

People

Bao Dai



The last emperor of Vietnam, who ascended to the throne in 1926, Bao Dai proved to be an ineffective ruler and was unable to exercise any of his powers without the support of the French colonial regime. He abdicated in 1946 after the **Viet Minh** drove out the Japanese occupation forces and took control of the government. In 1948, the French reinstated Bao Dai as the premier of “independent Vietnam” but he left affairs of state to his pro-French appointees. Only one year after the **Geneva Conference** created a republic in South Vietnam, **Ngo Dinh Diem** outmaneuvered Bao Dai and took power; Bao Dai then retired to France.

McGeorge Bundy

The Special Assistant for National Security Affairs under both **John F. Kennedy** and **Lyndon B. Johnson**. Bundy pressed for escalating the Vietnam War but after leaving his position in 1966 became critical of further escalation.



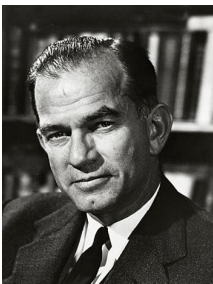
William Calley

A U.S. Army lieutenant and the leader of the company of U.S. soldiers who killed several hundred unarmed Vietnamese civilians in the 1968 **My Lai Massacre**. A 1971 court-martial sentenced Calley to a life prison term, but many Americans believed that he was a scapegoat for larger government atrocities. Following the intervention of President Nixon he was paroled in 1974. Other critics believed that considering the nature of the massacre, Calley had received very lenient treatment.

Dwight D. Eisenhower

The 34th U.S. president, who popularized the **domino theory** that was later used to justify increased U.S. political and military involvement in Vietnam.

J. William Fulbright



A U.S. senator from Arkansas and a leading critic of the Vietnam War in the U.S. Congress. In 1966, Fulbright published the influential book *The Arrogance of Power*, which attacked President **Lyndon B. Johnson** and the U.S. war strategy. That year, Fulbright also chaired nationally televised hearings of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that criticized the war. Johnson derogatorily dismissed Fulbright as “Senator Half-Bright.”

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Ho Chi Minh

The primary Vietnamese nationalist and Communist leader during the twentieth century, who resisted French, Japanese, and American influence in Vietnam. Born in poverty in French-occupied Annam, Ho traveled widely and spent considerable time in Paris, London, and New York, gaining exposure to Western ideas, including **Communism**. On his return to Vietnam, he founded the **Indochina Communist Party** in 1930 and reestablished the **Viet Minh** in 1941. From its founding to his death in 1969, Ho was president of the **Democratic Republic of Vietnam**, serving as the primary North Vietnamese leader throughout much of the Vietnam War.



Lyndon B. Johnson

The 36th U.S. president, who promised to honor his predecessor **John F. Kennedy's** limited U.S. commitments in Vietnam, but ended up escalating the war drastically after the U.S. Congress passed the **Gulf of Tonkin Resolution** in 1964. Empowered by the resolution, in 1965 Johnson authorized **Operation Rolling Thunder** to bomb North Vietnam into submission. When this failed, he sent more than 500,000 U.S. troops to Vietnam and ultimately converted the conflict into a protracted and bitter war.

George F. Kennan

A U.S. State Department analyst who first articulated the doctrine of containment in 1947, arguing that the United States could keep Communism from spreading simply by deterring Soviet expansion at critical points, mostly in Europe. The idea of containment became very influential and served as the basis of U.S. foreign policy for much of the Cold War.

John F. Kennedy

The 35th U.S. president, whose decision to send U.S. “military advisors” into Vietnam in 1962 marked the first official direct U.S. military involvement in the country. Although Kennedy and his administration backed the corrupt **Ngo Dinh Diem** regime in South Vietnam, they ultimately decided to back a coup to overthrow Diem in November 1963. Just weeks later, disgruntled former Marine Lee Harvey Oswald assassinated Kennedy in Dallas, and Vice President **Lyndon B. Johnson** became president.

Henry A. Kissinger

A former political science professor who served as President **Richard Nixon's** National Security Advisor and then as his Secretary of State. The German-born Kissinger worked closely with Nixon to create and implement the policy of **Vietnamization** and personally engaged in negotiations with North Vietnamese emissary **Le Duc Tho** in 1972 to hammer out a **cease-fire**. Kissinger also assisted Nixon in using **China** and the **Soviet Union** to pressure



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North Vietnam to opt for a peace settlement. Historians have shown that these efforts largely failed.

Edward Lansdale

A CIA operative based in Saigon beginning in 1953 who initiated some mostly failed psychological operations against Vietnamese Communists and spoke favorably about **Ngo Dinh Diem** to U.S. policy makers.

Le Duan

The primary leader of the North Vietnamese Communist Party after **Ho Chi Minh**'s death in 1969.

Le Duc Tho

A senior North Vietnamese diplomat who engaged in secret negotiations in Paris with U.S. emissary **Henry A. Kissinger** in 1972, leading to the **cease-fire** that ended official U.S. involvement in Vietnam in January 1973.

Robert S. McNamara



The Secretary of Defense under **John F. Kennedy** and **Lyndon B. Johnson**, from 1961 to 1968. As the principle architect of the military strategy in Vietnam, McNamara initially advocated increasing U.S. involvement in Vietnam, but by 1966 started to question U.S. policy. After growing disillusioned with the direction of the war, McNamara was allowed to resign from his position following the **Tet Offensive** in early 1968. He later went on to serve as President of the World Bank. McNamara later wrote and spoke about how the war had been a terrible mistake, but failed to take responsibility for his role in orchestrating the conflict.

Ngo Dinh Diem



The U.S.-backed leader of the South Vietnamese **Republic of Vietnam** from 1955 until 1963. Diem came from a family that was both Confucian and Catholic, and though his Christianity endeared him to many U.S. policy makers, it alienated him from South Vietnam's Buddhist majority. Diem's regime quickly became corrupt and autocratic, cracking down viciously on Buddhist leaders and, with American support, ignoring the **Geneva Conference**'s promise of free elections in 1956. Increasingly paranoid, he gave his family members important positions of leadership in the government, which they abused. Although the United States continued to support Diem, this support ultimately waned, and Diem and his brother **Ngo Dinh Nhu** were assassinated in 1963 as part of a U.S.-approved coup.

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Ngo Dinh Nhu



A brother of **Ngo Dinh Diem** who effectively became a warlord after Diem appointed him head of the **Can Lao**, the South Vietnamese secret police. Brutal, exploitative, and corrupt, Nhu earned the universal hatred of the South Vietnamese population. His sharp-tongued wife, **Madame Nhu**, who served as South Vietnam's de facto first lady, was equally hated. Nhu's excesses were largely responsible for the U.S.-backed coup of November 1963 in which both Diem and Nhu were assassinated.

Madame Nhu

The wife of **Ngo Dinh Nhu** and de facto first lady of the corrupt South Vietnamese government under **Ngo Dinh Diem**. Madame Nhu was a hated figure and a public relations disaster, a sort of Vietnamese Marie-Antoinette who cared nothing for the struggles of Vietnamese peasants and displayed an extravagant fondness for all things French, despite the fact that the French were the hated former colonial masters of Vietnam. After a Buddhist monk publicly burned himself to death in 1963 in protest of the Diem regime, Madame Nhu derided the incident as a "barbecuing" and stated that she would provide gasoline and matches for the next monk who wanted to follow suit. She was abroad when a U.S.-backed coup toppled Diem and her husband in November 1963 and stayed away from Vietnam thereafter.

Richard M. Nixon

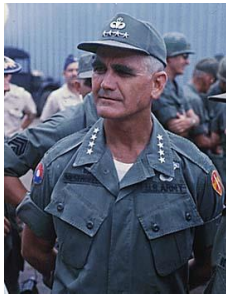
The 37th U.S. president, who orchestrated the U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam in the early 1970s, but not before escalating the bombing campaign and extending the fighting into Cambodia. Elected in 1968, Nixon claimed that amid the rising din of antiwar protests a "**silent majority**" of Americans still supported the war. All evidence suggests this was not really the case. Nonetheless, he engaged in a policy of **Vietnamization** to withdraw U.S. troops from Vietnam and hand over military authority to the South Vietnamese. Meanwhile, Nixon covertly expanded the scope of the war by secretly authorizing illegal military actions in **Cambodia** and **Laos**. By 1972, he and his national security advisor, **Henry A. Kissinger**, pursued secret negotiations with North Vietnam and engaged in diplomacy with both **China** and the **Soviet Union** in order to pressure North Vietnam into a cease-fire. Although Nixon was reelected in a landslide in 1972, his administration became dogged with scandals ranging from **Watergate** to the **Pentagon Papers** to the public revelation of the U.S. military actions in Cambodia. Despite his skilled diplomacy and success at removing U.S. troops from Vietnam, he resigned in 1974 to avoid impeachment over the scandals.

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Vo Nguyen Giap

Ho Chi Minh's leading general and the primary commander of Vietnamese Communist forces from the earliest days of the **Viet Minh**. A former lawyer and history teacher, Giap proved his military brilliance at the battle of **Dien Bien Phu** in 1954, in which he defeated the French to end the **First Indochina War** and give Vietnam more leverage at the **Geneva Conference** bargaining table. Giap remained involved in the North Vietnamese military throughout the ensuing struggle with the United States.

William C. Westmoreland



A U.S. Army general who in 1964 became the commander of the **MACV**, the corps of U.S. “military advisors” in Vietnam. As the war escalated and the United States sent troops, Westmoreland continually pushed for more U.S. ground forces in Vietnam and instituted **search-and-destroy** missions, as he believed that a war of **attrition** would result in a victory for the United States. His direction gave U.S. troops definitive goals, but also tended to put them in far greater danger than ever before, and his request for an additional 200,000 troops after the 1968 **Tet Offensive** shocked the American public, who had been reassured that the United States was making substantial headway in the war.

Terms

17th Parallel

The dividing line between **North Vietnam** and **South Vietnam** as established by the 1954 **Geneva Conference**. The 17th parallel was buffered by a demilitarized zone, or **DMZ**, between the two countries.

Agent Orange

A chemical herbicide and defoliant that U.S. forces sprayed extensively in order to kill vegetation in the Vietnamese jungle and expose Viet Cong hideouts. Agent Orange inflicted immense damage on Vietnam’s natural environment and led to decades of unforeseen health problems among Vietnamese civilians and U.S. military forces.

Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN)

The national army of South Vietnam, which U.S. “military advisors” of the **MACV** trained, beginning in 1962. By 1965, after several defeats by the Viet Cong at battles such as **Ap Bac** and **Pleiku**, the ARVN was seen as ineffective.

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Can Lao

The South Vietnamese secret police during the **Ngo Dien Diem** regime, which was controlled by Diem's hated brother **Ngo Dinh Nhu**.

Christmas Bombing

An intensive bombing campaign against **Hanoi** that President **Richard M. Nixon** launched in late December 1972, in an attempt to force the North Vietnamese into a peace settlement. The NVA did not surrender but instead called for a **cease-fire**, which was signed in January 1973.

COINTELPRO

The FBI's counterintelligence program, which President **Lyndon B. Johnson** authorized to spy on domestic anti-Vietnam War activists toward the end of his administration. COINTELPRO agents planted false evidence and arrested hundreds of antiwar activists on bogus charges of supporting Communism. These harsh and illegal tactics turned the American public away from the federal government and widened the **credibility gap**.

Containment

A U.S. foreign policy strategy during the Cold War, developed in 1947 by State Department analyst **George F. Kennan**. Under containment, the United States would not challenge nations already in the **Soviet Union's** sphere of influence but also would not tolerate any further Soviet or Communist expansion. Although containment was meant to apply primarily to Europe, it evolved into the **domino theory** that formed the basis for U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

Credibility Gap

The term applied to the difference between what the U.S. military and **Lyndon B. Johnson** were telling the American public about the Vietnam War and what the American media said was actually occurring on the ground. As a result of the credibility gap, many Americans began to question the president's honesty. This "credibility gap" widened further when Johnson authorized both the **CIA** and the FBI's **COINTELPRO** to spy on antiwar activists. The credibility gap made Johnson a political liability for the Democratic Party, and he declined to run for reelection in 1968.

Demilitarized Zone (DMZ)

The no-man's-land surrounding the border between **North Vietnam** and **South Vietnam** at the **17th parallel**.

Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV)

The **Ho Chi Minh**-led Communist government of North Vietnam which was created after the 1954 **Geneva Conference** divided the country at the **17th parallel**.

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Dien Bien Phu

A small village in the remote, mountainous northwest corner of Vietnam that was the site of a major French defeat at the hands of the **Viet Minh** in 1954. The French attempted to lure the Viet Minh into a trap at Dien Bien Phu, where a central base with an airstrip was defended by three surrounding artillery bases. Viet Minh General **Vo Nguyen Giap**, however, had Vietnamese peasants smuggle disassembled artillery pieces into the surrounding mountains, where they were then reassembled and used to bombard the French airstrip, destroying the French supply line. The decisive battle of the **First Indochina War**, Dien Bien Phu led France to seek a peace settlement and gave the Viet Minh negotiating power at the **Geneva Conference**.

Domino Theory

First popularized by President **Dwight D. Eisenhower** in 1954, the idea that if one nation fell to Communism, the surrounding nations would be likely to fall to Communism as well, starting a chain reaction in which nations fell like dominoes in a line. The domino theory guided U.S. foreign policy for years and was used to justify U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

Fragging

A practice, which erupted sporadically late in the Vietnam War, in which demoralized U.S. servicemen killed their own superior officers in order to avoid being sent on dangerous missions. Although fragging was not widespread, numerous specific incidents were reported.

French Indochina

The French colonial term for the area encompassing present-day Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam,

Geneva Conference

A 1954 peace conference at the end of the **First Indochina War**, prompted by the stunning French defeat at Dien Bien Phu. The conference issued the **Geneva Accords**, which divided Vietnam officially into **North Vietnam** and **South Vietnam** along the **17th parallel** as a temporary measure and promised free Vietnam-wide elections for 1956 (although these elections never occurred).

Gulf of Tonkin Resolution

A 1964 resolution, passed by a near-unanimous vote in the U.S. Congress, that gave President **Lyndon B. Johnson** a free hand to escalate the war in Vietnam. The resolution was prompted by an incident in which two U.S. Navy destroyers were allegedly attacked by North Vietnamese forces in the Gulf of Tonkin. Though not an explicit war declaration, the resolution empowered Johnson to initiate **Operation Rolling Thunder** and allowed a process of escalation that would eventually see more than 500,000 U.S. soldiers committed to the war in Vietnam.

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Military Assistance Command of Vietnam (MACV)

A group of U.S. “military advisors” whom President **John F. Kennedy** sent to Vietnam in 1962 to train the South Vietnamese army, the **ARVN**, to fight against the **Viet Cong**. The MACV’s numbers soared steadily through the 1960s as the United States became increasingly involved in Vietnam. General **William C. Westmoreland** became head of MACV in 1964.

My Lai Massacre

A 1968 raid on the tiny village of **My Lai** by an American unit in South Vietnam. The soldiers, angry and frustrated at their inability to find **Viet Cong** operatives in the village, killed up to 500 unarmed Vietnamese civilians—men, women, children, and elderly—without provocation. News of the massacre surfaced in 1969, outraging Americans and turning public opinion against the U.S. military. The leader of the company, Lieutenant **William Calley**, was court-martialed in 1971 and sentenced to a life term but later paroled.

Napalm

A flammable, sprayable, gasoline-based gel that the U.S. military used extensively as a weapon in Vietnam. Napalm inflicted devastating burns, killing and maiming many Vietnamese soldiers and civilians.

National Liberation Front (NLF)

An organization formed in 1960 to provide structure and support to the formerly isolated cells of the southern **Viet Cong**. Eventually, the terms NLF and Viet Cong came to be used interchangeably.

Nixon Doctrine

A proclamation issued by President **Richard M. Nixon** in 1969 that the United States would no longer send troops to fight Communist revolutions abroad. The doctrine, issued along with his policy of **Vietnamization**, effectively reversed the policies of several post-World War II U.S. presidents.

NSC-68

A 1950 National Security Council memo that advocated an enormous increase in U.S. military spending to combat the perceived growing threat of Communism. NSC-68 contributed to the **domino theory** that was later used to justify U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

Operation Rolling Thunder

A sustained U.S. bombing effort against North Vietnam authorized by President **Lyndon B. Johnson** in 1965 and lasting until 1968. Rolling Thunder was launched in response to a **Viet Cong** raid on a U.S. military base at **Pleiku** that killed several U.S. servicemen. When the air strikes

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failed to end the war, Johnson increased the number of U.S. soldiers in South Vietnam from roughly 200,000 to over 500,000.

Pentagon Papers

A secret U.S. government report, originally commissioned by Secretary of State **Robert S. McNamara**, to detail U.S. involvement in Vietnam since World War II. In 1971, former Defense Department official Daniel Ellsberg leaked the Pentagon Papers to the *New York Times* and other newspapers and caused an uproar. When the Nixon administration attempted to block their publication, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a ruling to allow their release to continue. Because the Pentagon Papers revealed that the U.S. government had lied about numerous secret operations in Vietnam, the American public grew even more distrustful of the government.

Republic of Vietnam (RVN)

The corrupt, U.S.-backed government of **South Vietnam**, which **Ngo Dinh Diem** proclaimed in 1955.

Search and Destroy

A U.S. military strategy designed to send U.S. troops out into the field proactively to locate and kill **Viet Cong** forces. The policy, instituted and supported by General **William C. Westmoreland**, stood in contrast to the previous U.S. policy to protect only “**strategic enclaves**,” those areas that the South Vietnamese government still held.

Silent Majority

The key words in a statement by President **Richard M. Nixon** about the antiwar movement. Nixon claimed that despite the fact that antiwar protests were becoming vocal and widespread, a “silent majority” of Americans still supported the war in Vietnam. In other words, the president claimed that noisy activists constituted only a small percentage of the American public. This was true, however, general support for the war was lower than Nixon claimed.

Students for a Democratic Society (SDS)

One of the major organizations of **antiwar protesters** in the United States during the 1960s. Founded in 1959, the quasi-socialist SDS began to organize widespread protests against the U.S. military **draft** by 1965.

Tet Offensive

A massive offensive launched by **Viet Cong** guerrillas on January 30, 1968, the Vietnamese new year holiday of **Tet**. The Tet Offensive comprised simultaneous attacks on dozens of U.S.-controlled sites in South Vietnam. Although the offensive resulted in a tactical victory for the United States and many Viet Cong casualties, the American public saw it as a setback, as the U.S. military and

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President **Lyndon B. Johnson** had led them to believe that the Viet Cong was already well on its way to defeat. The Tet Offensive caused public support for the war to plummet in the United States, especially when the U.S. military requested 200,000 soldiers in the months following the attacks.

Twenty-Sixth Amendment

A 1971 amendment to the U.S. Constitution that lowered the voting age from twenty-one to eighteen. The amendment was passed in response to protests that young U.S. soldiers fighting and dying in Vietnam lacked the legal right to vote for or against the politicians who were running the war. Although antiwar activists welcomed the amendment, they continued to protest.

Viet Cong (VC)

Akin to the American slang word “Commies,” an originally mildly derisive term for Communist forces in South Vietnam who opposed the U.S.-backed government in Saigon. “Viet Cong” grew to lose its negative connotation and came into common use as the war progressed. By the time of U.S. involvement, the Viet Cong was a sizable guerrilla force hidden among South Vietnam’s population, making its members extremely difficult to find or target. It often worked in conjunction with the professional **North Vietnamese Army (NVA)** to attack U.S. soldiers and supply lines. The United States lost the war in Vietnam in large part due to the Viet Cong’s tenacity and its widespread popularity with the South Vietnamese.

Viet Minh

Vietnamese Communist resistance forces, based in northern Vietnam and led by **Ho Chi Minh**, during the **First Indochina War** with France (1945–1954).

Vietnamization

President **Richard M. Nixon**’s 1969 plan that called for withdrawing almost all of the more than 500,000 U.S. troops in Vietnam over the next year and handing over more responsibility to the South Vietnamese. Although Nixon did remove troops, he also planned another intensive round of bombing in North Vietnam to convince Hanoi to end the war.

War Powers Resolution

An act passed by the U.S. Congress in 1973 after the extent of President **Richard M. Nixon**’s secret bombing campaigns in neutral Cambodia was revealed. The act required the president to notify Congress upon launching any U.S. military action abroad and limited any such action to sixty to ninety days in duration if Congress did not approve it.

Watergate

A domestic scandal in the United States that began in the summer of 1972, when police arrested five men breaking into the Democratic Party headquarters at the **Watergate Hotel** in Washington,

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D.C. President **Richard M. Nixon** publicly denied having any prior knowledge of the incident and created a special investigative committee to look into the matter. Eventually, it was revealed that Nixon had authorized both the break-in and the cover-up that followed. As the scandal exploded, calls arose for Nixon's impeachment; Nixon ultimately resigned in 1974. Taking advantage of the confusion and distraction in the Nixon administration, North Vietnamese forces moved into South Vietnam, setting the stage for an offensive in the spring of 1975 that led to the fall of **Saigon**.