

BardMUNC Crisis Simulation

Background Guide

Nixon's Cabinet: The First Hundred Days

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## **Topics to Address:**

Topic A: Creating a comprehensive plan to secure lasting peace in Vietnam without allowing the Viet Cong to take over Vietnam

- This topic is what delegates should focus on most throughout the debate. How will you find a way to end the war quickly and make good on Nixon's grandstanding promises while simultaneously preventing the Viet Cong from winning the war? Keep in mind that it would seem hypocritical to increase the number of troops stationed in Vietnam considering Nixon's personal positions.

Topic B: Finding a way to pull troops out of Vietnam in an organized and systematic way while also demonstrating the United States' commitment to halting the progression of communism in Southeast Asia.

- Nixon's primary campaign promise was that he would shift much more of the burden of the war on South Vietnam, which would satisfy some of the American dissatisfaction with the war so far. However up until this point South Vietnam has been an extremely shaky ally with a tenuous grip on its sovereignty. How will you enact the Vietnamization plans cautiously enough to prevent South Vietnam from collapsing?

Topic C: Generating fiscal policy and making budgetary decisions that can be used to finance the war's expenditures

- This topic is relatively straightforward and has a great breadth of interpretability, and for this reason it can really work to a delegate's benefit. If you can find an intelligent way to finance the war and its expenditures, then you will stand out among your committee members as a champion of logistical enterprise.

Topic D: Ensuring that President Nixon command the popular support of both the American people and the global community, especially as he begins to target the neighboring area of Cambodia and puts his Madman Theory to the test.

- While the primary focus of this committee is ending the Vietnam war, making sure that the international community is on board with Nixon's decisions as well as maintaining Nixon's popularity domestically should certainly be on the minds of all the committee members. Without popular support, Nixon and the members of the committee will be vilified for their actions (especially if it is decided that the Madman Theory is the best course of action)

**Mission Statement:**

Delegates,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the 2018 Bard Model United Nations Conference. While our conference is a short exercise, only taking place within one day, I am confident that you all will enjoy the simulation and leave the conference with a sense of satisfaction about the work that you have done. Unlike the other committees involved in BardMUNC, your committee will be presented with a Crisis simulation. This means that the delegates involved in this simulation will be in a much less guided scenario than in other groups, and much of the evolving story arch is based on the whims of the players as opposed to the chairs. The topic of this Crisis is Nixon's promise to end the Vietnam war. During his presidential campaign, Nixon assured the public that he had a "secret plan" to end the war, and that he would carry out said plan when he was elected. While the public didn't entirely buy into Nixon's "secret plan", they saw that the Democrats of the era (represented by Lyndon Johnston) were intentionally escalating warfare against North Vietnam in an attempt to prevent Southeast Asia from becoming Communist. Nixon presented as a mainstream politician that was committed to ending the war, which

brought him a narrow victory in 1968 against incumbent vice president Hubert Humphrey. The results were clear; it was time for the war to end, and Nixon was put into office to do just that. Without a solid plan, however, Nixon could swiftly become unpopular for not making good on his word. For this reason, the now-president Richard Nixon has gathered you all in the hopes that you can find a way to mediate the situation in Vietnam without allowing Communism to flourish within Southeast Asia. As you will come to see, it isn't easy to end a war in a developing nation without making sacrifices. Your decisions must reflect America's desire to both end Vietnam abruptly and maintain posterity. Enjoy your research delegates, I look forward to our official meeting!

Best,

Crisis Chair Adam Savino

### **Pre-War Background of Vietnam:**

Vietnam has had an extensive history of both fighting off and becoming subject to invaders and colonization. The Viet were initially a loose ethnic group that was conquered by China in 111 B.C. that would end up taking a heavy cultural influence from the Chinese during their rule. Religion, language, and artistic expression traditionally utilized or practiced by the Chinese was assimilated by the Viet<sup>1</sup>. China would go on to rule Vietnam for around a thousand years, however their ruling presence would not be consistent within this time as the Vietnamese would spur numerous rebellions against Chinese imperial control. China's conquest of the Viet people also incorporated the area known as "Nhat Nam" into the Vietnamese colony, establishing a country closer to what we know as Vietnam today rather than the just the northern regions of "Giao-Chi" and "Cuu-Chan". Chinese dominion over Vietnam was also

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<sup>1</sup> Lawrence, Mark. *The Vietnam War: A Concise International History*. Oxford University Press, 2008. Pp. 8, 16-17, 18-22, 52-61, 74-83, 117-136, 137-139.

marked by many attempts by the Viet to escape Chinese colonial rule through acts of rebellion. Trung Trac was the first of these liberators, pushing out the Han rulers in 40 B.C. and establishing a short lived aristocratic district governance system. Trac's rebellion only lasted two years, and was crushed by Han General Ma Yuan with extreme prejudice, however this altercation would forever color Vietnam's perception of Han China and would lead to many more rebellions to come. During the 6 Dynasties era (222-589) many revolutionaries would challenge the weak internal governance of a broken China in order to create an independant Vietnam, but it would not be until 939 A.D. that Vietnam (now controlling the Southern region of Annam) would be independant of China's control<sup>2</sup>. That said, China would continue to vie for power in Vietnam for the next thousand years, succeeding occasionally in implementing governmental power over Vietnam. China's domination of Vietnam had clearly lead to an odd relationship between the two nations that has persisted to this day, as Vietnamese nationalism relies heavily on the cultural impositions of the Chinese and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam takes a great deal of influence from the People's Republic of China. In particular, the Vietnamese acceptance and propagation of Maoism seems to demonstrate a continuation of the close relationship between China and Vietnam, even though Chinese imperialism ended over a thousand years ago(JDocsh4). An understanding of China's influences on Vietnam is an important understanding to have in regards to this crisis scenario, because it gives context to Vietnamese traditions, practices, and nationalism, all of which are relevant to any diplomat trying to remedy a conflict with the Vietnamese.

The most recent colonizers of Vietnam were not the Chinese, but instead the French. In 1843 France began it's open occupation of Vietnam, attempting to weaken the control of the official government and strengthen its economic and strategic position in Asia. By 1862 France

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<sup>2</sup> Woods, L. Shelton. *Vietnam: A Global Studies Handbook*. ABC-CLIO, 2002. Pp. 15-21, 41-49.

had proven victorious and had quite a bit of control over Vietnam, and outright had proprietorship over 3 provinces. France did not aim only for Vietnam, and soon would have both Vietnam and Cambodia as members of its protectorate. During this time they intentionally divided Vietnam by locale, calling Vietnamese people either Cochin Chinese, Annamese, or Tonkinese. By doing so, France strategically prevented unity within Vietnam to quell any potential for an immediate rebellion. France also impeded educational opportunities for the Vietnamese, which would drop the literacy rate considerably during their rule<sup>3</sup>. While a landholding and educated class of Vietnamese evolved within French-Indochina, they were only allowed within the lower levels of the bureaucracy. Much of the colonial revenue came from rice sales, which amounted to around 229,000 tons annually, and 70% of Vietnam's total revenue was produced by the French government-owned businesses. Heavy land alienation prevented the Vietnamese from gaining control over their own resources, as 57 percent of the population was landless peasants who worked for the landowning class (around 25% of people)<sup>4</sup>. Despite the attempts of the French to completely subjugate the people of Vietnam, there was a considerable revolutionary fervor in Vietnam incited by Phan Boi Chau and Phan Chu Trinh. Phan Boi Chau suggested in his writings that Vietnam try to adapt a Western-style government and become decolonized in order to achieve this republic. Chau and the group known as the Modernization Society worked endlessly to promote literature on shaking off the chains of colonization. Phan Chu Trinh, on the other hand did not believe in immediate revolution but believed that France should provide Vietnam the means in which it can become a strong nation over time. Over time, these ideas would lead to the formation of Vietnamese nationalism (especially within well educated circles)<sup>5</sup>. The French occupation of Indochina would seriously

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<sup>3</sup> Woods, L. Shelton. *Vietnam: A Global Studies Handbook*. ABC-CLIO, 2002. Pp. 15-21, 41-49.

<sup>4</sup> Cima, Ronald J.. *Vietnam: A Country Study*. "Chapter 3: The Economy". Library of Congress, 1989. Pp. 30-33

<sup>5</sup> Lawrence, Mark. *The Vietnam War: A Concise International History*. Oxford University Press, 2008. Pp. 8, 16-17, 18-22, 52-61, 74-83, 117-136, 137-139.

play into Vietnam's future with Ho Chi Minh, and would set the stage for the revolutionary politics of both the incoming Vietnamese war of Independence and the Vietnam-America war.

### **Rise of Ho Chi Minh and Ngo Dinh Diem:**

France's occupation of Vietnam set the stage for the introduction of Vietnam's most infamous rebel to this day: Ho Chi Minh. Born Nguyen Tat Thanh, Minh was raised in a strictly patriotic household for most of his developmental years. During his young adult life, Minh acted as a student activist and eventually left the country of his own volition to see the world. His travels brought him to both the United States and Britain, and in the later of which he drew up a petition for the great powers to heavily reform the system of colonial rule over Vietnam. When his movement was ignored, Minh saw radical action as the solution to ending colonial rule that the French were imposing on the Vietnamese. When Minh returned to Vietnam, his message of anti-colonial Leninism mixed with hardline Vietnamese nationalism appealed very strongly to much of the Vietnamese population. Thus, the Indochinese Communist Party was born<sup>6</sup>. The Viet Minh saw their chance to overthrow the currently occupying forces in Vietnam through the outbreak of World War Two. At this time both France and Japan were staking claims in Vietnam, however both were also playing a large part in the second World War and could not afford to fight a war in Vietnam as well. Ultimately, dominion over Vietnam was ceded to the Annamese Emperor Bao Dai and Vietnam's independence was briefly to be recognized. During this time, the Indochinese Communist Party wielded most of the power and Bao Dai remained primarily a figurehead representing the validity of the Vietnamese state<sup>7</sup>. Despite the momentous triumph for the Viet Minh, they knew that they could not celebrate yet. Once victory in Europe had been achieved the French swiftly turned back to attempting to re-colonize Indochina. This war for

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<sup>6</sup> Lawrence, Mark. *The Vietnam War: A Concise International History*. Oxford University Press, 2008. Pp. 8, 16-17, 18-22, 52-61, 74-83, 117-136, 137-139.

<sup>7</sup> Gluckstein, Donny. "Vietnam – Anti-Imperialist Breakthrough." *A People's History of the Second World War: Resistance Versus Empire*, Pluto Press, London, 2012, pp. 193–206.



independence set the stage for many of the Viet Minh's more well-developed areas of tactical expertise, such as hit-and-run warfare, tunnel crafting, and strategic maneuvering for ambushes. As time went on, it became increasingly clear that the French could not maintain large amounts of land despite their superior firepower. Continuing to fight in Vietnam would be a sink of resources that were crucial to rebuilding post- WW2 France, and any territory that they could capture would easily become the Viet Minh's if they were not constantly watching over it<sup>8</sup>. Eventually the French realized they could not fight against the Vietnamese forever. However, the United States feared that the development of a Marxist state in Vietnam would spread communism across the general region, and so they felt it was necessary to intervene.



While the Democratic Republic of Vietnam's leaders were formally supported in Northern Vietnam, they were much less popular in South Vietnam. America, which had just lost its ability to debuff communism in Asia after the French were defeated, was facing some serious calls from right-wing ideologues to put an end to the DRV as a means of preventing communism from spreading in a domino effect. The French still had a considerable amount of troops in the South and thus could utilize the (albeit shaky)

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<sup>8</sup> Paul, Christopher, et al. "Indochina, 1946–1954: Case Outcome: COIN Loss (Mixed, Favoring Insurgents)." *Paths to Victory: Detailed Insurgency Case Studies*, RAND Corporation, 2013, pp. 1-9, 23–30

anti-communist sentiment to keep some control over South Vietnam. This began the Eisenhower administration's tolerance of a more direct role in Vietnam through outright military support of the French alongside the complete support of Prime Minister Ngo Dinh Diem. Diem, appointed by Emperor Bao Dai, seemed to be America's best possible compatriot in its fight against communism. While Diem was a Vietnamese nationalist who was distrustful of the French, he also recognized that the primary enemy to South Vietnam was the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and garnered support from American conservatives because of his devout Catholic faith. Before long the United States and the Republic of Vietnam were economically quite close; the Republic of Vietnam relied very much on the United States to provide it with consumer and military goods alike<sup>9</sup>. The main point of tension was now the North Vietnam/South Vietnam border, as each country laid claim to the other and both were now militaristically sound enough to defend their borders. As time went on, Eisenhower began promising more and more money to the RV in an attempt to make up for France's pulling out of the imperial struggle. By 1954 he still made the claim that there would be no way American troops would end up stationed in Vietnam, however discord within Vietnam was clearly growing. America would be heavily involved with attacks on the Ho Chi Minh trail not long after Eisenhower expressed this sentiment, indicating that tensions were only beginning to rise<sup>10</sup>. Eisenhower actively refused to turn Vietnam into another ground war for America to become engaged in, however his concessions in attacking Vietnam and the development of unique, separate governments for the RV and the DRV ramped up the likelihood for the next United States presidents to react in the acceleratory manner that they did.

### **The Steady Progression Toward the War**

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<sup>9</sup> Lawrence, Mark. *The Vietnam War: A Concise International History*. Oxford University Press, 2008. Pp. 8, 16-17, 18-22, 52-61, 74-83, 117-136, 137-139.

<sup>10</sup> Mann, Robert. *A Grand Delusion: America's Descent into Vietnam*. Basic Books, 2001. Pp. 70-147, 225-256, 458-467, 627-634.

The Vietnam War was not swiftly begun. It can be best described as a series of concessions; military assistance for the South, bombing campaigns against the Ho Chi Minh trail, and attempts to prevent surrounding nations from taking direct influence from the communists. A marked point in which the option of an all-out conventional war became more likely was the inauguration of John F Kennedy. Kennedy's policy toward Vietnam began with an escalation of pre-existing measures from Eisenhower's time as president, investing increasing time and resources into bolstering the South Vietnamese forces. However, Kennedy would also begin testing his own luck against other communist forces, arguing for and considering an invasion of Thailand and orchestrating the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961. Not long after Kennedy orchestrated the first official instance of United States military intervention in Vietnam by stationing a special operations task force into South Vietnam. While Kennedy vehemently denied that US intervention in Vietnam was a declaration of war, Senator Wayne Morse noted in 1962 that presidential advisors were prepared for a long fight in which many American soldiers could potentially die. The prospect of war shifted from the realm of possibility to the realm of reality during Kennedy's time in office<sup>11</sup>. All of this, of course, contradicts Kennedy's 1954 sentiments that pouring money into South Vietnam would be a "dangerously futile and self destructive" action to take (OpView41). While all of this political turmoil unravelled in America, Diem had been deposed by a US coup for his strict anti-Buddhist stance and general unpopularity in '63. Taking notice of this internal unrest, the Viet Minh began doubling their efforts to gain command of South Vietnam. While Diem's successor, Nguyen Khanh, would attempt to regain control of South Vietnam with his military coup, significant damage had been done to the Republic of Vietnam's legitimacy. Chaos began to break out within major population centers due to poor internal management and the looming outside threat of the Vietminh. To

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<sup>11</sup> Mann, Robert. *A Grand Delusion: America's Descent into Vietnam*. Basic Books, 2001. Pp. 70-147, 225-256, 458-467, 627-634.

make matters worse, the Kennedy assassination occurring not long after meant that Vietnam's fate was now left to Kennedy's predecessor, Lyndon B. Johnson<sup>12</sup>. Kennedy's short era of presidential power left a resounding impact on the escalation of America into the Vietnam War, and can perhaps be seen as the beginning of the true "war" due to his implementation of ground forces into Vietnam. This beginning, mixed with the destabilization of South Vietnam, meant that Johnson would have quite a bit of work on his hands as he inherited the presidency.

While JFK began to make it clear that the war was inevitable, Lyndon B. Johnson's full presidency can be seen as the breaking point full, outright delving into the Vietnam conflict as a war. While he initially danced around the prospects of a full on war during the remainder of Kennedy's former president, Johnson picked up the pace significantly after he was elected into office in '64. Johnson's devotion to the war took many forms, including an incredible amount of research and development focused primarily on weapons, inventory, and strategic initiatives as well as an outright brutal onslaught of ground forces and bombing campaigns picking up primarily in '66. One of LBJ's primary reasons for investing so heavily into the Vietnam war was the fact that South Vietnam was extremely unstable and looking more and more like it was going to collapse, especially since multiple military coups had displaced the post-Diem heads of state numerous times already. Because of this, Johnson began taking more matters into his own hands regarding the war effort and started his series of bombings on the Ho Chi Minh trail. These bombings would later evolve into Operation Rolling Thunder, and would be constant and brutal until the end of the war<sup>13</sup>. Strategic air strikes were not the only thing that Johnson increased; Johnson began to deploy significantly more troops within South Vietnam as well. Of course, these troops were extremely well-equipped in that major facilities for troops in South Vietnam were also built by Johnson. Food, housing, medical facilities, and anything else the

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<sup>12</sup> Lawrence, Mark. *The Vietnam War: A Concise International History*. Oxford University Press, 2008. Pp. 8, 16-17, 18-22, 52-61, 74-83, 117-136, 137-139.

<sup>13</sup> Karnow, Stanley. *Vietnam: A History*. Penguin Books, 1984. Pp. 328-403, 493-527

troops would need were made sure to be accounted for as he sent massive amounts of soldiers into Vietnam<sup>14</sup>. This marked the beginning of the recognition that what the United States is doing in Vietnam is fighting a war. By no uncertain terms, Lyndon B. Johnson would immerse the United States completely in this conflict by intensifying it in all areas. However, he would also see it through for the remainder of his presidency and would have to deal with the consequences of full declaring war on the DRV, which will be accounted for in the passage to come.

### **The Pre-Nixon Years and Nixon's Immediate Positions**

The two years leading up to Nixon's presidency would be the most brutal years of the Vietnam war yet. By late 1966, Johnson's plan seemed to be



continuing to ramp up the amount of troops sent into Vietnam. However, it was clear that the war was much more of a priority to diplomats than to everyday Americans and soldiers. While military superiority was notably on the American side, the average citizen was afraid for what might happen to the soldiers stationed there. Around 300 American soldiers had died by this

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<sup>14</sup> Mann, Robert. *A Grand Delusion: America's Descent into Vietnam*. Basic Books, 2001. Pp. 70-147, 225-256, 458-467, 627-634.

point and the prospect of sending more soldiers in (especially considering that drafting soldiers could mean that anyone could die in Vietnam) did not seem like a positive possibility for many people. Thus, mass protests broke loose and some even committed political suicide. While these concerns reached Johnson's ears, he did little to respond to them. His main response was a period in which he halted his bombing campaign for 37 days, but promptly resumed after. The flack he was getting from protests and media outlets was considerable, leading Johnson to become much more willing to meet with Ho Chi Minh, however these talks did not get far due to the refusal of the Americans to unconditionally halt the bombings<sup>15</sup>. In early 1968, the most memorable advancement of the Vietnam war occurred: the Tet Offensive. Leading up to the attack DRV forces intentionally lead American troops away from major population centers. DRV forces then attacked urban centers during the holiday of Tet, a holiday in which they had previously honored a ceasefire, while American forces believed that the Viet Minh would attack the coastline as they had before. The battles that would ensue would be the bloodiest in the entire war, leading to the death or serious wounding of around 34,000 US and Republic of Vietnam soldiers(though leading to near twice that for the Viet Minh). These attacks failed to produce any lasting gains for the communists land-wise, however they allowed for a great American reaction that spread opposition to the war fairly quickly. While Johnson responded by sending in double the troops, and in an attempt to use the momentum from Tet to his advantage ramped up the bloodshed, causing 14 thousand more American troops to die. American antiwar protests were at an all-time high, and democrats lost popularity extremely quickly<sup>16</sup>. The results of the last election were clear; it is time for Nixon to end this war.

Richard Nixon's 1968 presidential campaign was framed around the idea of achieving "peace with honor". This meant that Nixon promised to end the war without sacrificing the ideals that

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<sup>15</sup> Karnow, Stanley. *Vietnam: A History*. Penguin Books, 1984. Pp. 328-403, 493-527

<sup>16</sup> Lawrence, Mark. *The Vietnam War: A Concise International History*. Oxford University Press, 2008. Pp. 8, 16-17, 18-22, 52-61, 74-83, 117-136, 137-139.

America was touting while engaged in the war. However, Nixon was not convinced of simply withdrawing from the war. Nixon has always been an extreme anti-communist, attacking the democrats for allowing China to successfully revolutionize, and because of this he recognizes that withdrawing from Vietnam immediately would open him up to extreme critique. Nixon's primary focus is on creating a successful and highly functioning South Vietnam, and making sure that the North cannot overtake it<sup>17</sup>. Much of Nixon's internal promises were hinged on the idea of preserving law and order, and retaining peace both at home and abroad<sup>18</sup>. As it stands, Nixon's main tactical consideration is his "Madman Theory", in which he will attempt to make North Vietnam believe that America will resort to any means to end this war by ramping up bombings and beginning to target Cambodia. By doing this, Nixon believes that he can cause Ho Chi Minh to completely concede. While Nixon has yet to try this measure, it seems somewhat clear that both the DRV and the US have no desire to concede. However, Nixon is very open to a Peace proposal- albeit one that would be very much in the US's favor- and hopes that North Vietnam will become receptive to one as well<sup>19</sup>. Nixon also promoted the idea of "Vietnamization", which entailed shifting the burden of the war on South Vietnam in order to help them develop greater independence and lower the amount of American lives lost by the war<sup>20</sup>. These ideals colored Nixon's bid for election and won him a slim majority of the votes, but it is up to all of you to successfully implement policy and make plans that will allow for Nixon to pull out of Vietnam while being consistent with his beliefs.

## **Vietnam: Ecology and Economy**

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<sup>17</sup> Lawrence, Mark. *The Vietnam War: A Concise International History*. Oxford University Press, 2008. Pp. 8, 16-17, 18-22, 52-61, 74-83, 117-136, 137-139.

<sup>18</sup> Richard Nixon Presidential Library. *Biography of Richard Milhous Nixon*. Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum. Pp. 1-4

<sup>19</sup> Mann, Robert. *A Grand Delusion: America's Descent into Vietnam*. Basic Books, 2001. Pp. 70-147, 225-256, 458-467, 627-634.

<sup>20</sup> Richard Nixon Presidential Library. *Biography of Richard Milhous Nixon*. Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum. Pp. 1-4

Vietnam's climate and geography was brutal to adjust to for American forces, who were not used to the tropical conditions imposed upon them. The humidity of Vietnam, in particular, seemed to be a factor that wore down on soldiers<sup>21</sup>. This is understandable, as humidity in Vietnam averages at around 84% per year<sup>22</sup>. Humidity, however, is not Vietnam's only issue, as monsoons regularly impact the country within the summer season. On average, the coastline of Vietnam is exposed to around 7 typhoons annually<sup>23</sup>. This can cause serious damage against the residences of the people who live near the area in which a typhoon strikes. Vietnam's tropical environment allows for a great diversity in flora and fauna within the country. Most of Vietnam's agricultural sector relies mainly on the Mekong and Red River Deltas as suitable areas in which cropping can occur<sup>24</sup>. The Red River Delta is the primary source of the fertile land in North Vietnam, while the Mekong Delta is mainly utilized by the Southern portion of Vietnam. The principal mineral resources that Vietnam has at its disposal are coal, copper, crude oil, manganese, zinc, and silver<sup>25</sup>. Two of Vietnam's primary agricultural products are rice



and rubber. Rice is the primary subsistence crop of Vietnam. Most of the production of food goods such as rice, coffee, and tea as well as other agricultural goods such as tobacco occur in the

<sup>21</sup> World Bank, *Vulnerability, Risk Reduction, and Adaptation to Climate Change: Vietnam*. World Bank, 2011. Pp. 1-14

<sup>23</sup> World Bank, *Vulnerability, Risk Reduction, and Adaptation to Climate Change: Vietnam*. World Bank, 2011. Pp. 1-14

<sup>24</sup> GlobalSecurity.Org. *Vietnam- Environment*. GlobalSecurity.Org, Unknown Date of Publication

<sup>25</sup> Library of Congress, *Country Profile: Vietnam*. Library of Congress, 2005. Pp. 1-20



south. Most of Vietnam's forests are in the North, and said forests act as a significant provider of resources for shelter, food, and other materials for local residents. The northern areas of Vietnam are much more industrially focused after France's occupation of Vietnam, and are very much invested in the generation of fuel resources mentioned above as well as invested in the production and processing of rubber from rubber plantations, most of which are located in the North<sup>26</sup>. While these details are not related to the Vietnam war itself, it is important to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the different sides of the conflict as well as understand the most basic details of the background of Vietnam's ecology so effective decision making can occur in the crisis room.

### **Cambodia and Laos' Relationship to the War**

One of the most decisive factors in the Vietnam war was the relationship that it had with the surrounding nations of Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos. The rebellion of Vietnam against the French was extremely inspirational for Vietnam's neighbors, creating a communist party in Cambodia known as the Khmer Rouge<sup>27</sup> and a leftist party in Laos known as the Pathet Lao. Cambodia in particular was of extreme importance to the Viet Minh, as they used the Cambodian border to their advantage by sneaking through Cambodia to permeate South Vietnam. While the Cambodian government, lead by Prince Norodom Sihanouk, remains neutral, the Khmer Rouge has been training in Vietnam and becoming far stronger in organization and it seems as though neutrality in Vietnam is becoming less and less of a viable option<sup>28</sup>. Laos is in a bit of a different situation, as it is currently under the control of a neutral government with strong communist leadership and citizenry. After the France-Indochina war of

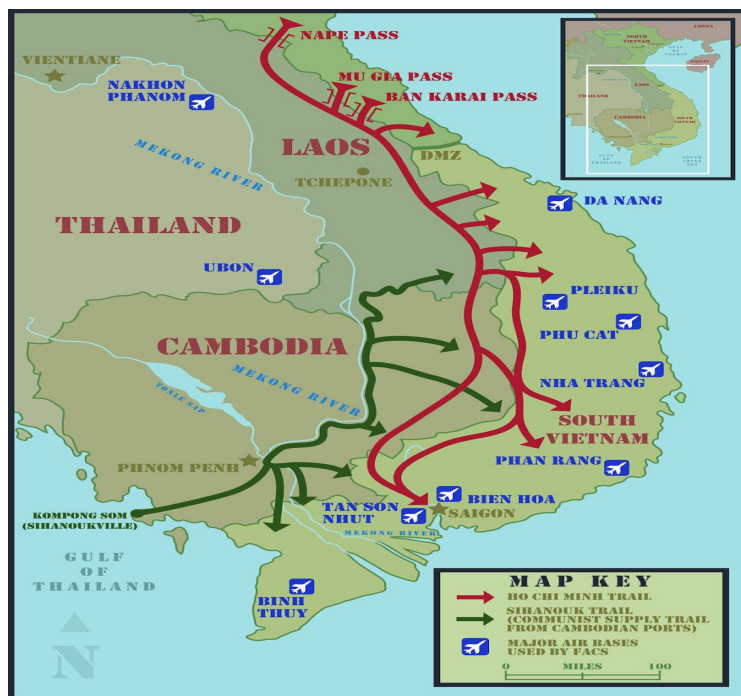
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<sup>26</sup> To, Phuc Xuan and Nghi, Huu Tran. *Rubber Expansion and Forest Protection in Vietnam*. Tropenbos International Vietnam, 2014.

<sup>27</sup> Paul, Christopher, et al. "Cambodia, 1967–1975: Case Outcome: COIN Loss." *Paths to Victory: Detailed Insurgency Case Studies*, RAND Corporation, 2013, pp. 309–317.

<sup>28</sup> Dobbins, James, et al. "Cambodia." *Overcoming Obstacles to Peace: Local Factors in Nation-Building*, RAND Corporation, 2013, pp. 29–66.

Independence a new system of government would need to be established in Laos. One prince, Souvanna Phouma, was focused mainly on staying neutral, while his half-brother Souphanouvong was a stringent Pathet Lao leader. Although there was an initial attempt to reconcile the Pathet Lao and absorb them into the government, the government of Laos become more and more divided until ultimately a series of coups staged by both the right wing government and the Pathet Lao resulted in Souvanna Phouma in power at this time. However, it is clear that the communist party still plays a significant role in Laos and is clearly attached to Souvanna Phouma<sup>29</sup>.



The route known as the “Ho Chi Minh Trail” also lead through Laos, and provided the Viet Cong a valuable method of transporting goods into the Republic of Vietnam for general use. The trail through Laos also provided the Vietnamese viable opportunities to infiltrate and ambush South Vietnamese forces in strategic locations. The trail at

this point in the war is extremely detailed as it has been worked on since the France-Indochina war of Independence. Particular measures have been taken to make sure that there is as little disturbance as possible to the natural environment around the trail in order to disempower any attempts at tracking. American attempts at surveillance and detection of the Ho Chi Minh trail

<sup>29</sup> ELLIOTT, MAI, and James A. Thomson. “Laos and Thailand: Sideshows.” *RAND in Southeast Asia: A History of the Vietnam War Era*, RAND Corporation, 2010, pp. 541–614

have been largely unsuccessful under Kennedy and Johnson, however the most promising measure that has been attempted is operation Igloo White, which placed a plethora of sensors around areas suspected to be a part of the Ho Chi Minh trail<sup>30</sup>. The importance of Vietnam's border states of Laos and Cambodia to the waging of this war is extreme, and because of this it is extremely important to fully understand the Viet Minh's relationship with these powers in order to effectively stop the war.

### **Conclusion:**

While Nixon has made it clear that he wants to end the war, it seems as though he has promised more than he can deliver by himself. You all must work together to end the Vietnam war without disturbing your own beliefs and conscious, and so all of the factors mentioned above must inform your decisions before you proceed with any action. Be cautious, as three presidents and their advisors prior to you have not been able to successfully end this war. Utilize all of this information as well as any information you come in to the committee with and try to make a plan of action that will make sense when compared to your beliefs. Ultimately, it is up to you how this war will turn out, so make sure Nixon's presidency is not remembered as a blemish on America's name.

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<sup>30</sup> ROSENAU, WILLIAM. "U.S. AIR GROUND OPERATIONS AGAINST THE HO CHI MINH TRAIL, 1966–1972." *Special Operations Forces and Elusive Enemy Ground Targets: Lessons from Vietnam and the Persian Gulf War*, 1st ed., RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, CA; Arlington, VA; Pittsburgh, PA, 2001, pp. 5–28.