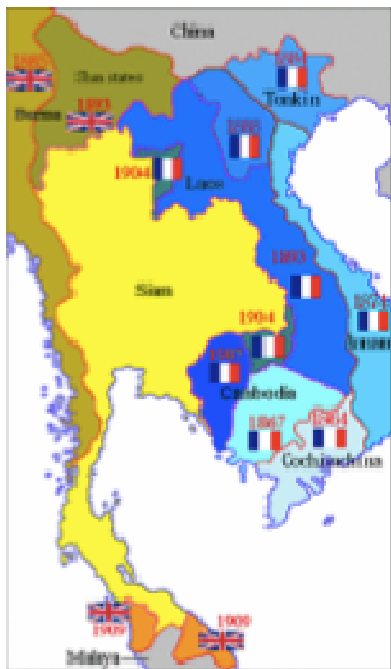


Section I Exit of the French

France began its conquest of Indochina in the late 1850s and completed pacification [brought peace] by 1893. Various opposition movements to French rule existed throughout this period, but none were ultimately as successful as the nationalist group, the Viet Minh, which was controlled by the Indochinese Communist Party and funded by the U.S. and the Chinese in its fight against Japanese occupation during World War II.

Once the Japanese surrendered in August of 1945, Viet Minh leader Ho Chi Minh declared the independent Democratic Republic of Vietnam before a crowd of 500,000 in Hanoi. Before the happened, however, the major allied victors of World War II: the United Kingdom and the United States all agreed the area belonged to the French. Since the French did not have the ships, weapons, or soldiers to immediately retake Vietnam, the major powers came to an agreement that British troops would occupy the south while Chinese forces would move in from the north. Chinese troops entered the country to disarm Japanese troops north of the 16th parallel on September 14, 1945. When the British landed in the south, they rearmed the French forces as well as parts of the surrendered Japanese forces to aid them in retaking southern Vietnam, as they did not have enough troops to do this themselves.



In January 1950, the communist nations, led by the People's Republic of China (PRC), recognized the Viet Minh's Democratic Republic of Vietnam, based in Hanoi, as the government of Vietnam, while non-communist nations recognized the French-backed State of Vietnam, with its capital in Saigon as the Vietnamese government.

PRC military advisors began assisting the Viet Minh in July 1950. PRC weapons, expertise, and laborers transformed the Viet Minh from a guerrilla force into a regular army. After the Battle of Dien Bien Phu, in which the French suffered stunning defeat, foreign control came to an end. At the Geneva Conference in 1954, the French negotiated a ceasefire with the Viet Minh and independence was granted to Cambodia, Laos, North Vietnam, and South Vietnam.

Section 2

Ho Chi Minh

Ho Chi Minh was born in Vietnam in 1890. His father, Nguyen Sinh Huy was a teacher employed by the French. He had a reputation for being extremely intelligent but his unwillingness to learn the French language resulted in the loss of his job.

As a nationalist, Nguyen taught his children to resist the rule of the French. Not surprisingly, they all grew up to be committed nationalists willing to fight for Vietnamese independence. Ho Chi Minh's sister obtained employment working with the French Army. She used this position to steal weapons that she hoped one day would be used to drive the French out of Vietnam. She was eventually caught and was sentenced to life imprisonment.

Although he had refused to learn French himself, Nguyen decided to send Ho to a French school. He was now of the opinion that it would help him prepare for the forthcoming struggle against the French. Ho finally settled in Paris in 1917. Here he read books by Karl Marx and other left-wing writers and eventually he became a proponent of communism.

In 1924, he visited the Soviet Union. While in Moscow, Ho wrote to a friend that it was the duty of all communists to return to their own country to: "make contact with the masses to awaken, organize, unite and train them, and lead them to fight for freedom and independence."

In September, 1940, the Japanese army invaded Indochina. With Paris already occupied by Germany, the French troops decided it was not worth putting up a fight and they surrendered to the Japanese. Ho Chi Minh and his fellow nationalists saw this as an opportunity to free their country from foreign domination and formed an organization called the Vietminh. Under the military leadership of General Vo Nguyen Giap, the Vietminh began a guerrilla campaign against the Japanese.

The Vietminh received weapons and ammunition from the Soviet Union, and after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, they also obtained supplies from the United States. During this period the Vietminh lent a considerable amount of money to help them learn about military tactics which was to prove invaluable in the years that were to follow.

When the Japanese surrendered to the Allies after the dropping of atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August, 1945, the Vietminh was in a good position to take over the control of the country.



Section 3

Diem and the Viet Cong



In the north, the Viet Minh ruled as the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and engaged in a drastic land reform program in which an estimated 8,000 perceived "class enemies" [bourgeoisie] were executed. The south, meanwhile, constituted the Republic of Vietnam (ROV), with Ngo Dinh Diem as prime minister.

From April to June 1955, Diem (against U.S. advice) eliminated any political opposition in the south by launching military operations against religious groups. As broad-based opposition to his harsh tactics mounted, Diem increasingly sought to blame the communists.

The ROV was created largely because of the Eisenhower administration's desire for an anti-communist state in the region. The domino theory, which argued that if one country fell to communism, then all of the surrounding countries would follow, was first proposed as policy by the Eisenhower administration. It was, and is still, commonly hypothesized that it applied to Vietnam. John F. Kennedy, then a U.S. Senator, said in a speech to the American Friends of Vietnam: "Burma, Thailand, India, Japan, the Philippines and obviously Laos and Cambodia are among those whose security would be threatened if the Red Tide of Communism overflowed into Vietnam."

Beginning in the summer of 1955, Diem launched the "Denounce the Communists" campaign, during which communists and other anti-government elements were arrested, imprisoned, tortured, or executed. He instituted the death penalty against any activity deemed communist in August 1956. The regime branded its opponents Viet Cong ("Vietnamese communist") to degrade their nationalist credentials. As a measure of the level of political repression, about 12,000 suspected opponents of Diem were killed between 1955 and 1957 and by the end of 1958 an estimated 40,000 political prisoners had been jailed.

In May 1957, Diem undertook a ten-day state visit to the United States. President Eisenhower pledged his continued support, and a parade was held in Diem's honor in New York City. Although Diem was publicly praised, in private Secretary of State John Foster Dulles conceded that Diem had been selected because there were no better alternatives.

Section 4

The United States Get Involved



In August 1964, U.S. President Lyndon Johnson told Congress that North Vietnamese patrol boats had attacked two U.S. destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin. As a result, Congress authorized the president to send U.S. Troops to fight in Vietnam. By late 1965, more than 185,000 US soldiers were in combat on Vietnamese soil. US planes had also begun bomb North Vietnam. By 1968, more than half a million US soldiers were in combat there.

The United States had the best equipped, most advanced army in the world. Yet it faced two major difficulties. First, US soldiers were fighting a guerrilla war in unfamiliar jungle terrain. Second, the South Vietnamese government that they were defending was becoming more unpopular. At the same time, support for the Viet Cong grew, with help and supplies from Ho Chi Minh, the Soviet Union, and China. Unable to win a decisive victory on the ground, the United States turned to air power. US forces bombed millions of acres of farmland and forest in an attempt to destroy enemy hideouts. This bombing strengthened peasants' opposition to the South Vietnamese government.

During the 1960s, the war grew increasingly unpopular in the United States. Dissatisfied young people began to protest the tremendous loss of life in a conflict on the other side of the world. Bowing to intense public pressure, President Richard Nixon began withdrawing US troops from Vietnam in 1969. Nixon had a plan called Vietnamization. It allowed the US troops to gradually pull out, while the South Vietnamese increased their combat role. In response to protests and political pressure at home, Nixon kept withdrawing US troops. The last Americans left in 1973. Two years later, the North Vietnamese overran South Vietnam. The war ended, but more than 1.5 million Vietnamese and 58,000 Americans lost their lives. **Vietnam was united under communism**, but today it incorporates some elements of capitalism.

