

DOCUMENT BASED QUESTION
THE VIETNAM WAR
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Directions: The following document based question requires you to utilize both the information that is contained in the presented documents and also information that you have learned in this course about this particular time period in order to earn a high score on you essay.

Question: Throughout the history of the United States, there have been many issues which have radically divided our country even to the point of a Civil War. During the 1960's and the 1970's, nothing divided the country more than the Vietnam War. After reading and viewing the documents, analyze the how's and why's of this divisiveness. Try to carefully refrain from taking one side or the other of this dividing issue.

Document A: President Eisenhower's letter to the president of South Vietnam offering US aid and support. (10-23-1954)

October 23, 1954

Dear Mr. President,

I have been following with great interest the course of developments in Vietnam, particularly since the conclusion of the conference at Geneva. The implications of the agreement concerning Vietnam have caused grave concern regarding the future of the country temporarily divided by an artificial military grouping, weakened by a long and exhausting war, and faced with enemies without and by their subversive collaborators within.

Your recent requests for aid to assist in the formidable project of the movement of several hundred thousand loyal Vietnamese citizens away from areas which are passing under a de facto rule and political ideology which they abhor, are being fulfilled. I am glad that the United States is able to assist in this humanitarian effort.

We have been exploring ways and means to permit our aid to Vietnam to be more effective and to make a greater contribution to the welfare and stability of the Government of Vietnam. I am, accordingly, instructing the American Ambassador to Vietnam [Donald R. Heath] to examine with you in your capacity as Chief of Government, how an intelligent program of American aid given directly to your Government can serve to assist Vietnam in its present hour of trial, provided that your Government is prepared to give assurances as to the standards of performance it would be able to maintain in the event such aid were supplied.

The purpose of this offer is to assist the Government of Vietnam in developing and maintaining a strong, viable state, capable of resisting attempted subversion or aggression through military means. The Government of the United States expects that this aid will be met by performance on the part of the Government of Vietnam in undertaking needed reforms. It hopes that such aid, combined with your own continuing efforts, will contribute effectively toward an independent Vietnam endowed with a strong Government. Such a Government would, I hope, be so responsive to the nationalist aspirations of its people, so enlightened in purpose and effective in performance, that it will be respected at home and abroad and discourage any who might wish to impose a foreign ideology on your free people.

Source: Department of State Bulletin, November 15, 1954

Document B: These 2 pages are part of a longer CIA report citing the internal politics dividing the agency in Saigon relevant to a possible coup against the leaders of South Vietnam. (9-19-1963)

TO: WASHINGTON [REDACTED]
FROM: SAIGON 1034, 19 SEPTEMBER 1963

FOLLOWING IS VERBATIM TEXT ENTIRE TIMES OF VIETNAM RPT
TIMES OF VIETNAM ARTICLE 19 SEPT TOUCHING DIRECTLY ON CIA.
"PARDON, CIA, YOUR SPLIT IS SHOWING"
RIFT DEEPENS BETWEEN PRO-COUP, NO-COUP FACTIONS IN AGENCY
SAIGON (TVN) - CIA IN VIETNAM HAS SPLIT WIDE OPEN INTO
PRO-COUP AND NO-COUP FACTIONS, ACCORDING TO FOREIGN DIPLOMATIC
SOURCES.

BUILDING UP SINCE 2 SEPTEMBER, THE SPLIT HAS NOW BECOME
A STRUGGLE ON THE OUTCOME OF WHICH U.S. - VIETNAMESE RELATIONS
DEPEND.

MOST OF THE PRO-COUP ELEMENTS, THE SAME SOURCES REPORT, ARE
AGENTS IN USIS WHO INSIST THEIR "GRASSROOTS" CONTACTS GIVE THEM
MORE REALISTIC INFORMATION ON THE SITUATION THAN CERTAIN OTHER
GROUPS HAVE AVAILABLE. USIS THE SOURCES *REPORT*,
AND THE AGENTS

THERE ARE NOW FEVERISHLY TRYING TO CONVINCING WASHINGTON TO HELP
OVERTHROW THE GOVERNMENT.

USIS HAS FOR SOME TIME SHOWN A PATTERN OF IGNORING AND
DOWNPLAYING NEWS ABOUT CERTAIN OF VIETNAM'S LEADERS.

[REDACTED]
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BY *mbh* NLK-32-60
NARS. DATE *6/85*

DURING THE RECENT CRISIS THE USIS PRESS ROUNDUP HAS BEEN ALMOST COMPLETELY DEVOTED TO U. S. PRESS ARTICLES AND LETTERS TO THE EDITORS OF U. S. NEWSPAPERS AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT OF VIETNAM AND THE PRESIDENT AND HIS FAMILY. HOWEVER, NEWS CLIPPINGS ARRIVING DIRECTLY FROM THE UNITED STATES SHOW ANOTHER SIDE OF THE STORY COMING OUT.

VOA, WHICH IS UNDER THE JURISDICTION OF THE U. S. INFORMATION AGENCY, HAS CONTINUED TO BE CONSISTENTLY HOSTILE TO THE VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT IN THEIR REPORTING OF THE CRISIS HERE, AND LAUNCHED A CALL FOR ARMED REBELLION LATE LAST MONTH.

THE AGENTS IN USIS AND VOA TOGETHER WITH SOME JUNIOR OFFICERS IN THE POLITICAL SECTION OF THE U. S. EMBASSY, ARE CONSIDERED TO FORM A GREATER PART OF THE HARDCORE PRO-COUP CIA ELEMENTS. THOSE AGENTS IN USOM ARE REPORTED TO BE SPLIT WITH A MAJORITY BEING PRO-COUP.

MILITARY INTELLIGENCE AGENTS ARE REPORTED SPLIT ALSO, BUT WITH A HEAVY MAJORITY ON THE NO-COUP SIDE. THE MILITARY INTELLIGENCE GROUPS ARE CONSIDERED BY MOST DIPLOMATIC OBSERVERS HERE TO HAVE MORE INFORMATION ON THE ACTUAL SITUATION. TO BE LESS SWAYED BY THE USIS PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN, AND TO BETTER UNDERSTAND THE TACTICS OF SUBVERSION. THEIR INTEREST IS IN WINNING THE WAR RATHER THAN IN GAINING POLITICAL CONTROL. THE PRO-COUP CIA GROUP IS CONSIDERED MOST INTERESTED IN PUTTING A GOVERNMENT IN WHICH THEY CAN CONTROL, AND THUS JUSTIFY THE IMMENSE SUMS THEY HAVE ALREADY SPENT IN PROMOTING STILLBORN COUP D'ETATS AND IN COLLECTING MISINFORMATION.

THE EFFORTS OF THE CIA GROUPS TO UNDERCUT THE POPULAR SUPPORT OF THE PRESIDENT ARE REPORTED TO HAVE BEEN EXTREMELY COSTLY AND NOW THEY HAVE RESULTED ONLY IN STEPPED UP SUBVERSION IN THE CITIES

Document C: After US naval vessels were fired upon, President Johnson delivered a television address on 8-5-1964 reiterating the reasons as to why we were fighting a war in Southeast Asia. One of his reasons was the famous domino theory. After this naval encounter, Congress passed the below document which is known as the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. (8-7-1964)

Joint Resolution of Congress

H.J. RES 1145
August 7, 1964

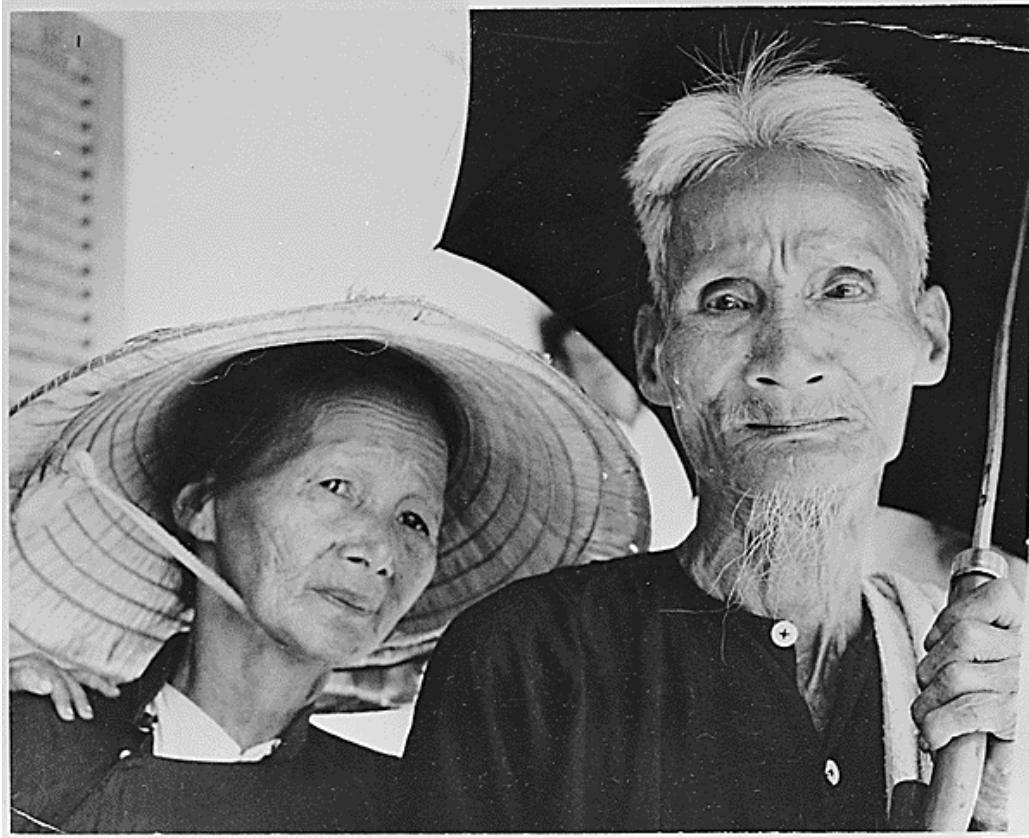
Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

That the Congress approves and supports the determination of the President, as Commander in Chief, to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.

Section 2. The United States regards as vital to its national interest and to world peace the maintenance of international peace and security in southeast Asia. Consonant with the Constitution of the United States and the Charter of the United Nations and in accordance with its obligations under the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty, the United States is, therefore, prepared, as the President determines, to take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force, to assist any member or protocol state of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty requesting assistance in defense of its freedom.

Section 3. This resolution shall expire when the President shall determine that the peace and security of the area is reasonably assured by international conditions created by action of the United Nations or otherwise, except that it may be terminated earlier by concurrent resolution of the Congress

Document D: In early 1965, an aged Vietnamese couple are photographed near Le My where they live in a US Marine Corps sponsored refugee camp. The wages of a war that has raged for far too many years are reflected in their faces.



Document E: These few pages are part of a letter that Senator Robert Kennedy to the President on "...why we are going to lose this stupid damn war." (7-6-1965)

Mr. President:

Yesterday's press carried several stories reminding us of some of the difficult problems we face if the war in Vietnam is to be won.

The first story, by John T. Wheeler, appeared in the Washington Post under the headline, "Bombs Kill Viet Village Innocents." It relates that a pro-government village was "hit three days running with bombs, rockets and cannon fire from American and Vietnamese fighter bombers." An American official is quoted as saying, "When we are in a bind like we were in Bagia we unload on the whole area to try to save the situation. We usually kill more women and kids than we do Viet Cong but the government troops just aren't available to clean out the villages so this is the only answer."

But the dilemma is found in the words of another U.S. adviser, who is quoted as saying, "That's why we are going to lose this stupid damn war. Senseless, it's just senseless." As I pointed out in a speech to the International Police Academy on July 9, the situation in Vietnam is more

and more an open military conflict. But much more than military means are needed to deal with it. And the way in which we use military force will determine whether our political and civic action has a chance to succeed.

This question is not limited to Bagia. Indeed, as an article in Life Magazine makes clear, it will be faced by every American commander of a unit in South Vietnam. The article, as an example, cites a recent engagement on a South Vietnam island, in which some guerillas "had simply moved in among the 1,500 villagers. Major General Lewis Walt, in charge of the Marine amphibian force, was caught in the bitter moral dilemma of counterinsurgency warfare: whether to kill presumably innocent peasants in order to reach an enemy who have taken on protective coloration among them. In this instance the Marines eventually did shell two hamlets on the island, killing an estimated 50 to 100 of the inhabitants."

If we are to achieve our objectives in Viet Nam, it must be clear that the United States is not engaged in a war with the people of South Vietnam. The U.S., rather, is and can only be engaged in assisting the Government of Viet Nam to preserve itself against the assault to which it has been subjected. The South Vietnamese government must preserve its authority in the country -- not merely the survival of its Army. It must have the loyalty of its people. To do this, it must be able to offer them the assurance of a better life. Again, I quote Colonel Vann: "America already has a good image here. The Vietnamese Government does not. And this represents the entire problem over here."

A further point is made by two articles by Richard Critchfield in the Washington Star. One speaks of "the growing lack of human contact between Americans and Vietnamese". The other, which describes an admirable rural pacification program being carried out by United States Marines at LeMay, also shows that our action may tend to undermine the authority of the South Vietnamese government.

Document F: A photo of the Pittsburg Veterans for Peace at the March on the Pentagon (10-21-1967)



Document G: This is an eyewitness account of Sgt. Hooper's heroic action during a fire fight in Vietnam on 2-21-1968.

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EYEWITNESS STATEMENT

On 21 February 1968 Company D (2/501) was attacking a large enemy force well entrenched behind heavy bunkers, all linked by an intricate and complex trench system by which the enemy could bring deadly flanking and enfilade fire onto any attacking force. Running parallel to the enemy's lines were a woodline and stream. It was while attempting to cross the stream that the company encountered severe fire which momentarily delayed its advance. At this point Sgt Hooper rallied his squad by completely exposing himself to enemy fire and leading several men across the stream against the forward enemy positions. This action triggered a general movement and was tremendously responsible for generating the entire company forward.

Sgt Hooper was constantly exposing himself even as the fearful enemy fire increased as he evacuated wounded, shifted men, distributed ammunition, and pointed out targets. In the course of evacuating one of his men Sgt Hooper was wounded, but he refused first aid and evacuation and quickly returned to his men, taking extra ammunition with him. Throughout the remainder of the day Sgt Hooper was conspicuous, charging bunkers, braving intense fire, and leading his men over position after position, and not without cost. Inevitably Sgt Hooper was wounded several more times by grenade fragments, but he remained on the field and did not even stop to have his wounds treated. At one point he killed an enemy soldier with his bayonet when he was out of ammunition. Over all, Sgt Hooper can be directly credited with much of the success of Delta Company due to his great courage, inspiration, and leadership.

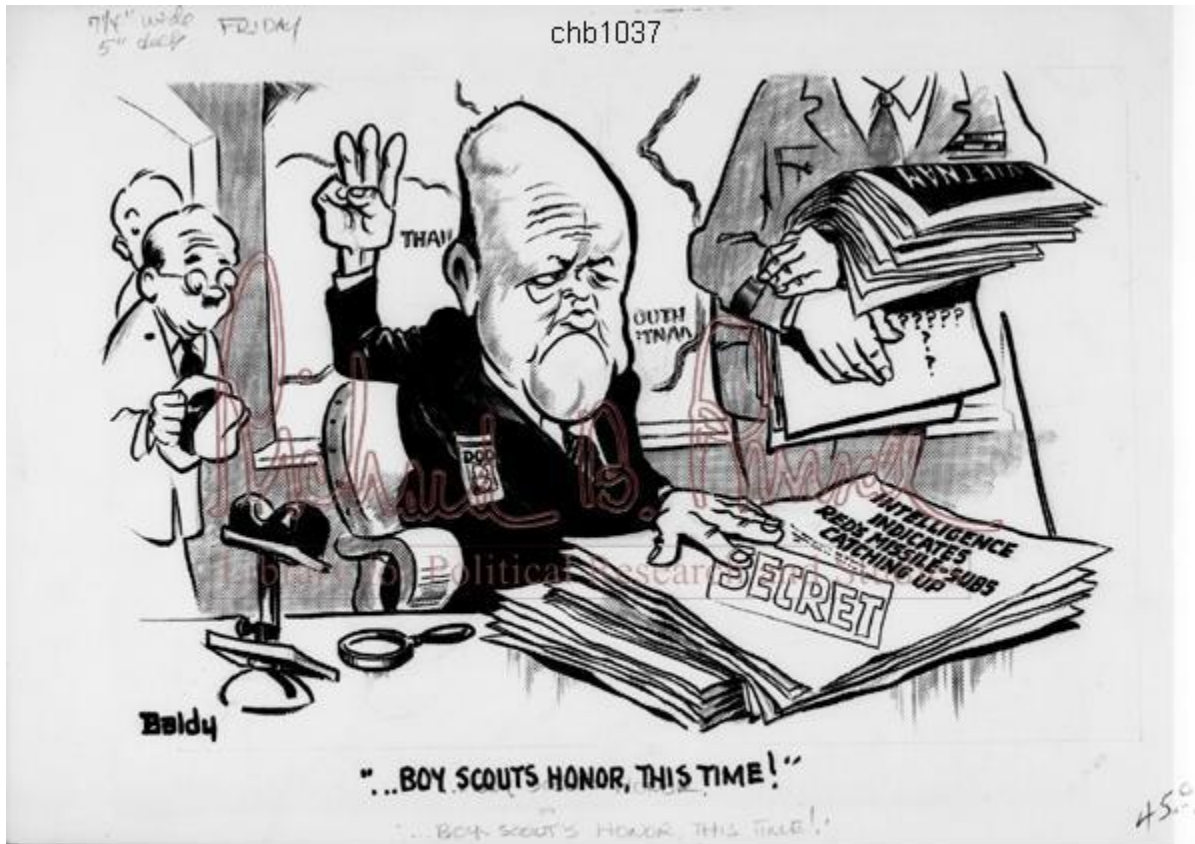
William F. Aronow
WILLIAM F. ARONOW
1LT, Infantry
Executive Officer

FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY *Cleo C Hogan*
CLEO C HOGAN
CPT, Infantry
Commanding

Document H: The men who brought us the war: Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford speaks to President Johnson in a Cabinet Room meeting with Senator Richard Russell and Secretary of State Dean Rusk. (10-4-1968)



Document I: This cartoon sums up the feelings of many Americans especially after the publication of the Pentagon Papers by the *New York Times*.



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Document J: On November 3, 1969, President Nixon outlined his Vietnamization policy on national television. At the conclusion, he reached out to “the silent majority” of Americans who he felt supported his continued bombing and military engagement of the North Vietnamese. The following paragraph is the conclusion to his speech.

And so tonight—to you, the great silent majority of my fellow Americans—I ask for your support.

I pledged in my campaign for the Presidency to end the war in a way that we could win the peace. I have initiated a plan of action which will enable me to keep that pledge.

The more support I can have from the American people, the sooner that pledge can be redeemed; for the more divided we are at home, the less likely the enemy is to negotiate in Paris.

Let us be united for peace. Let us also be united against defeat. Because let us understand: North Vietnam cannot defeat or humiliate the United States. Only Americans can do that.

Fifty years ago, in this room and at this very desk, President Woodrow Wilson spoke words which caught the imagination of a war-weary world. He said: "This is the war to end war." His dream for peace after World War I was shattered on the hard realities of great power politics and Woodrow Wilson died a broken man.

Tonight I do not tell you that the war in Vietnam is the war to end war. But I do say this: I have initiated a plan which will end this war in a way that will bring us closer to that great goal to which Woodrow Wilson and every American President in our history has been dedicated—the goal of a just and lasting peace.

As President I hold the responsibility for choosing the best path to that goal and then leading the Nation along it.

I pledge to you tonight that I shall meet this responsibility with all of the strength and wisdom I can command in accordance with your hopes, mindful of your concerns, sustained by your prayers.

Thank you and goodnight.

Document K: The following is an excerpt from an address by John Kerry to a Senate committee in which he confesses to the congressmen about the atrocities committed by our soldiers while in Vietnam. (4-23-1971)

John Kerry

testimony to the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
April 23, 1971

I would like to talk on behalf of all those veterans and say that several months ago in Detroit we had an investigation at which over 150 honorably discharged, and many very highly decorated, veterans testified to war crimes committed in Southeast Asia. These were not isolated incidents but crimes committed on a day-to-day basis with the full awareness of officers at all levels of command. It is impossible to describe to you exactly what did happen in Detroit -- the emotions in the room and the feelings of the men who were reliving their experiences in Vietnam. They relived the absolute horror of what this country, in a sense, made them do.

They told stories that at times they had personally raped, cut off ears, cut off heads, taped wires from portable telephones to human genitals and turned up the power, cut off limbs, blown up bodies, randomly shot at civilians, razed villages in fashion reminiscent of Ghengis Khan, shot cattle and dogs for fun, poisoned food stocks, and generally ravaged the countryside of South Vietnam in addition to the normal ravage of war and the normal and very particular ravaging which is done by the applied bombing power of this country.

We call this investigation the Winter Soldier Investigation. The term Winter Soldier is a play on words of Thomas Paine's in 1776 when he spoke of the Sunshine Patriots and summertime soldiers who deserted at Valley Forge because the going was rough.