

Vietnam War

Student's Name

Institutional Affiliation

Abstract

After World War II, Vietnam, a French colony, fought for their independence from France. Since Vietnam felt that the foreign invaders oppressed them, they opted to be independent from colonialism and imperialism. This would then pose a threat to the United States and the world.. Vietnam War is one of the contentious conflicts in the history of the United States. This paper discusses political mistakes made regarding American involvement in Vietnam War and also reviews the circumstances that made policymakers believe that the war could not be won.

Keywords: Vietnam War, communism, military

Vietnam War

Since Vietnam felt that the foreign invaders oppressed them, they opted to be independent from colonialism and imperialism. Sullivan (1985) indicates that after the defeat of the French in Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh, a communist revolutionary, was considered a hero that the people of Vietnam looked up to. Moreover, the country was split into two parts: the Communist North and the American-supported South. Communist North Vietnam posed a significant threat to the United States as it aimed to stop the spread of communist ideology. A unifying election was supposed to be held in 1956, however, South Vietnam, headed by Ngo Dinh Diem, together with the United States opposed the idea. According to Sullivan (1985), America and South Vietnam were aware that if the elections had been held, Ho Chi Minh would have been elected the president and would unite the North and South communism represented, in particular, by National Liberation Front, also referred to as Viet Cong, which received support from North Vietnam (Jennings, 2010). This paper converses the political blunders made regarding American involvement in Vietnam War and also reviews the circumstances that made policymakers believe that the war could not be won.

Political Mistakes of America in the Vietnam War

After an attack on two American naval destroyers that were stationed off the coast of Vietnam, the Congress assembled for passing the famous Gulf of Tonkin Resolution (Martel, 1992). Martel (1992) directs that it was the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution that gave authority to President Johnson Lyndon to do everything possible to drive back any armed attack against the military forces of the United States and to preclude further belligerence by the communist

government of North Vietnam. According to Martel (1992), the United States Congress passed this on August 7th, 1964 launching the full-scale American involvement in the Vietnam War.

The motivations of President Johnson were on the ground of him being elected in 1964 and passing the Great Society Legislation in 1964-1965. This was what made the president insecure because he felt threatened under those political and domestic objectives. The American president then hoped that the military would provide him with advice that would allow him to make decisions that would not jeopardize those goals. The Secretary of Defense with president's advisors developed a strategy that only addressed the wishes and concerns of the president and it was referred to as "graduated pressure". The strategy was based on a wrong assumption that limited covert actions, military actions, and bombings against North Vietnam would make the leadership of North Vietnam led by Ho Chi Minh cease from supporting the South Vietnamese communists. This kind of thinking brought about many problems.

Lieutenant General McMaster in his interview indicates that the problem was that the United States mirror-imaged the opponent and applied to Ho Chi Minh the rational man theory of English common law. The acts of war and war itself unleashed a psychological trend that did not allow to rationally forecast the events that would unfold in the future.

Another mistake that the United States made, according to Lieutenant General McMaster, was reaching a standoff situation. This only left the United States with military force options as a solution to compel an outcome which is in contention with the writings of Schelling Thomas on coercive force.

It is at that point that the Vietnamese communist Ho Chi Minh had an initiative and responded predictably. Jennings (2010) indicates that in 1964 there existed the Sigma war games that predicted the future. The mistakes of the United States president and the Secretary of

Defense were that they thought that they did not need proper recommendations from the military chiefs. Moreover, the president decided to split them to make it impossible for them to hinder him to implement his policy (Sullivan, 1985). This was absolutely not productive because it inhibited and removed approach that could be used to correct what was a retrospect and imprudent policy. This act by the president and the Secretary of Defense was an undemocratic circumvention of the United States Constitution (Jennings, 2010).

Circumstances that Made Policymakers Believe the War could not be Won

At the time of President Harry Truman, the United States established a foreign policy doctrine called Containment (Matthias, 2001). Matthias (2001) indicates that this policy was passed not to fight the communist Soviet Union but rather to confine the Soviet Union and other communists to the existing boundaries. The basis of the United States strategy of containment and the will and reason to enter the war in Vietnam was due to the domino theory (Matthias, 2001). The war in Vietnam came as a result of the national strategy of containment. With this policy, the United States thought that it could easily stop communist belligerence into the states of Southeast Asia.

The domino hypothesis implied that if one nation went communist in Asia, that would start a chain reaction. Tragically, the United States foreign policy leaders in the mid-1960s conferred a preeminent demonstration of misinterpretation by mediating openly in the Vietnam War. The intercession turned out to be catastrophic. In addition to other things, it damaged a built-up vital directive against submitting the United States military power to a vast scale war on the terrains of Asia (Holsti, 2006).

The premise of containment was that the Soviet Union was expansionist having a fanatic faith that made them determined to impose absolute authority on the world. Holsti (2006)

indicates that the policy dictated that no nation could be a neutral or nonaligned nation which meant they could be part of the Soviet empire. The doctrine of containment insisted that war had to be avoided, but the United States pledged themselves to prevent or stop any communist governments from existing and expanding. The United States president at that time did not want to have any negotiations about his implemented policies and his decisions. According to Lieutenant General McMaster, the key issue at that time was that there was an inherently ambiguous line between advocacy and advice. The president needed to get the best military advice, but instead, he crossed the line between advocacy and advice of certain policies that was a dangerous approach to the state democracy and civil control.

References

- A Conversation with Lieutenant General H. R. McMaster. (n.d.). Retrieved November 29, 2017,
From <https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/studio/multimedia/20141204-a-conversation-with-lieutenant-general-h-r-mcmaster>
- Holsti, O. R. (2006). *Making American foreign policy*. New York, NY [u.a.: Routledge.
- Jennings, P. (2010). *Politically incorrect guide to the Vietnam War*. Washington, D.C: Regnery
Pub.
- Martel, E. (December 07, 1992). Gulf of Tonkin. *Oah Magazine of History*, 7, 2, 36-38.
- Matthias, W. C. (2001). *America's strategic blunders: Intelligence analysis and national security
Policy, 1936-1991*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Sullivan, M. P. (1985). *The Vietnam War: A study in the making of American policy*. Lexington:
The University Press of Kentucky.