

Why did America get involved in Vietnam?

Background to the War in Vietnam

Vietnam, a French colony, had been invaded and occupied by the Japanese during the second World War. Ho Chi Minh was the leader of a group of Vietnamese, called the Vietminh, who opposed the Japanese. Ho Chi Minh supported Communism and by the end of the war the Vietminh had gained control of North Vietnam.

After the defeat of the Japanese in 1945, the French returned to re-take control of Vietnam. Communist China sent aid to the Vietnamese. The US, fearing that the Communists could take control of south-east Asia, sent aid to the French.

In 1954, the French were defeated. Elections were held in the North and it became Communist led by Ho Chi Minh. The US stopped elections being held in the South because they were afraid that the Communists would win.



Ho Chi Minh



John F. Kennedy



Ho Chi Minh was upset that elections had not been held in the South and launched a guerrilla war against the government in the South. The Americans sent money, arms and advisors to help the south but the Viet Cong (Vietnamese Communists) could not be defeated.

In 1963, President Kennedy was assassinated and Vice President Johnson became President of the USA. Johnson believed that if the Communists took South Vietnam they would then go on to take control of South-East Asia. This would mean the loss of important military, political and commercial interests.

By 1965 the government in the South was on the verge of collapse and Johnson made the decision to send American troops into Vietnam.

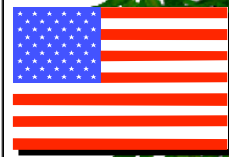
Activities

1. Copy the words in the glossary to the back of your exercise books.
2. Which two countries controlled Vietnam?
3. In which year were the French defeated?
4. Why did the Americans stop elections in South Vietnam?
5. What did the North Vietnamese call themselves?
6. Why was South-East Asia important to the Americans?
7. In which year did President Johnson make the decision to send troops to Vietnam.

Glossary

Communism – A classless society where everything is equally owned and controlled.

Guerrilla War – Small bands of soldiers harass and make sudden strikes on an army.



Vietnam

- President Kennedy is assassinated shortly after Diem.
- Lyndon Johnson assumes to presidency.

“You see, the Communists want to rule to world, and if we don’t stand up to them, they will do it. And we’ll be slaves. Now I’m not one of those folks seeing Communists under every bed. But I do know about the principles of power, and when one side is weak, the other steps in.”

- Lyndon Johnson

Task: Do you think President Johnson wanted to involve the United States in the conflict in Vietnam? How can you tell?



- Communist guerillas, called Viet Cong or VC, began attacking South Vietnam.
- They began winning support from some South Vietnamese people.

