **Internationalism** - the belief that America should become involved in treaties and commitments with other countries - was now stronger in the country. The success of the Marshall Plan encouraged the US government to believe that they could undertake further schemes thinking that American strength would carry them through. The **Second World War** had changed American foreign policy for the future. After the war, the US favoured intervention. **As one political leader said, 'Pearl Harbor drove us to the conclusion that peace was indivisible.'** This is why many people supported **internationalism** after the war. Now people wanted the US to lead the democratic and capitalist world.

Both the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan highlighted **tension** between the US and the USSR. By 1948, the **Cold War** was fully established. For the next 40 years all US policies revolved around the enmity between the US and the USSR. This influenced the arms race, patrolling by US fleets, round-the-clock flights by Strategic Air Command, the growth of the military in US life and the build-up of the defence industry.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What was the Truman Doctrine?
2. What was the Marshall Plan?
3. What was Stalin's attitude to the Marshall plan and how did that help Truman?
4. What was the difference between isolationism and internationalism?
5. How did the Second World War affect post-war US foreign policy?

US Foreign Policy AND BERLIN

Post-War Germany

Very soon Truman was faced with a new challenge. In June 1948, Stalin began the **blockade** of West Berlin. He responded to American policy in Germany. The wartime allies had agreed to divide Germany into **four zones** and Russia was allowed take **reparations** from the country. But soon the US gave Marshall Aid to rebuild their own zone.

The US and its allies, especially Britain, now believed that the economic recovery of Germany was necessary for the economic recovery of Europe. It was also necessary to build up Germany as a barrier to the expansion of Communism. On the other hand, Stalin feared that a prosperous West Germany would undermine Communism in Eastern Germany.

Tensions came to a head when the Western allies united their zones under a new currency, the **Deutschmark**, to revive the German economy. The Soviets refused to allow the currency in their own sectors. Their retaliation came on 24th June 1948 by cutting off all road, rail and canal links to West Berlin. This became known as the **Berlin Blockade**. This was the first major confrontation of the Cold War.

EXTRACTS FROM TRUMAN'S SPEECH TO CONGRESS ANNOUNCING THE TRUMAN DOCTRINE

The foreign policy and the national security of this country are involved. The United States has received from the Greek Government an urgent appeal for financial and economic assistance. The very existence of the Greek state is today threatened by the terrorist activities of several thousand armed men, led by Communists, who defy the government's authority at a number of points...

The United States must supply that assistance.

The peoples of a number of countries of the world have recently had totalitarian regimes forced upon them against their will. At the present moment in world history nearly every nation must choose between alternative ways of life. The choice too often is not a free one. One way of life is based upon the will of the majority, and is distinguished by free institutions, representative government, free elections, guarantees of individual liberty, freedom of speech and religion, and freedom from political oppression.

The second way of life is based upon the will of a minority forcibly imposed upon the majority. It relies upon terror and oppression, a controlled press and radio, fixed elections, and the suppression of personal freedoms. I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free people who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.

'We are going to stay, period.'

Stalin was hoping to force the US out of West Berlin. But Truman did not want to abandon Berlin. It would mean a huge victory for Communism. It would also undermine the **policy of containment**. He was encouraged by his advisers to hold firm. The American commander in Berlin wrote, *'When Berlin falls, Western Germany will be next. If we mean to hold Europe against Communism, we must not budge.'* Truman agreed. He said, *'We are going to stay, period.'*

The West was determined not to give into the Soviets and found a solution through air drops. They were gambling that Stalin would not risk all-out war by shooting down a supplies airplane. Codenamed **Operation Vittles**, the **Berlin Airlift** was a huge operation, with cargo planes bearing food, clothing, medical supplies and fuel for over 2.5 million people flying to and from three airports in West Berlin. The blockade lasted 323 days; Stalin lifted the blockade when he realised that the Allies would not leave.

The Consequences of the Berlin Blockade and Airlift

The Soviets were prepared to increase pressure on the West but not all-out war.

- The division of Germany became permanent during the Cold War era. The three western zones became the **Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany)** – democratic and capitalist country. The Soviet zone became the **German Democratic Republic (East Germany)** – communist country within the Iron Curtain. In 1961, the **Berlin Wall** was built to permanently divide the city. It came to symbolise the Cold War.
- The USA, Canada and ten other Western European States set up a military alliance, the **North Atlantic Organisation (NATO)** in 1949. The US believed it needed to strengthen Europe militarily against the Soviet Union. This was the first time the US formed a peacetime military alliance. Under the terms of NATO, an attack on one was an attack on all. It resulted in the deployment of US troops to bases in Western Europe.
- The Soviets accelerated their nuclear weapons programme, with their first atomic bomb detonated in 1949. They also set up a military alliance in Eastern Europe in 1955 (the **Warsaw Pact**).
- The Soviets' atomic bomb started the **arms race** – both sides in the Cold War spent billions every year to build bigger and more powerful nuclear weapons that could wipe out the other side. Both sides spent billions every year and created huge, well-equipped armies with the latest technology.

Berlin - Centre of Conflict

Berlin continued to be a centre of conflict in the Cold War during the 1950s. At this time, West Berlin and West Germany prospered, and their prosperity attracted a constant stream of immigration from East Berlin into the West, where there was a strong demand for labour. This had a serious effect on the East German economy, since many of these people were skilled workers.

The East German government put pressure on the Soviet Union to act. The leader of the Soviet Union, Khrushchev, believed he could overcome the new young American President, John F Kennedy. They met in Vienna and Khrushchev demanded that the US withdraw from Berlin within six months. Kennedy responded by increasing military spending and calling up reserves. He said, *'We seek peace, but we shall not surrender.'*

The Berlin Wall

Kennedy was successful, as Khrushchev backed down. Instead, East Germany and the Soviet Union built the Berlin Wall, which divided East and West Berlin. Building the wall eased tensions between both sides by stopping the flow of migrants, but now the US was able to point to East Berlin as a prison for its people.

When President Kennedy visited Berlin in June 1963, he made clear the Western viewpoint: *'There are many people in the world who really don't understand, or say they don't, what is the great issue between the Free World and the Communist world. Let them come to Berlin. There are some who say that Communism is the way of the future. Let them come to Berlin. And there are some who say in Europe and elsewhere we can work with the Communists. Let them come to Berlin.'*

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why did Stalin blockade Berlin?
2. Why did the US and the allies want to stay in Berlin?
3. How was the US successful in the Berlin Blockade/
4. Was this a victory for containment?
5. Why was there tension over Berlin in the 1950s?
6. Why did Khrushchev and Kennedy clash?
7. Why was the Berlin Wall built and what effect did it have on US-USSR relations?

US *Foreign* POLICY AND *Korea*

China Falls - Korea to follow?

In 1949, China became Communist under **Chairman Mao Zedong** in the **Chinese Civil War**. This encouraged America to fear the further spread of Communism in Asia. It also led Republicans at home to accuse Truman of *'losing China'* by weak policies. American opinion was fully convinced of the danger of Communism, spurred on by **Senator Joe McCarthy** and events in Europe and around the world. Therefore, it was not surprising that the US viewed the invasion by North Korea of South Korea in the same way. This was seen as **another test** of the policy of containment.

North Attacks the South

Korea was a former Japanese territory that had been divided along a map line called **the 38th parallel** at the end of the Second World War. In **North Korea**, the Soviets established a **communist government**. In **South Korea**, a **democratic and capitalist government** was backed by the US. It was expected that there would be free election in 1948 to create an united, democratic Korea. The US went ahead with its elections in the South but the Soviet Union did not go ahead with elections in the North. Shortly after (in 1950), North Korea attacked and drove the South Koreans into one corner of the country.

Truman had no choice but to intervene. Firstly, South Korea had suffered an unprovoked attack. Also, he believed that the Soviet Union was behind the attack - if he did not stop them, they would *'swallow up one piece of Asia after another'*. He did not want to repeat the mistake of Munich where European powers gave into Hitler. *'I had to act as commander-in-chief and I did,'* he said. In this way **Truman bypassed Congress**. This was an increase in presidential power which was later used by Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon in Vietnam.

Truman immediately responded to the invasion by committing the US in the name of the **United Nations** (UN) to come to the rescue of South Korea. Truman got UN backing through a UN Security Council vote, when the Soviet Union was temporarily absent due to a dispute over recognition of Communist China.

US Success and Defeat

The US forces, led by **General MacArthur** and aided by troops from 15 other countries, were very successful. MacArthur invaded at **Inchon** behind North Korean lines and the North Korean invasion collapsed. By October, the North Koreans were pushed back behind the thirty-eighth parallel. America had been successful; this was another victory for the policy of containment.

But the US overreacted and invaded the North, easily taking it over in spite of Chinese warnings. This resulted in a Chinese invasion with 250,000 soldiers. They drove the Americans and their allies back and recaptured **Seoul**, the capital of South Korea. But in bitter and slow fighting the US eventually pushed them back to the thirty-eighth parallel again.

MacArthur pressed for an attack on China and even the use of the **atomic bomb**. Truman had to dismiss him, but fighting dragged on for two more years. By 1953, the leadership of the USSR and the US had changed - Stalin died in Russia and Eisenhower was elected President of America. Eventually **peace** was agreed and the border was fixed on the thirty-eighth parallel. America lost over 50,000 soldiers and the war cost \$20 billion.



25 June 1950



14 September 1950



25 November 1950



27 July 1953

Effects of the Korean War on US Foreign Policy

- The division of Korea became **permanent**. The North became a brutal communist dictatorship. The South emerged as a prosperous, industrialised capitalist economy.
- The USA considered the war the **second success** for the policy of containment, as communism had been stopped from spreading to South Korea. As in Berlin, all-out war had been avoided while the communists had been confronted and contained.
- The war affected US foreign policy. Truman saw the need for strengthening the US military position in South-East Asia as the **Cold War divided Asia as it had Europe**. He began by signing treaties with **Japan** and the **Philippines** (1951). He also formed a defence pact with **Australia and New Zealand** (ANZAC Pact). These were extended by Eisenhower, who formed the **South-East Asia Treaty Organization** (SEATO). This meant increased involvement of the US in Asian affairs. It also meant an **expansion of containment**, which led to increased military spending. The war also worsened relations with **China** for two decades. The US was now more closely tied to hateful regimes in Taiwan and South Korea.
- The war also affected **US policy in Europe**. The US felt that the defence of Western Europe needed to be strengthened. This led to US demands that West Germany should be allowed to rearm, and that the country should become a member of NATO. This eventually happened when West Germany became a member in 1955.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How was the invasion of South Korea by North Korea a challenge to the policy of containment?
2. How did Truman respond and why?
3. How successful was the US in Korea?
4. What were the effects of the Korean War on US foreign policy?

US Foreign Policy under Eisenhower

Eisenhower maintained the general **policy of containment** laid out by his predecessor, Truman. He believed in the **Domino Theory** - that if any country fell to Communism, other countries nearby would do so also. He relied more on nuclear weapons rather than conventional weapons to back up his case. He thought a **policy of deterrence** would work against the Soviet Union. If he maintained a powerful nuclear arsenal, then this would deter the Russians from attacking. But he also followed a **policy of peaceful co-existence** with the Russians and their new leader, Khrushchev. He hoped that both sides could get along peacefully with each other. But his policy here was upset when a U-2 spy plane was shot down over Russia.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Explain these terms in relation to Eisenhower's foreign policy:
 - a. Domino theory
 - b. Policy of deference
 - c. Policy of peaceful co-existence

U S Foreign Policy and the Cuban Missile **CRISIS**

Background

A number of factors heightened Cold War tension in the early 1960s and contributed to the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. First there was talk about a **missile gap** - that the USSR had overtaken the US in missile production. The military-industrial complex, which hoped for greater defence spending, encouraged this. There was also increased anti-Communism caused by **Castro's Communist takeover of Cuba**. Many newspapers and magazines, such as Time and Newsweek, contributed to this. So did the new President, John F Kennedy.

At his **inauguration speech**, President Kennedy said, *'We shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and success of liberty.'* He followed this with a number of anti-Communist speeches. *'The enemy is the Communist system itself... increasing in its drive for world domination.'* He too supported the view that there was a missile gap.

Flexible Response

Kennedy took an active interest in foreign policy, even more so than domestic policy. He had his own ideas about that policy. In spite of his view about a missile gap, he thought the US was over-reliant on nuclear weapons. Instead he wanted a policy of **flexible response** in order to be able to respond quickly to regional conflicts. He also supported the development of **counter-insurgency forces** (counter-terrorism) such as the Green Berets. These policies led to increased defence spending.

Kennedy also believed in firm and decisive action; he believed this displayed a certain **toughness**. This contributed to **Kennedy** authorising the **Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)** to plan an invasion by anti-Castro exiles in April 1961 at the **Bay of Pigs**. It was a total disaster and was a huge embarrassment for the Kennedy government: Castro's forces easily defeated the invaders and Castro received more weapons to defend against a future invasion.

Soviet Views

Another factor in the development of the Cuban Missile Crisis was the attitude of **Khrushchev**, the Soviet leader. He pledged USSR aid to '*wars of national liberation*'. He was aggressive toward Kennedy when they met in Vienna in June 1960 and they failed to agree over East Germany. Khrushchev thought he was dealing with a weak and indecisive leader. Thereafter both increased military spending at home. It led to the building of the **Berlin Wall** to stop the flow of refugees from East Berlin to the West. This led to a further heightening of tension between the two sides. The Soviet Union gave increased support to Cuba, including the building of **missile bases** in the summer of 1962. Their range of over 1,000 miles meant that they could hit the major US cities. **U-2** flights revealed that the missile sites were nearly ready.

American Reaction

Kennedy set up an **Executive Committee** (ExComm) to deal with the missile crisis. Over a period of 13 days the world was on the brink of a third world war. There were various opinions in ExComm on what the US policy should be. Some advised an **invasion** of Cuba, while others advised **air strikes** on the missile bases. The more moderate members said that the US should agree to demilitarise Cuba, including withdrawing US forces from their naval bases in Guantanamo, and also remove their missiles from Turkey.

Kennedy believed he could not appear to be weak, so he did not agree with the ideas of the moderates. He also rejected air strikes because they would not succeed in knocking out all the sites. Instead he decided on a **blockade** of Cuba to stop any further Soviet equipment reaching the island. He informed Khrushchev and later the public on television. The naval blockade demonstrated US will to resist Soviet pressure, but it also gave Khrushchev a way out.

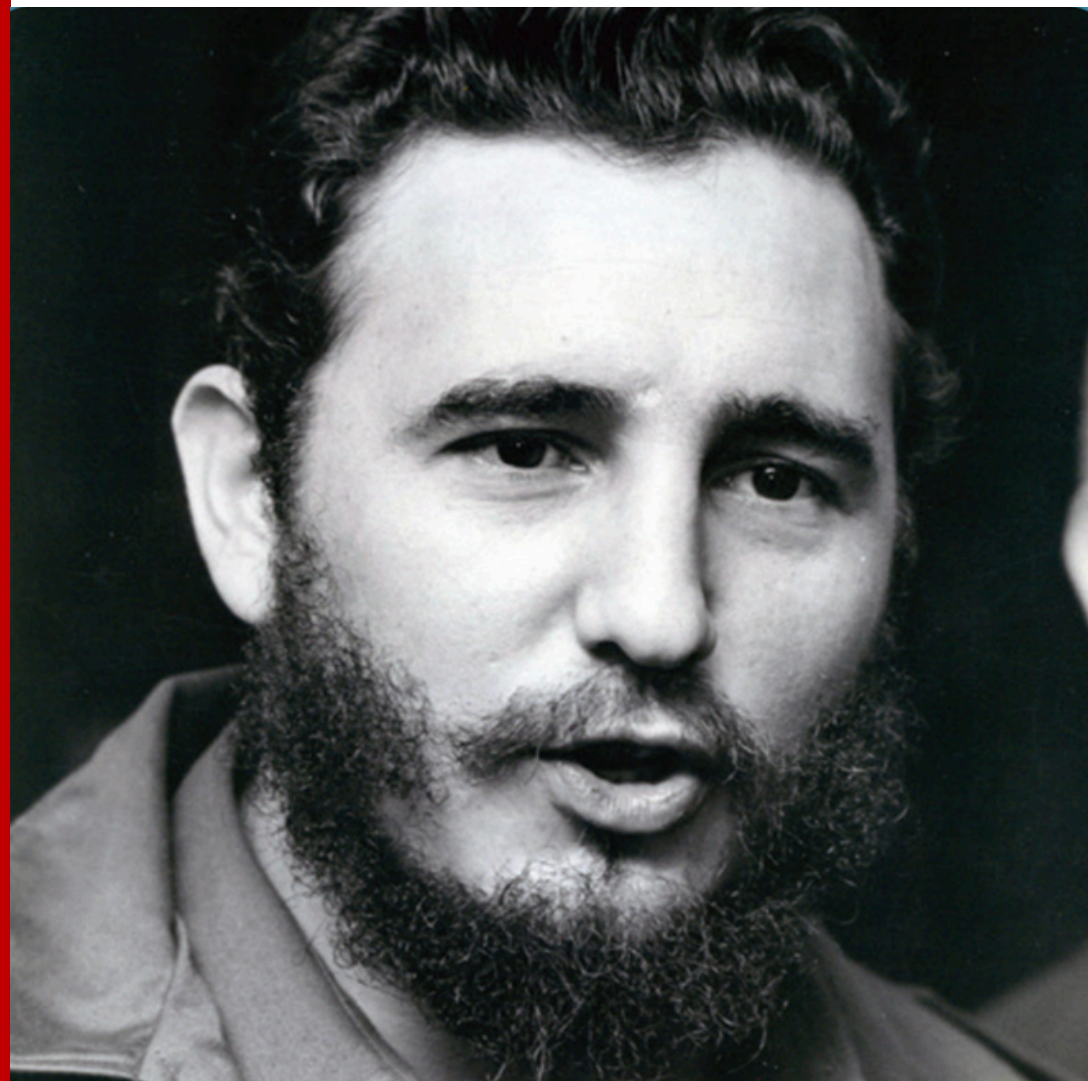
There was huge **tension** in the US and worldwide. Some Soviet ships turned around, while others without weapons agreed to be searched. Kennedy demanded the dismantling of the missile bases. On the other hand, Khrushchev wanted the US to end the blockade and agree not to invade Cuba. He also wanted the US to dismantle their missile sites in Turkey.

Kennedy publicly agreed to lift the blockade and to call off any invasion. But privately he assured the Soviets of the future dismantling of the Turkish sites. In return Khrushchev agreed to dismantle the Soviet missile bases.

The Cuban Missile Crisis



Leaders of the Cuban Missile Crisis



Fidel Castro
Cuba



John F Kennedy
USA



Nikita Khrushchev
USSR



Diplomatic Victory

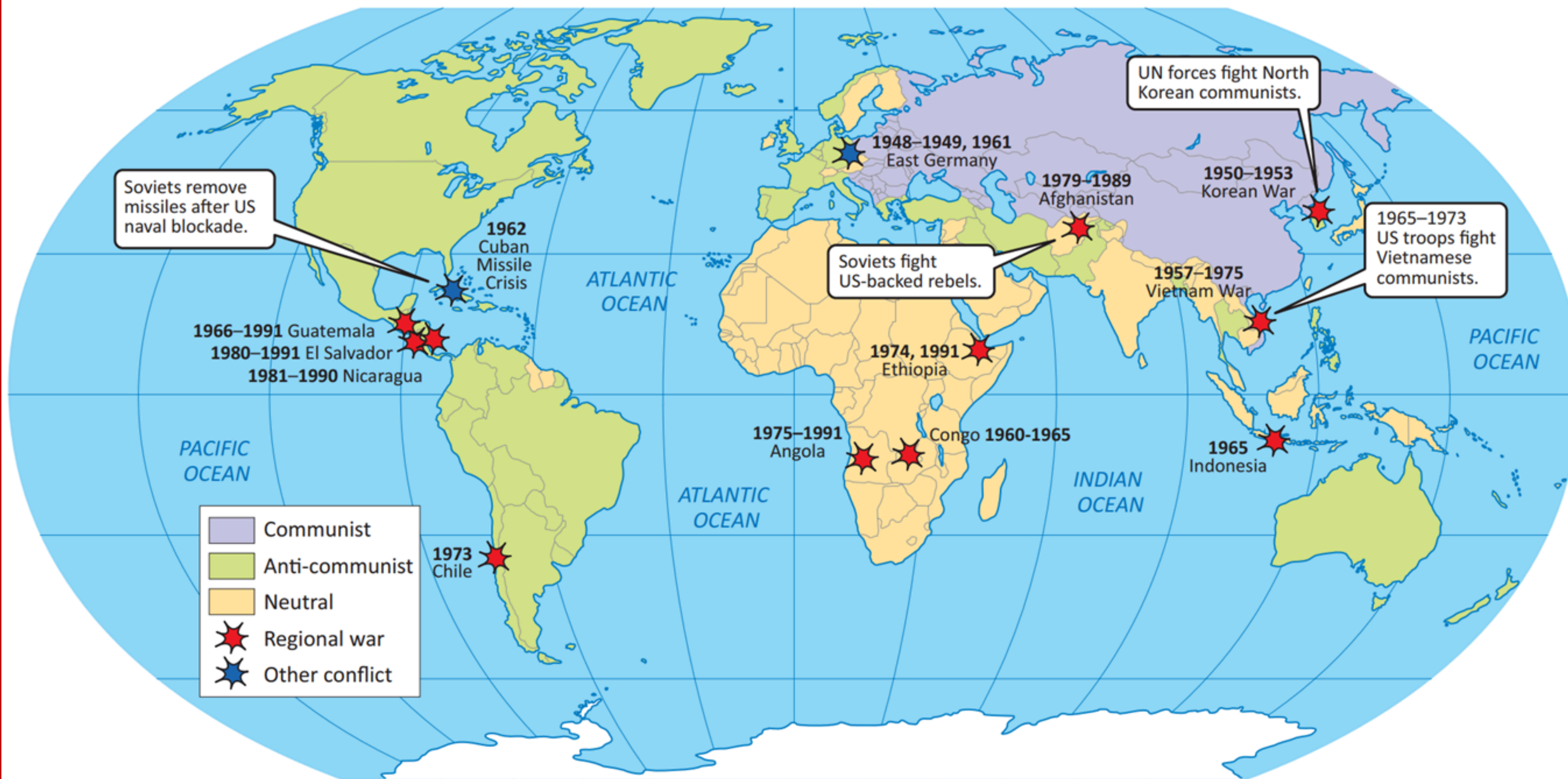
While some US military leaders were angry that America did not strike, Kennedy's steady handling of the crisis earned him praise. One journalist said it was *'perhaps the greatest personal diplomatic victory of any US President in our history'*. It led to the establishment of a **hotline** between Moscow and Washington to improve future communications between the leaders and to lessen the dangers of nuclear war. It also led to a **Test Ban Treaty**, which banned nuclear testing in the air, in space or underwater.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What factors heightened Cold War tensions in the early 1960s?
2. What was Kennedy's attitude to these tensions?
3. What were the main causes of the Cuban Missile Crisis?
4. How did Kennedy react to the Cuban Missile Crisis?
5. How successful was he?

U.S. Foreign Policy and the War in Vietnam

Key Events of the Cold War



Vietnam after World War II

Before World War II, Vietnam had been a French Colony, occupied by Japanese during the war. Communist forces drove the Japanese out of the Northern half of the country near the end of the war. The French tried to return after the defeat of the Japanese but the **Viet Minh** under **Ho Chi Minh** fought back. By 1954, the French had been forced out. North Vietnam was ruled by communist while the South was ruled by a pro-Western government.



How Did the USA Become Involved in Vietnam?

Under Truman

The US became gradually involved in Vietnam. After the Second World War, **Truman** supported the French Empire in Indo-China (Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos) in its battle against **Ho Chi Minh** and the Vietminh. He believed the Vietminh were backed by Stalin and the USSR and he looked on his support for the French in Cold War terms. By backing the French he believed he was containing Communism and following the **Truman Doctrine**.

Under Eisenhower

President **Eisenhower** increased US involvement because he believed in the **Domino Theory** - that if Indo-China fell to Communism, so would all the other countries around it. He sent in the first military advisers. After the French defeat, there was a peace agreement in Geneva which set up four countries - Laos, Cambodia, North Vietnam and South Vietnam. The US, however, refused to hold elections in the South because they feared a victory for the Communists. Instead they backed **Ngo Dinh Diem** in South Vietnam, sent in aid and increased the number of military advisers to 1,500 by 1960.

Under Eisenhower

But Diem was an **unpopular leader**. He was a Catholic leader in a mainly Buddhist country, and he favoured placing Catholics in positions of power. He failed to introduce land reforms demanded by the Buddhist peasants (farmers) so rents remained high. Diem imposed a repressive regime and he was accused of corruption and torture. All these aspects of his rule increased his unpopularity. Instead, popular support went to the South Vietnamese Communists, called the **Vietcong**. These were supported by Ho Chi Minh, who was backed by the Soviet Union and China.

The Americans continued to believe in Vietnam as a **Cold War conflict**. They failed to see it as a **nationalist uprising** seeking independence. Their failure to do this led them to become more and more involved in Vietnam.



Kennedy Increases US Involvement

Kennedy believed he had to take a strong stand in South-East Asia since he had already accused the previous Eisenhower government (administration) of being soft. He believed in the **Domino Theory** too and was a strong supporter of the **policy of containment**. His advisers were equally strong in standing up to Communism in South- East Asia. However, Kennedy did not want to get the US militarily involved, so he refused to send troops to Vietnam. But financial aid increased and there was a large increase in US advisers to 16,000 by 1963. It seemed inevitable that they would get involved in the fighting. Indeed, some of the so-called advisers were soon involved.

Kennedy believed in developing a **flexible response** to combat Communist expansion. This involved the US sending in Special Forces to train the South Vietnamese army in **counter-insurgency** (counter-terrorism) methods. But very often their tactics resulted in losing rather than winning the support of the people. Diem's government introduced the **Strategic Hamlet Programme** to herd peasants into armed and protected villages to counter the Vietcong. This only upset the peasants more. Actions by Diem against Buddhist monks in 1963 worsened the situation. Soon after, **Diem was assassinated** in an internal army coup which led to more political uncertainty in Vietnam. Even though the US knew about the plot, they did not attempt to stop it. A few weeks later Kennedy himself was assassinated in Dallas. Kennedy's Vice-President, **Lyndon Johnson**, was sworn in as the new President.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How and why did (i) Truman and (ii) Eisenhower involve the US in Vietnam?
2. How and why did Kennedy increase US involvement in Vietnam?

CASE STUDY *Lyndon Johnson and Vietnam,*
1963-68

Johnson and Vietnam

Instead of withdrawing from Vietnam, the new President, Lyndon Johnson, increased the number of US advisers by 30 per cent. Not only did Johnson support the **policy of containment** and **the Domino Theory**, he believed that **US credibility** was at stake. He thought that if the US did not stand up for their ally - South Vietnam nobody would trust them in future. Johnson's advisers, who also advised Kennedy, believed in a **military solution** to the problem. Even when doubts crept in a few years later about US policy, Johnson's **domineering personality** discouraged them from giving an alternative view. Johnson was concerned about how future generations would judge him so he did not want to be *'the first President to lose a war'*. (See Sources 1 to 4)

SOURCE 1: THE BLIND LEADING THE BLIND



Four Presidents entangled in Vietnam.

QUESTIONS

1. According to W.T. Cosgrave, what advantages did de Valera have as a negotiator?
2. What did Cosgrave mean by the words 'keeping their ablest player in reserve'?
3. How did de Valera regard his own role as 'symbol of the Republic'?
4. In his view, what was a 'shirking of duty'?

SOURCE 2 - JOHNSON'S SPEECH

'Most of the nations of Asia cannot by themselves and alone resist the growing might and grasping ambition of Asian Communism. Our power, therefore, is a vital shield. And an Asia so threatened by Communist domination would imperil the security of the US itself. Moreover, we are in Vietnam to fulfil one of the most solemn pledges of the American nation. Three Presidents over 11 years have promised to help defend this small and valiant nation. We cannot now dishonour our word.'

Speech by President Johnson in 1965

SOURCE 3 - PHONE CALL

'I don't think it's worth fighting for and I don't think we can get out. I don't see that we can ever hope to get out of there once we are committed. It's just the biggest damn mess.'

President Johnson in a private phone conversation in 1964

SOURCE 4 - LESSONS FROM MUNICH

'We learned from Hitler at Munich that success only feeds the appetite of aggression.'

President Johnson

QUESTIONS

1. According to W.T. Cosgrave, what advantages did de Valera have as a negotiator?
2. What did Cosgrave mean by the words 'keeping their ablest player in reserve'?
3. How did de Valera regard his own role as 'symbol of the Republic'?
4. In his view, what was a 'shirking of duty'?

After Kennedy

Johnson followed Kennedy's policy on Vietnam; *'I swore to myself that I would carry on.'* He approved **NSAM 273**, a National Security Agency memo, which said the US government should 'assist the people and Government of South Vietnam to win their contest against the externally directed and supported Communist conspiracy.' He then approved the transfer of secret operations against North Vietnam from the CIA to the army. Next, in March 1964, he approved **NSAM 288** which said the US should use greater force, including air strikes against North Vietnam. However, Johnson did not want to escalate the war immediately because he was involved in the presidential election campaign.

The 1964 Presidential Election

In the 1964 presidential election, Johnson was faced by **Barry Goldwater**, a Republican candidate. Goldwater wanted a *'total victory'* in the war against world Communism. In relation to Vietnam, he suggested that atomic weapons should be used to *'defoliate'* North Vietnam. Johnson, on the other hand, campaigned as a **candidate of peace**. *'We are not about to send American boys nine or ten thousand miles away from home to do what Asian boys ought to be doing for themselves,'* he said. *'We don't want to get... tied down to a land war in Asia.'*

However, Johnson soon began to realise that:

- Limited American aid was not working.
- The Vietcong were extending their hold on the country.
- The South Vietnamese government was not strong enough to stop them.

Johnson was faced with **two alternatives**: either withdrawing the US from Vietnam or else committing huge numbers of US troops to the country.

The Gulf of Tonkin and Change in US Policy

During the election campaign in 1964, a dramatic change occurred in US policy. In August 1964, North Vietnamese boats fired on the **USS Maddox** while it was patrolling in the **Gulf of Tonkin**, but they were easily driven off. A couple of days later, the **Maddox** and the **Turner Joy** were patrolling in the Gulf when they reported being fired on again. They returned fire but later investigators cast doubts on their account of what happened. Some historians suggest that the US patrols were deliberately set up to provoke a North Vietnamese response. At any rate, the incident was used by President Johnson to escalate US involvement in the war. (See Sources 5, 6 and 7)

Congress passed the **Tonkin Resolution** after Johnson gave a deliberately misleading account of the incident. This resolution gave Johnson almost unlimited power to wage war. This allowed the President to take 'all necessary measures, including the use of military force' to protect US interests in South-East Asia. It also allowed the US to attack North Vietnam, because Johnson claimed North Vietnam was supplying the Vietcong in South Vietnam.

SOURCE 5 - JOHNSON'S VERSION OF TONKIN

'The initial attack on the destroyer Maddox, on August 2, was repeated today by a number of hostile vessels attacking two US destroyers with torpedoes. The destroyers and supporting aircraft acted at once on the orders I gave after the initial act of aggression. We believe at least two of the attacking vessels were sunk. There were no US losses.'

President Johnson's television address, 4 August 1964

SOURCE 6 - TONKIN GULF RESOLUTION

... Whereas naval units of the Communist regime in Vietnam, in violation of the principles of the charter of the United Nations and of international law, have deliberately and repeatedly attacked United States naval vessels lawfully present in international water, and have thereby created a serious threat to international peace...'

Extract from 'The Tonkin Gulf Resolution', 7 August 1964, in the Pentagon Papers

QUESTIONS

1. According to W.T. Cosgrave, what advantages did de Valera have as a negotiator?
2. What did Cosgrave mean by the words 'keeping their ablest player in reserve'?
3. How did de Valera regard his own role as 'symbol of the Republic'?
4. In his view, what was a 'shirking of duty'?

SOURCE 7 - WHY DID JOHNSON ESCALATE THE WAR?

Johnson's decisions were based on complicated political and military considerations. LBJ steered a middle course: The 'hawks' in Congress and in the military wanted him to engage in massive bombing of enemy cities, threaten to use nuclear weapons, and even threaten to invade North Vietnam. This might have led to Chinese entry into the war, as had happened in the Korean War, or even Soviet engagement. 'Doves' in Congress, the State Department, and even Vice President Hubert Humphrey wanted Johnson to negotiate with Hanoi for a 'neutral' South Vietnam and eventual reunification with the North. The President's 'middle way' involved a commitment of U.S. ground forces, designed to convince the regime in Hanoi that it could not win, and some punishing bombing campaigns, after which serious U.S. negotiations might ensue.

Kent Germany, Associate Professor of History, University of South Carolina,
Lyndon B. Johnson: Foreign Affairs

QUESTIONS

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The Escalation of the War, 1965-68

But Johnson waited until after his re-election before he took action. In response to an enemy raid on an American air base in South Vietnam early in 1965, he gave the go-ahead for **Operation Rolling Thunder**. This operation launched massive air assaults on North Vietnam to stop them helping the Vietcong. He also announced a \$1 billion aid programme for the South. (See Sources 8, 9, 10 and 14)

Then he began a huge **build-up** of ground forces. In March 1965, the first US Marines landed in **Da Nang**, to protect the US air base there. By the end of the year the US had over 180,000 soldiers in Vietnam. A year later this had increased to over 350,000 and it was half a million by the end of 1967. By the end of 1968 the war was costing \$30 billion a year. (Source 15)

In the meantime, Johnson rejected offers by the North Vietnamese government to negotiate on the basis of their **Four Points**. In turn, the US announced its **Fourteen Points** in January 1966 to form the basis of negotiations, but these were rejected by North Vietnam. (Source 10)

SOURCE 8 - JOHNSON'S VIEW

'We have kept our guns over the mantle and our shells in the cupboard for a long time now. I can't ask our American soldiers out there to continue to fight with one hand tied behind their backs.'

President Johnson at a meeting with his top advisers, February 1965, after the attack on a US air force base in which eight soldiers were killed

SOURCE 9 - JOHNSON AND ADVISERS

President Johnson meets with advisers in the Cabinet Room of the White House (May 1967).



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The Fighting

The US army used a variety of tactics to fight against the Vietcong and the North Vietnamese, including:

- In **search-and-destroy missions**, the US army tried to clear areas of suspected Vietcong, and villages suspected of helping the guerrillas were destroyed. In **Operation Cedar Falls** (1967), an area north of Saigon was cleared. But only a few Vietcong were found. Instead, 6,000 peasants were evacuated and their villages and land destroyed, thus making enemies of the people the US were supposed to be helping. It was also one of these missions which caused the **My Lai Massacre** in 1968, though news of it did not become public until after Johnson left office.
- Success in search-and-destroy missions was based on **body counts** or **kill ratios**. These were often **inaccurate** because soldiers could not distinguish between villagers and guerrillas. *'If it is dead and Vietnamese, it's VC.'*
- The US air force dropped **napalm** (jellied explosives) and **defoliants** (chemicals) on the forests of South Vietnam. The purpose was to clear away the cover of the forest. But instead it made South Vietnamese people angrier at the US conduct of the war.
- The US air force dropped a greater **tonnage of bombs** over North and South Vietnam between July 1965 and December 1968 than the Allies did in Europe in the entire Second World War. However, these failed to undermine the will of the North Vietnamese people and the Vietcong.

The Fighting

- The US relied heavily on **helicopters**. While these provided a quick response and great mobility, the approaching noise meant that the Vietcong could escape from any surprise attacks.
- **Free fire zones** were laid out between the villages in which anybody there was regarded as a target.
- The US attempted to create a better South Vietnamese army, but this failed. Most US soldiers were only drafted to serve for a year. This made it difficult to create and maintain 'team spirit'. It also meant that no sooner had they built up the experience to cope with the conditions, than they were flown home.

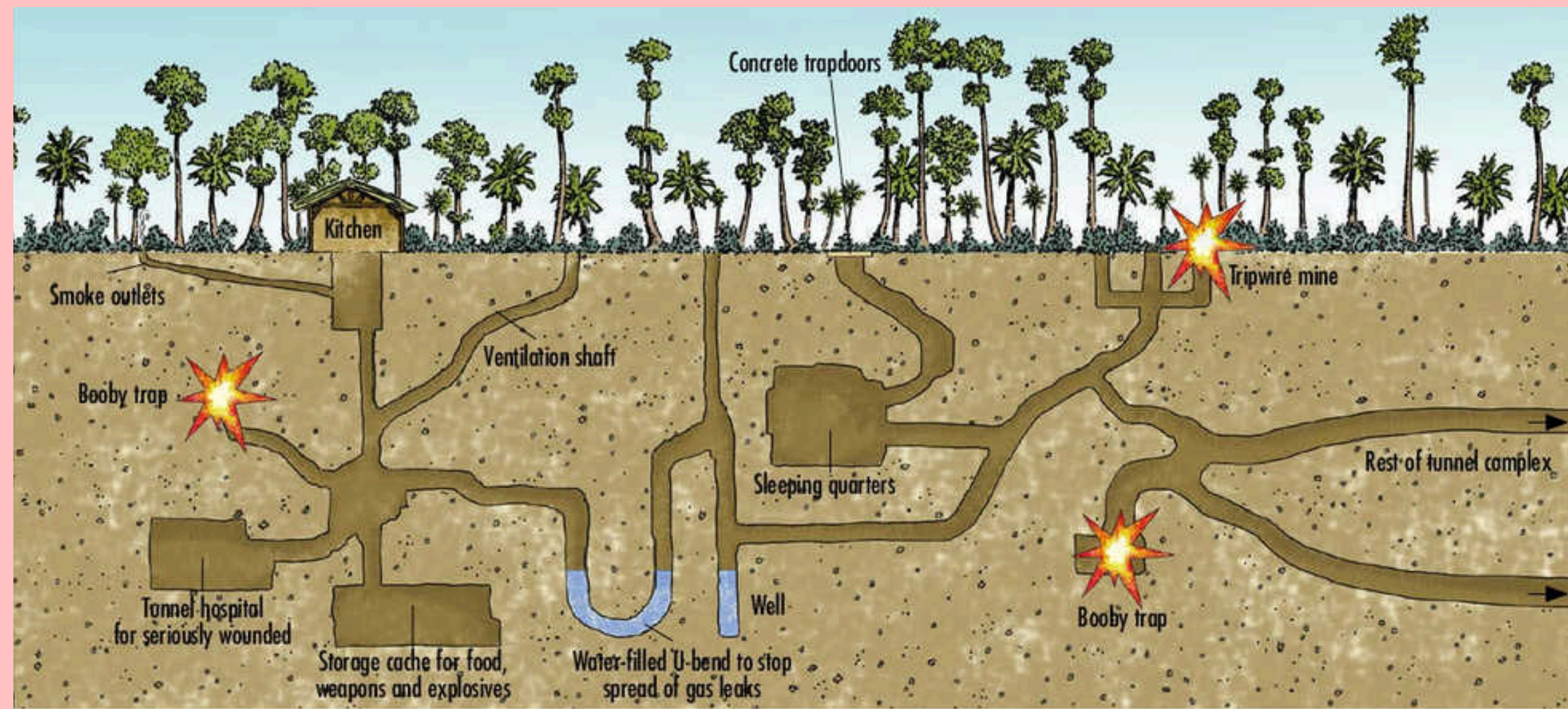
Johnson took a close interest in the progress of the war. On Tuesdays, he met with his advisers and they decided the military targets for the bombers. Each morning the first information he looked for was the number of US personnel killed the previous day.

SOURCE 10-SUMMARY OF NORTH VIETNAMESE FOUR POINTS FOR ENDING THE WAR, 1965

1. Withdrawal of the US military from South Vietnam.
2. Neutrality of North and South Vietnam pending their reunification.
3. The organisation of South Vietnam based on the programme of the Vietcong.
4. The peaceful reunification of Vietnam without foreign intervention.

SOURCE 11 - VIETCONG TUNNEL COMPLEX

Underground tunnel complex dug by the Vietcong. The total tunnel network estimated to be 240km long.



QUESTIONS

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SOURCE 12 - THE EFFECTS OF BOOBY TRAPS

Pulaski tripped on a booby trap, and it blew the hell out of him. Evidently, the enemy stole the explosives or something. The explosion blew one leg off about midway between the knee and the groin, and the other leg was blown off at the calf. The explosion left his body naked.

A US soldier's description of what happened to a fellow soldier

SOURCE 13A - A SOLDIER IN VIETNAM

Seven months later, I found myself in Vietnam (1966) (after volunteering). What I found in Vietnam, however, was not at all what I had been taught to expect. The American people had been told that we were defending a free democracy. What I found was a military dictatorship rife with corruption and venality and repression. The premier of South Vietnam openly admired Adolf Hitler. Buddhist priests who petitioned for peace were jailed or shot down in the streets. Officials at every level engaged in blatant black-marketeering at astronomical profit and at the expense of their own people. And the government was clearly devoid of the support of the vast majority of the Vietnamese people.

Source: W. D. Erhart, *In the Shadow of Vietnam*, Essays 1977- 1991, McFarland, Jefferson, North Carolina, 2011

QUESTIONS

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SOURCE 13B - AN OFFICER IN VIETNAM

We have seen the creation of a new empire by North Vietnam. We have seen Laos occupied by the North Vietnamese government. We have seen Cambodia robbed and starved by Cambodian Communists and then occupied by the North Vietnamese. We were right to resist terror and war being inflicted on a poor and backward people. The South Vietnamese government had many faults, but Ho Chi Minh and his Communist Party have left a trail of cruelty, famine and tyranny. I maintain in the face of all accusers that we who served in Vietnam did so when our only thought was duty and our only cause was freedom.

Source: David Donovan, *Once a Warrior King; Memories of an Officer in Vietnam*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1985

SOURCE 14 - MEMO FROM SECRETARY OF DEFENSE MCNAMARA

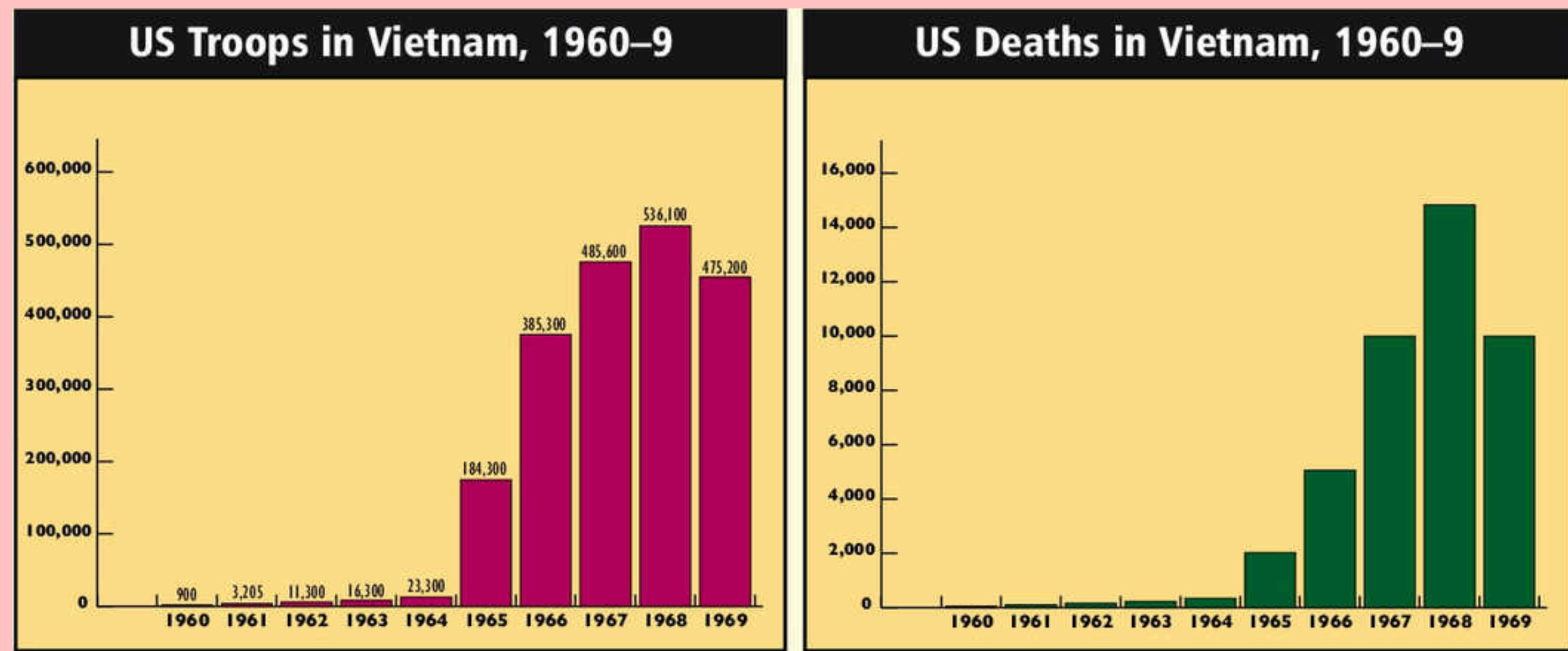
'With the situation continuing to deteriorate (in 1965), McNamara wrote a decisive memo in late July. It laid out three options: "cut our losses and withdraw," "continue at about the same level," or "expand promptly and substantially the U.S. pressure." He recommended the third. It would lead to "considerable cost in casualties and material" but would "offer a good chance of producing a favourable settlement in the longer run."

Quoted in J Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States 1945-74*

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SOURCE 15 - STATISTICS ON THE VIETNAM WAR



SOURCE 16 - JOHNSON AND THE PUBLIC

'However, Johnson was now apprehensive about facing hostile audiences during domestic appearances that he asked the FBI to "send an advance man along with Secret Service. to survey the situation" in Des Moines, Iowa, and Omaha, Nebraska. He "wanted the FBI's opinion as to whether or not it would be safe for him to go." [When he went there,] Aside from picketing by a few dozen anti-Vietnam demonstrators, the crowds were friendly and enthusiastic, and "there were no security problems of any sort."

R Dallek, Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1961-1973

QUESTIONS

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Progress of the War

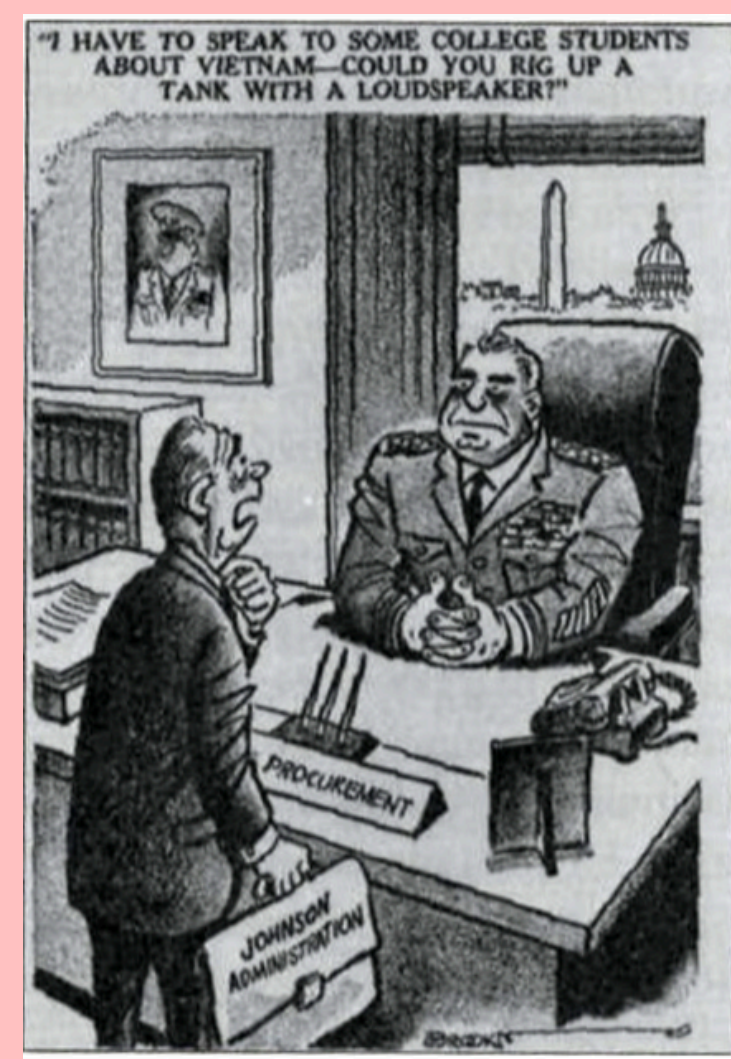
Johnson claimed that the bombing was aimed at military targets, but films showed otherwise. Johnson also claimed that the US was winning the war and that it would be over soon. His commander in Vietnam, **General Westmoreland**, always believed that if only he got more soldiers, he would win the war. But the use of **strategic bombing** failed to cripple a predominantly agricultural country, and the use of artillery and search-and-destroy missions failed in a **guerrilla** war.

But Americans still largely supported the **President's handling** of the war. In 1964, 85 per cent of Americans supported the country's policy in Vietnam. But this began to decline as America became more involved in the war, and an **anti-war movement** began in 1965.

Johnson himself was affected by the protests. The war soon became a media war as thousands of reporters and photographers from the press, radio and television descended on Vietnam.

Timeline of Johnson and US involvement in the Vietnam War	
1963, November	President Kennedy assassinated; Johnson becomes President
1963, August	Gulf of Tonkin incident; Tonkin Resolution; Johnson re-elected President
1965	Operation Rolling Thunder – air bombardment of North Vietnam US Marines land at Da Nang (South Vietnam) – first US combat troops
1965-67	Growth of US forces to over half a million
1967	(January) Tet Offensive in South Vietnam (March) My Lai Massacre
1968	Johnson ordered partial halt to bombing of North Vietnam; proposed peace talks; announced he would not seek re-election Paris Peace Talks began
1969, January	Nixon became President of USA

SOURCE 17



SOURCE 18- STUDENT SLOGAN AGAINST THE VIETNAM WAR

Hey! Hey! LBJ! How many kids did you kill today?

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The Tet Offensive, 1968

In the (Vietnamese) New Year of 1968, the Vietcong and North Vietnamese launched a large surprise attack on all the major cities of South Vietnam. They scored many significant victories, including an assault on the American embassy in Saigon, the capital. The offensive was only defeated after savage fighting. Almost 60,000 Communists were killed; 4,000 US troops; 2,000 South Vietnamese army (ARVN) and about 15,000 civilians:

- Even though the Tet Offensive was a military failure for the North Vietnamese, it **undermined Johnson's claim** that the US was winning the war in Vietnam. It seemed to show up his war policy as a failure.
- The US army commanders looked for **another 200,000 soldiers**. The only way the US could defeat the Vietcong, they said, was to use its full resources - a kind of total war.
- But Johnson did not want to do that since the war was already taking away resources from his **Great Society** programme. In March 1968 there was a **financial crisis** when speculators bought gold and sold dollars.
- Johnson also knew that the American people would not let him expand the war. The Tet Offensive increased **US opposition** to the war. This was shown by the huge vote **Eugene McCarthy** got when he almost defeated Johnson in the New Hampshire Democratic primary election in 1968.

The Tet Offensive, 1968

- A **credibility gap** was opening up because the people began to doubt what the government was telling them.
- **Television** showed frightening scenes from the Tet Offensive in people's living rooms, including Vietcong guerrillas attacking the US embassy in Saigon. This brought the impact of the war closer.
- The **anti-war movement** that began with university students spread to the wider public. This became more intense as the war progressed and culminated in the Chicago riots outside the Democratic Convention to select a presidential candidate in 1968.
- One of America's most influential journalists, **Walter Cronkite** of CBS News, concluded, *'It seems now more certain than ever that the bloody experience of Vietnam is to end in a stalemate.'* (27 February 1968)

SOURCE 19 - JOHNSON LISTENS

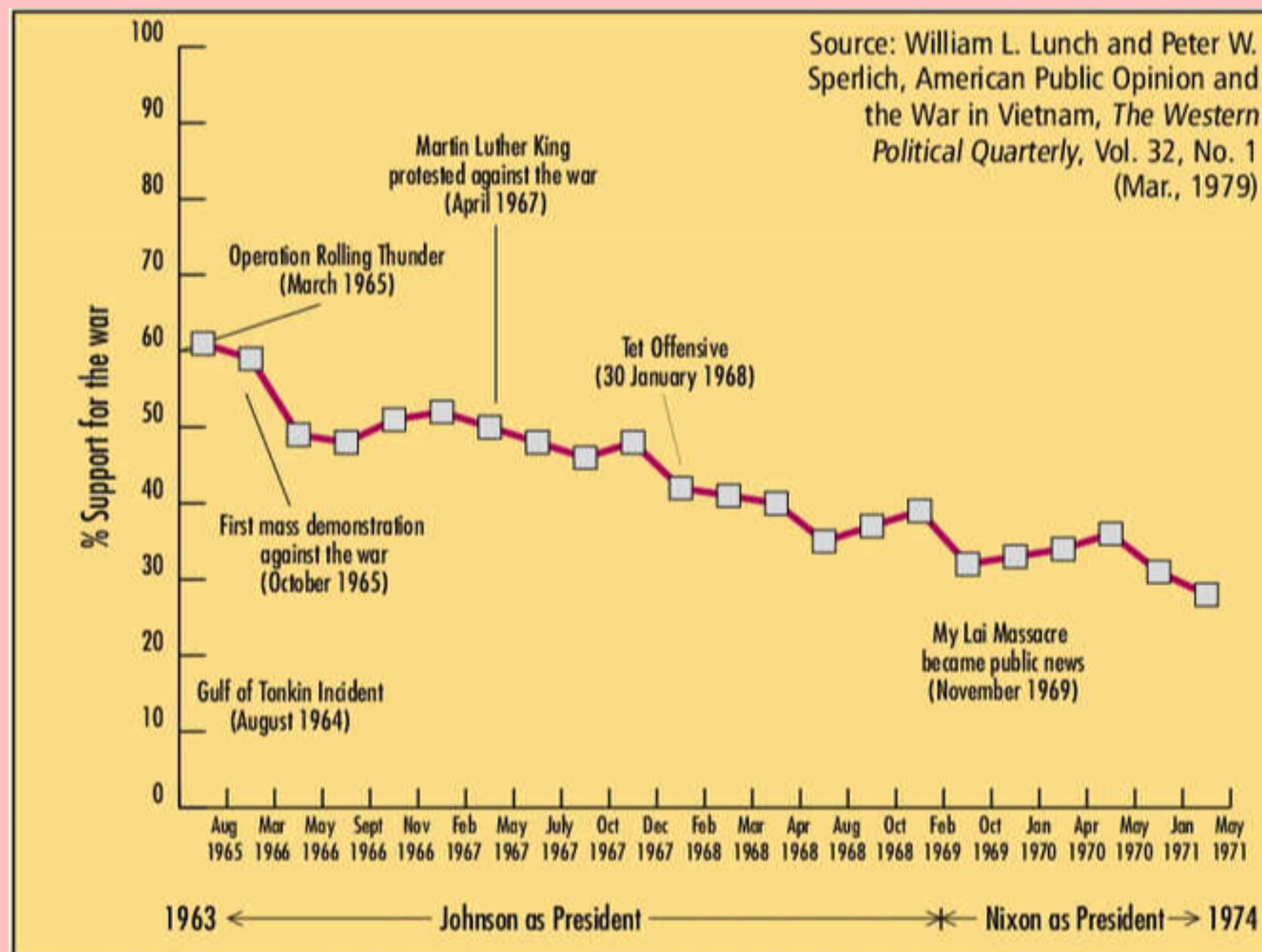


Sitting alone in the Cabinet Room, President Johnson listens to a tape-recorded message about the fighting in Vietnam from his son-in-law, Marine Captain Charles Robb (July 1968).

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SOURCE 20 - US PUBLIC OPINION AND THE VIETNAM WAR, 1965-70- DECLINING SUPPORT FOR THE WAR

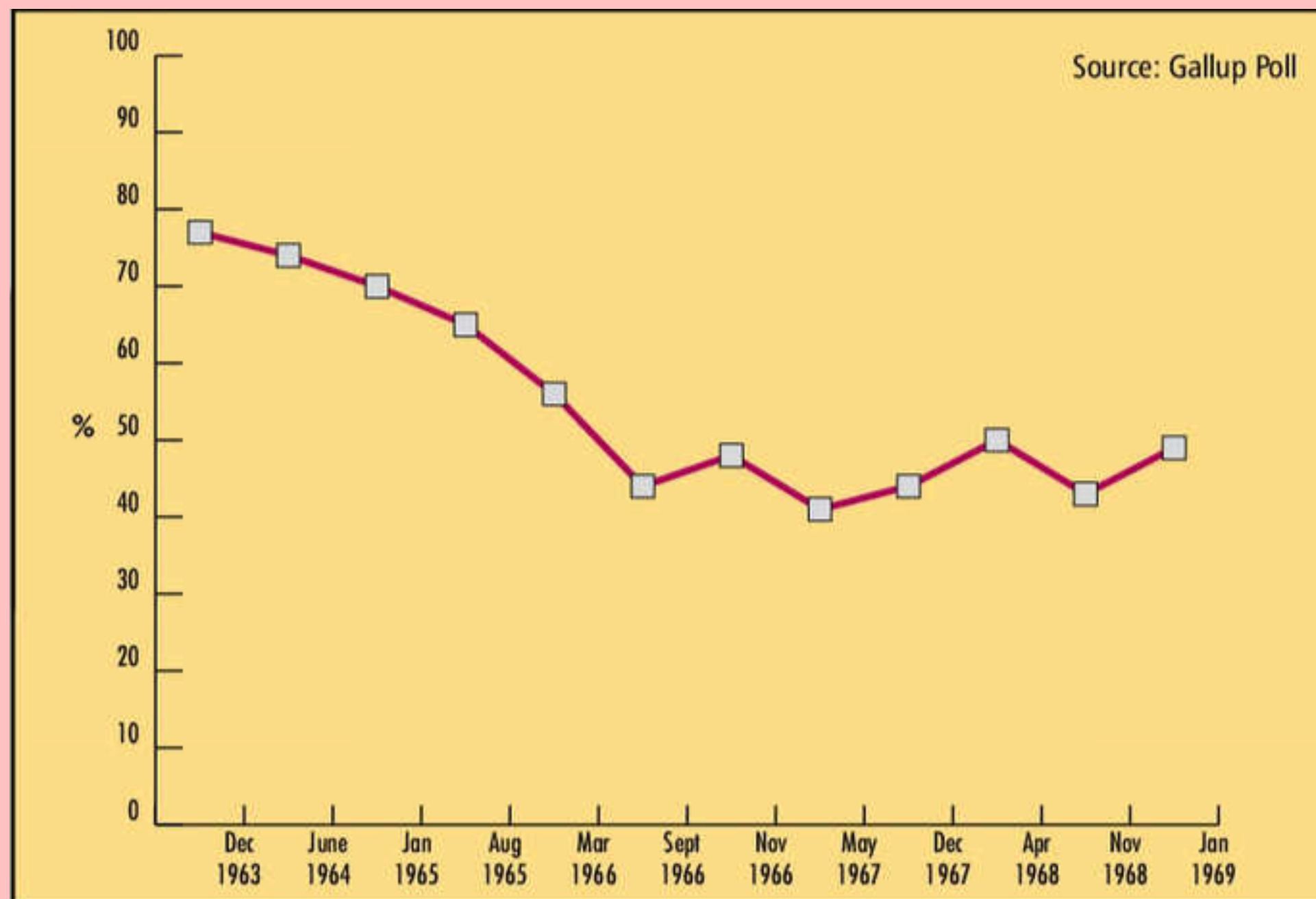


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The results of these opinion polls were based on the following question: *'In view of developments since we entered the fighting in Vietnam, do you think the US made a mistake sending troops to fight in Vietnam?'*

SOURCE 21 - JOHNSON'S APPROVAL RATING



Do you approve or disapprove of the way Lyndon Johnson is handling his job as President?

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Johnson Changes Policy

Some of Johnson's advisers, including **Secretary of Defense McNamara**, had gone to other jobs. Others began to change their mind - they doubted the view of the military that they were winning the war. Johnson had to **change his policy**. He called a partial halt to the air bombing of North Vietnam. He also withdrew from the presidential election race. He made a proposal for peace talks which was accepted by the North Vietnamese. In May 1968, preliminary talks began in Paris, but the two sides were soon deadlocked. There were divisions in the US government about how to proceed to make concessions or not to make concessions to the North Vietnamese. Johnson insisted that the North Vietnamese should reduce military activities if the US stopped the bombing. He was frustrated by the lack of progress in the talks. Later in 1968, just prior to the presidential election, Johnson announced the complete halt of the US bombing of North Vietnam. However, no agreement had been reached between the US and North Vietnam before Johnson left office in January 1969.

Conclusion - Johnson and the Vietnam War

Johnson's involvement in the War in Vietnam:

- Illustrated the **role** of the US President in shaping US foreign policy.
- Highlighted the **growing power** of the US President and eventually led to a conflict between the White House and Congress during Nixon's presidency.
- Showed how foreign policy **distracted** from domestic policy and Johnson's efforts to create a Great Society. (See Source 22 and 23)
- Caused him to **withdraw** from the presidential election in 1968. (See Sources 22 and 23)
- Caused **budgetary deficits** and **inflation** (rising prices) in the US.
- Expanded the war from a small-scale local conflict to a full-scale war. By the end of Johnson's presidency, the US had suffered 200,000 casualties, including 30,000 dead.
- Created **great divisions** in US society between the anti-war movement and Americans who felt they had to defend their country.
- Demonstrated the **limits** of American military technology when faced with a well-supported guerrilla campaign.
- **Distracted** the US and Johnson from foreign problems elsewhere.

SOURCE 22 - GREAT SOCIETY

'This confused war has played havoc with our domestic destiny... The promises of the Great Society have been shot down on the battlefields of Vietnam.'

Martin Luther King, 1967

SOURCE 23 - EFFECT ON JOHNSON

'For Lyndon Johnson, the Vietnam War represented a personal as well as a national tragedy. Johnson had not created the commitment in Vietnam, and he would have preferred to shun what he once called "that bitch of a war" and concentrate on "the woman I really loved", his cherished Great Society. But the war he took on so reluctantly and struggled unsuccessfully to conclude eventually destroyed the Great Society, tore the nation apart, and inflicted great pain on Johnson himself.'

G Herring, *The War in Vietnam in the Johnson Years*, Vol. 1, ed. R Divine

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WEB RESOURCES

- Vietnam War, <http://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war>
- Vietnam war: History, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/asia_pac/05/vietnam_war/html/introduction.stm
- Battlefield: Vietnam, <http://www.pbs.org/battlefieldvietnam/history/index.html>
- Vietnam War, <https://www.nytimes.com/topic/subject/vietnam-war>
- LBJ Presidential Library, The Vietnam Conflict, <http://www.lbjlibrary.org/exhibits/the-vietnam-conflict/>
- Search YouTube using 'Vietnam War', 'Johnson & the Vietnam War'