Paper 3

Modern Depth Study:

The Vietnam War

Name ..............................................................
# The Vietnam War – Revision Checklist

## How well do I know each topic?

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Section 1:

US Involvement in Vietnam, 1954-75
What was the Cold War?

The Cold War was a long period of tension between America and the Soviet Union (USSR) after WW2. The two countries had very different ideas about economics and government.

- The Soviet Union was communist. Communism is where the government controls all businesses and resources, and decides where people live and work. In theory, this means that wealth is shared equally amongst everyone in the country.

- America was a capitalist country. Capitalism is where people and businesses control themselves, and people decide where they live and work. This might mean that some people in society are very rich and some people are very poor.

The USA and USSR never actually fought each other – this is why it’s known as a cold war. However, they did get involved in other wars between other communist and capitalist countries.

The Cold War:

Commmunism:

The End of French Rule in Vietnam

Vietnam, in Asia, had once been a French colony. After WW2 a communist group called the Vietminh fought against the French for independence.

- The Vietminh was led by Ho Chi Minh and its support was strongest in the north. They were backed by the Soviet Union and China (which were both also communist).

- In the south, the French (desperate to keep hold of Vietnam) put former emperor Bao Dai in charge. They wanted a democratic country and were backed by the anti-communist USA.

The Battle of Dien Bien Phu (1954)

In 1954, the Vietminh defeated the French in a battle at Dien Bien Phu. The Vietminh won for several reasons:

- They were familiar with the local area
- They had the support of local people
- They had more troops – 50,000 v. 15,000 French
- They had support from communist China
The Division of Vietnam

The Geneva Accords (1954)

After the French defeat, nine countries met and came up with the Geneva Accords. They agreed that Vietnam would be temporarily divided into North and South along the 17th parallel.

Elections would then be held in 1956 to create a united Vietnam.

North Vietnam, ruled by Ho Chi Minh (Communist)

A demilitarised zone (DMZ) separated the two countries along the 17th parallel.

South Vietnam, ruled by Bao Dai (anti-communist) then Ngo Dinh Diem from 1955

However, South Vietnam’s prime minister Diem refused to hold elections in 1956, because he feared Ho Chi Minh (North Vietnam) would win. As a result, Vietnam stayed divided.

A group called the Vietcong (Vietnamese communists) began to fight against Diem, encouraging people in the South to support communism. They were supported by North Vietnam, who from 1959 sent troops and weapons into the South via the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

- Vietnam had once been a colony belonging to ____________.
- In 1954, the French were defeated by the Vietnamese at ____________________________.
- 9 countries then met and reached an agreement called the __________________ Accords.
- They decided to divide Vietnam in two along the __________ parallel.
- North Vietnam was ruled by ________________________. He was a ________________________.
- South Vietnam was ruled by ____________________, who was anti-Communist.
- A communist group called the ______________________ began to fight against Diem in the South.
- North Vietnam sent troops and weapons into the South along the ________________________.
President Eisenhower (1953-61) wanted to help protect South Vietnam against the communist North. He believed in a limited war – sending advisers to train the South Vietnamese Army (ARVN), but not fighting with them. Eisenhower got the USA more involved in Vietnam for 2 reasons:

**Reason 1: The ‘domino theory’**

America hated communism. The domino theory was the fear that if Vietnam became communist, other countries in that part of Asia would also become communist.

In 1954 Eisenhower set up the South East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO): a group of countries who would work together to stop communism spreading in the region.

**Reason 2: Diem’s government was weak**

The South Vietnamese government, led by Prime Minister Ngo Dinh Diem, was cruel and unpopular:

- Diem got rid of Bao Dai in a fixed referendum in 1955, then made himself president.
- He hunted and killed suspected communists in South Vietnam.
- He was a Catholic and he treated Vietnam’s Buddhists harshly.
- He gave most government jobs to family members and Catholics.
- He didn’t introduce reforms to help ordinary village peasants.
- He was seen as a puppet of the USA, not a man of the people.

By the end of 1960, Diem’s government had control of less than half of South Vietnam – without America’s help, it seemed unlikely to survive.
Greater Involvement Under Kennedy (1961-63)

Kennedy continued Eisenhower’s ‘limited war’ approach:

- He sent 16,000 more US advisers to train the ARVN.
- He focused on pacification – winning over local people so that they wouldn’t support communism.
- He sent in US Special Forces (‘Green Berets’), who trained villagers to protect themselves from the VC.
- He agreed the use of chemical spraying to kill crops and jungle areas where the VC could be hiding.

The Strategic Hamlet Program (1962)

The US helped Diem set up strategic hamlets: large villages guarded by the ARVN, where people could feel safe and protected by the government. They hoped this would stop peasants being recruited by the Vietcong.

About 5,000 had been built by September 1962. However, the program actually turned more people against Diem’s government:

- Villagers did not want to leave their old homes
- Diem’s government didn’t provide enough food, so people went hungry.

The overthrow of Diem (1963)

By 1963 the US had lost faith in Diem:

- He was increasingly harsh to Buddhists. His troops killed Buddhists and raided their temples. In June 1963 a Buddhist monk called Quang Duc famously burned himself to death in protest.
- In January 1963 the ARVN lost the Battle of Ap Bac, despite having more troops and US air support.
- It was impossible for the ARVN to win over villagers, who simply saw the army as part of Diem’s corrupt government.

The US knew that Diem’s unpopular, undemocratic government would never survive. In November 1963 Diem was assassinated in a coup by ARVN generals - the USA knew it was coming but deliberately didn’t warn him.

Just 3 weeks after Diem’s death, Kennedy was also assassinated. Lyndon B. Johnson took over as US President.
Kennedy’s policy of keeping peace by trying to win over the local people.

South Vietnamese program which aimed to protect villagers from being recruited by the Vietcong.

Religious group which was treated harshly by Diem’s government.

The South Vietnamese army, which overthrew and assassinated Diem in November 1963.

The tactic of sending advisers and supplies, but not actually fighting, used by both Kennedy and Eisenhower.

Greater Involvement Under Johnson (1963-69)

President Johnson had the same goals as Kennedy – to set up a stable government in South Vietnam, and to avoid full-blown war. However, his situation was more difficult than Kennedy’s.

**The Vietcong was stronger**

The VC was a much more serious threat than before. It seemed certain that South Vietnam would not survive without more US involvement. Johnson sent in more US advisers – there were 20,000 by 1964.

**Local support**
Respected villagers and made local reforms.
Won people round with propaganda

**Vietcong ideals**
Stressed that it was fighting against poverty, corruption and the USA

**Foreign aid**
Could do more damage thanks to troops and supplies from China and the USSR

**Organisation**
Well organised and could act quickly

**South Vietnam government**
After Diem’s death the government was weak, divided and unpopular because of its strategic hamlets program

**Why was the Vietcong more of a threat by 1964?**
The Gulf of Tonkin incident (1964)

On 4th August 1964, two US Navy ships – the Maddox and C. Turner Joy – claimed they had been torpedoed by North Vietnamese boats in the Gulf of Tonkin.

However, there were doubts over what actually happened. Conditions were stormy and some believed there had been no attack at all (although North Vietnamese boats had fired at the US two days earlier, on 2nd August).

- Ignoring the confusion, President Johnson retaliated by ordering US airstrikes on North Vietnam.
- On 7th August, Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. This allowed Johnson to send in US troops if necessary.
- The Resolution was not a declaration of war – although North Vietnam saw it that way.

North Vietnam responded by increasing their involvement in the South. They sent more people and supplies south, while the Vietcong attacked US bases.

The Gulf of Tonkin incident escalated the war. By 1965...

- ...the US was spending $2m a day on the war
- ...there were 184,300 US troops in Vietnam (up from 23,300 in 1964)
- ...both sides were committed to a war neither really wanted
- ...many of Johnson’s advisers were convinced that the war could be won quickly.

Johnson had the same goals as Kennedy before him: he wanted to keep South Vietnam free from communism, but still avoid full-blown ________. He therefore continued to send in US _____________. However, he was in a more difficult situation than Kennedy because the _____________ was much stronger and posed a much greater threat than before. Furthermore, the South Vietnamese government was weak and divided following the assassination of ____________ in November 1963.

The war escalated following the ___________________________ incident in August 1964. Two US ships claimed to have been attacked by North Vietnamese boats, although there was some confusion about what actually happened. Shortly after, ________________ passed the Gulf of Tonkin ________________, which allowed Johnson to use troops in Vietnam if necessary. North Vietnam saw this as a ________________ of war.
US Tactics

Operation Rolling Thunder (1965-68)

Rolling Thunder was a bombing campaign that targeted the Ho Chi Minh Trail and industrial areas in North Vietnam. As well as bombs the US also dropped napalm (a burning chemical) and pineapple bombs (which shoot pellets everywhere when they explode).

The first ground troops were sent in in March 1965, to protect the US air bases. Rolling Thunder caused significant damage to its targets. But -

- The Ho Chi Minh Trail was constantly repaired, so supplies still got through to the South.
- Aid from China and the USSR was not targeted.
- The destruction it caused turned the Vietnamese people against the USA.
- It killed thousands of civilians, which was bad for the USA’s image.

Search and destroy

Search and destroy missions involved small units of US soldiers searching the jungle for VC camps, then ordering helicopters to bomb or spray them.

The USA thought these missions were successful because they destroyed VC supplies and tunnels. However, they made big mistakes:

- The US troops usually left the area once it had been ‘destroyed’. This allowed the VC to move straight back in.
- The bombing and chemical spraying harmed villagers and turned them against the US.

During Operation Cedar Falls (1967), the US and ARVN moved thousands of villagers to refugee camps and burned their villages, then declared the area a ‘free-fire zone’ – but many villagers didn’t understand this and returned to their homes in the firing line.

Chemical warfare – Operation Ranch Hand

The US first used chemical weapons in Vietnam in 1961. They sprayed crops and jungle with herbicides to make the VC easier to find, and to cut off their food supply.

- **Agent Blue** was used to kill crops.
- **Agent Orange** was used to kill jungle forests.
- One plane could spray 300 acres in 4 minutes.
- The chemicals were very strong. They poisoned the soil and rivers, causing health issues and birth defects.
- Killing crops led to starvation.

People back home were outraged by the dangerous effects of spraying chemicals. The government stopped using them in 1971, but by then lots of damage had already been done.
The Vietcong had the home advantage – unlike the USA, they were familiar with Vietnam’s jungle terrain and used it to their advantage. They fought a guerrilla war:

- They attacked with **simple traps and sabotage** (e.g. blowing up roads and bridges)
- They used ‘**hit and run**’ tactics, attacking then disappearing back into the jungle
- They only fought big battles occasionally, so that when they did it was a **surprise** tactic
- They dressed like normal people – they were a ‘**shadowy enemy**’
- They used a complex system of **tunnels** to move around and surprise US troops

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<td><strong>OPERATION ROLLING THUNDER</strong></td>
<td><strong>Planes dropped bombs on the Ho Chi Minh Trail and industrial areas in the North.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>CHEMICAL WARFARE</strong></td>
<td><strong>The harmful chemicals caused long-term health and environmental damage, which triggered outrage and criticism in the USA.</strong></td>
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The Tet Offensive (1968)

The Tet Offensive was a series of attacks on cities and US bases by the VC and North Vietnamese. It began on January 30th, 1968, which was the Vietnamese New Year (Tet).

Preparing for the offensive

- The VC and North Vietnamese attacked areas near the DMZ, to lure US and ARVN troops away from cities and bases. They surrounded the US base at Khe Sanh.
- The North Vietnamese suggested they might be willing to enter peace talks, to lure the US into a false sense of security.

Key features

- The Tet Offensive wasn’t the usual jungle fighting – instead the VC and North Vietnamese attacked cities and military bases.
- The attacks began with the North Vietnamese and VC capturing key sites in Saigon such as the US embassy and ARVN headquarters.
- The attacks were on a much larger scale than usual. 84,000 communist troops took part.

The offensive was a tactical win for the US...

- The US and ARVN recaptured most cities and bases quickly.
- The VC suffered so many losses that they were almost wiped out.
- The offensive did not lead to a revolution in South Vietnam, as the VC had hoped.

...but a political win for North Vietnam and the VC:

- It was a huge propaganda victory for the VC – they had successfully caught the US off guard.
- People in America were shocked by the fighting, and lost faith in the government who said that the war would be won soon. Anti-war feeling increased.

The government tells us we’re winning the war, yet somehow the VC managed to catch the US totally off guard! It’s about time America got out of Vietnam.

Although we lost many men, the Tet Offensive was a political victory for the VC. We frightened the Americans and they are quickly losing public support for the war.

Tet was a victory for the US. We may have been caught off guard to begin with, but we quickly regained control and what’s more, we’ve practically wiped the VC out.

Match these statements about the Tet Offensive with the person who would have made them.
Vietnamisation Under Nixon (1969-73)

Johnson didn’t stand for re-election in 1968 because of the increasing criticism of the war. He was succeeded by Richard Nixon, who promised to get the USA out of the war.

Nixon’s ideas – known as the Nixon Doctrine - said that the US would no longer provide troops to its allies, only aid and training.

This meant that the US would gradually withdraw and leave South Vietnam to fight their own war, a process called Vietnamisation.

Vietnamisation

Vietnamisation meant shifting responsibility for fighting to the South Vietnamese Army (ARVN).

- US ground troops would withdraw (but not the Air Force)
- The US would still provide training and equipment
- The US would leave with honour (it wouldn’t simply abandon South Vietnam)
- South Vietnam would remain a separate (non-communist) country

Most Americans were pleased about troops being withdrawn, because it meant fewer US deaths. However, many army generals thought that with the VC weakened after the Tet Offensive, the US should be sending in more troops to finish them off. Vietnamisation failed for several reasons:

Why Vietnamisation failed

The ARVN

The ARVN was not strong enough to carry on the war without US troop support.

- It didn’t have enough soldiers
  - Desertion was common
  - Corruption was common

Training and equipment

The US supplied the ARVN with training and equipment, but there were problems:

- The training was often rushed
- Instruction manuals were in English, not Vietnamese

US troops

US troops lost the will to fight once they knew they would soon be going home.

- Fragging was common (where soldiers killed their own officer)
- Many US soldiers used drugs (especially heroin)

Problems in South Vietnam

- When the US personnel left, 300,000 South Vietnamese lost their jobs and there was an economic crisis
- The government was still seen as a puppet of the USA
Expansion of the War Under Nixon (1969-73)

Cambodia (1970)

In 1969 Nixon secretly ordered the bombing of the Ho Chi Minh Trail in neighbouring Cambodia, and in 1970 he sent in 30,000 US troops.

America achieved its aim of damaging the Ho Chi Minh Trail and preventing a communist government in Cambodia, but people back home were outraged at Nixon for expanding the war. Congress cancelled the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution.

Laos (1971)

In 1971 the US agreed to provide air support for an ARVN invasion of Laos, where communists were still using the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The ARVN attacked the city of Tchepone but were driven out by the communists – an embarrassment for the USA.

Bombing of North Vietnam (1972)

In 1972 the North Vietnamese attacked the South in the Easter Offensive, so the USA responded with Operation Linebacker – heavy bombing of North Vietnam.

- Major cities including Hanoi were targeted
- North Vietnamese industry and communication was destroyed
- Supplies from China and the USSR were disrupted

Ceasefire (1973)

By 1972 both sides felt pressured to make peace, and a ceasefire was agreed in the Paris Agreement in 1973. However, America never got what it had been fighting for all along - in March 1975 North Vietnam invaded the South, and Vietnam became united as a communist country.

Select the correct answer to these questions (some may have more than one).

1. Which neighbours of Vietnam were bombed under Nixon’s orders?
   - Cambodia
   - Thailand
   - China
   - Laos

2. President Nixon’s ideas on Vietnam were known as the Nixon ________?
   - Theory
   - Doctrine
   - Principle
   - Concept

3. In which year did America carry out heavy bombing of North Vietnam?
   - 1970
   - 1971
   - 1972
   - 1973

4. Under its ‘Vietnamisation’ policy, which of these would America still provide?
   - Ground troops
   - Air support
   - Training & equipment
1. Before WW2, Vietnam had been a colony belonging to which country?
________________________________________________________________________________
2. Who was the communist leader of North Vietnam?
________________________________________________________________________________
3. What happened to Vietnam as a result of the 1954 Geneva Accords?
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
4. What was Eisenhower’s ‘domino theory’?
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
5. Give one reason why the President of South Vietnam, Diem, was unpopular.
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
6. What were strategic hamlets?
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
7. What happened as a result of the Gulf of Tonkin incident?
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
8. What tactics did the Vietcong use?
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
9. What was Operation Rolling Thunder?

10. When was the Tet Offensive?

11. Why did the US consider the Tet Offensive a tactical victory?

12. What was Vietnamisation?


14. How did Nixon expand the war in the early 1970s?

15. Put these Presidents in the correct chronological order: Kennedy, Nixon, Johnson, Eisenhower.
Section 2:

Reactions to US Involvement in Vietnam, 1964-75
Reasons for Growing Opposition to the War

Before 1965 there was general support for the war, but this decreased as more troops were sent in:

- People worried about the rising death toll and loss/injury of loved ones
- Politicians opposed the high cost of the war, and its bad impact on America’s image abroad.

Escalation of the war

Many students were part of the 1960s ‘counter-culture’ which rejected the values of their parents’ generation.

- Students campaigned against the war using sit-ins, boycotts, strikes and protest marches. These got bigger and more violent through the 1960s.
- Student protests often got more media coverage because they were mainly white and middle-class.
- Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) was set up in 1960 and had 3000 members by 1965. The group angered some people because it actually supported the communist North Vietnamese.

The student movement

The draft was compulsory military service which many felt was unfair. Men were drafted from the age of 18 and given basic training before going to fight.

The draft process was changed to a fairer lottery system in 1969, where men were chosen using a random number system. People could delay or avoid the draft:

- People burned or tore up their draft cards in protest
- College students could delay being drafted until they graduated
- Clergymen and workers in certain industries were exempt
- People who were the only sons or wage earner of a family were exempt
- Physically or mentally unfit people were exempt
- Conscientious objectors didn’t have to fight, but they still had to do some kind of war work (e.g. in a weapons factory)
- Some people left the country illegally or went into hiding

About 650,000 of the 2.6m soldiers in Vietnam were drafted. About 15m eligible men avoided the draft.

The draft

Vietnam was the first war that was widely watched on TV.

- Ordinary people saw uncomfortable footage of the war (and anti-war protests) which made them think about it.
- People lost faith in the government, because news reporters in Vietnam showed that the war was not being won like the government claimed.
The My Lai Massacre (1968)

In 1968, Charlie Company, led by Lieutenant William Calley, killed all the people in the village of My Lai. Most of the villagers were women and children, not members of the Vietcong.

The army organised a cover-up of the massacre, but it was exposed in 1969. An enquiry was held in 1970 and found that 347 civilians had been killed by US soldiers.

Calley’s trial

Although Calley was acting under orders from above, no high-ranking officers were charged for their part in the massacre.

In 1971 Calley was sentenced to life imprisonment for murder. However, President Nixon reviewed the case and Calley only served 3 ½ years under house arrest on his military base.

Public reaction to the massacre

- The public was shocked and horrified at the massacre and its cover-up.
- People felt more strongly than ever that they should trust the media, not the government.
- Many people were disgusted that Calley served such a small sentence.
- Some felt that the soldiers were only following orders, and Calley was being used to take the blame for more senior officers.

The Kent State Shootings (1970)

On 4th May 1970, four unarmed students were shot dead by the Ohio National Guard during a protest at Kent State University.

Protests against Nixon’s invasion of Cambodia had been taking place at the university for several days. On May 4th the National Guard were unable to break up the large crowd using tear gas, so began shooting instead.

The public were horrified by the shootings because they mainly involved white middle-class students; even more tragically, two of the victims were students simply walking between classes.

The shootings inspired protests and student strikes across the country, as well as a famous anti-war song (Ohio) by Neil Young.
Below are five reasons why people were opposed to the Vietnam War. Match each statement with the person most likely to say it.

1. The draft system is unfair. My sons or husband could be killed if they’re drafted.
   - A college student

2. I don’t agree with fighting – what have the Vietnamese ever done to me?
   - A conscientious objector

3. The government claims we’re winning the war, but that’s not how it looks on the news!
   - A politician

4. Four innocent students have died because of Vietnam. We have a right to protest.
   - A woman with a family

5. The war is costing far too much money and is bad for America’s image!
   - A TV viewer

What can we infer from these photos about why people opposed the Vietnam War? Match each photo with the correct description.

1. These protestors are criticising the high number of US deaths, as well as the US government’s actions at Kent State University.
   - A

2. The people in this photo are conscientious objectors who oppose the war on moral grounds.
   - B

3. These people are protesting against the draft system, which many felt was unfair.
   - C

4. These people are protesting against the expectation that black people should fight, even though they haven’t got equal civil rights at home.
   - D
During the 1950s people in America feared communism (the ‘Red Scare’). Many were scared that it would spread around the world, and therefore felt that America was doing the right thing by fighting it in Vietnam. They didn’t want it to look as though America was giving in to a communist country.

Many Americans were incredibly patriotic – they loved their country and supported whatever decisions the government made. Patriots felt that people who refused to fight were letting their country down. They wanted America to win the war so that it didn’t look weak.

‘Hard hats’ was a nickname given to construction workers who supported the war. In May 1970, a group of ‘hard hats’ in New York beat up anti-war protestors and held a pro-war rally outside City Hall involving about 60,000 people.

In 1969 President Nixon called for the ‘silent majority’ to speak up – people who agreed with the war, but who didn’t actively campaign either for or against it. The speech was successful. Nixon received thousands of messages of support and a poll showed that 77% of people supported his policy in Vietnam. This high level of public support convinced Congress to keep funding the war.

Not everyone in America opposed the Vietnam War. In fact, many people supported the war. One of the main reasons for this was a fear of ________________, while others were simply ______________ who loved their country.

One group who fiercely supported the war were the ‘hard _________’. These were construction workers who _________ _____ anti-war protesters in 1970, then held their own pro-war rally.

In 1969, President ____________ called for support from people who agreed with his policy in Vietnam, but who rarely spoke out in support. He called this group the ‘______________ ______________’. Nixon’s speech was very successful, inspiring thousands of people to send messages of support. Opinion polls afterwards showed strong public support for the war, which helped to persuade ______________ to keep funding it.

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<td>beat up</td>
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Peace Negotiations, 1972-73

**Official peace talks** began in **Paris** in **1968** but got nowhere - America wanted South Vietnam to be independent, but North Vietnam wanted Vietnam reunified as one country.

As a result, Nixon also held **secret talks** with North Vietnam and its allies China and the USSR, pressuring them to reach an agreement.

America and North Vietnam reached an agreement in Paris in **1972**, but it was never signed because South Vietnam’s President Thieu (who was not involved in the discussions) refused to accept it.

Talks eventually began again in **January 1973** – after Nixon continued bombing North Vietnam, and persuaded South Vietnam to come to the talks by promising them aid and supplies.

**High casualties**

**USA’s continued bombing of North Vietnam**

**Fear of China and USSR stopping aid to N. Vietnam**

**No victory in sight**

**High cost of the war**

**Growing anti-war feeling in the US**

**Reduced funding by Congress**

**Reasons why both sides agreed to peace talks in 1972**

In **1973** the **Paris Peace Accords** were signed. This agreement said:

- Vietnam was to be a single country. A new government would be elected without interference from other countries.
- A ceasefire would begin, and all US military would be withdrawn.
- America would not interfere in Vietnam anymore, and US aid to the ARVN would stop.
- The USA would give aid for reconstruction.

**Significance of the Paris Peace Accords:**

**America:** The peace deal allowed the USA to leave the war. Afterwards, Congress cut levels of funding and aid to South Vietnam.

**South Vietnam:** Without US support, South Vietnam’s economy and military were weak. Support for the VC in the villages grew again.

**North Vietnam:** North Vietnam got fed up with President Thieu’s refusal to negotiate and attacked the South in 1974. Saigon fell to the communists in April 1975.
The Cost of the War for the USA

Financial
The war cost the US $167 billion. In order to pay for the war, the government took money from elsewhere. This meant that issues at home (e.g. improving black ghettos) lost out on funding.

America’s image
Americans saw themselves differently – they had lost the war to a much smaller and less developed country. Despite all their efforts South Vietnam had still ended up communist.

Americans also lost trust in their government, who it seemed had misled them throughout the war.

Human cost

- 58,220 US soldiers were killed
- 303,704 were wounded
- About 850,000 were left with psychological problems

Many returning soldiers struggled to readjust to normal life. There was a lot of hostility towards veterans and few large ‘welcome home’ parades.

There was little understanding of post-traumatic shock, and the suicide rate amongst Vietnam veterans was almost twice the average.

Below are some of the reasons why both sides agreed to peace talks in 1973. Which ones apply to America, and which ones apply to North Vietnam? (Some may apply to both).

Scared that China and USSR might stop aid  No victory in sight  High number of casualties

High financial cost  Reduced funding by Congress  Growing public anti-war feeling

Continued bombing of North Vietnam  Negative image abroad

North Vietnam  USA
Reasons for the USA’s Failure in Vietnam

**The ‘home advantage’**

The North Vietnamese were familiar with Vietnam’s landscape and language. They knew how to fight in the conditions and win people onto their side.

**The Ho Chi Minh Trail**

The trail allowed the North Vietnamese to move people and equipment into the South easily. Neighbours Laos and Cambodia allowed the trail to operate in their countries.

**Public support**

Vietnam had been one country before and many people wanted it to be one again. Villagers helped shelter the VC and were determined to win the war.

**Russian and Chinese support**

China and the USSR gave money and weapons to North Vietnam - $3 billion between 1954 and 1967.

**Vietcong tactics**

The VC were well-organised and experienced in guerrilla fighting. They had tunnel systems to move around quickly and had the support of villagers.

(They were badly weakened after the Tet Offensive though – the North Vietnamese army did most of the fighting after this point.)

**Poor understanding of Vietnam**

US soldiers were unfamiliar with Vietnam’s geography, culture and language. They didn’t understand that villagers didn’t want to leave their villages, or that most couldn’t read.

**Military tactics**

The military thought more troops and bombing would win the war, but failed to win over ordinary Vietnamese people.

They measured their success by the number of enemy troops killed, but ignored the fact that the ARVN still didn’t control large areas of the South. The draft meant that US troops were young and inexperienced.

**USA’s weaknesses**

**Political problems**

The US-backed South Vietnamese government was corrupt and unpopular, and many people still associated it with French rule. To the Vietnamese, the USA was a foreign invader trying to force its own ideas on them.

**Opposition to the war at home**

Presidents and Congress needed public support, and it was impossible to ignore the large opposition to the war. It was the war in which a large section of the population was against the US’s involvement.
1. What was the SDS?

________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________

2. What was the draft?

________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________

3. Give one way in which people avoided or delayed the draft.

________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________

4. How did the public react to the 1968 My Lai Massacre?

________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________

5. What happened at Kent State University in 1970?

________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________

6. Give 2 reasons why some people supported the war.

________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________

7. Who were the ‘hard hats’?

________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
8. Which president called for the support of the ‘silent majority’?


10. What did the Paris Peace Accords say should happen to Vietnam?

11. What happened to South Vietnam in 1975, after America had left?

12. In total, how many US soldiers were killed in Vietnam?

13. What was the total cost of the war for the USA?

14. Name two strengths which helped North Vietnam win the war.

15. Describe one problem/weakness with the USA’s military tactics in the Vietnam War.
Believed in limited war
- Sent advisers to train the ARVN, but not ground troops
- Got involved in Vietnam to prevent the spread of communism ('domino theory') and to support Diem's weak government in the South

Continued limited war approach
- Sent in 16,000 more advisers
- Focused on winning over the villagers (pacification)
- Sent in Special Forces to train villagers against the VC
- Began chemical spraying of jungle
- Helped set up strategic hamlets

Escalated the war following the Gulf of Tonkin incident in 1964
- Got the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution passed, allowing the use of ground troops
- Authorised Operation Rolling Thunder and search and destroy tactics

Nixon Doctrine – no more ground troops, only aid
- Vietnamisation handed responsibility for fighting back to the ARVN
- Expanded the war into Laos and Cambodia
- Bombed North Vietnam
- Held peace talks 1972-73

Former Emperor of Vietnam
- Put in charge of South Vietnam by the French after WW2
- Removed from power and replaced by Diem in 1955

Got rid of Bao Dai in a rigged referendum in 1955, then made himself president
- His government was corrupt and unpopular
- Catholic – he persecuted South Vietnam’s Buddhist population
- Assassinated in a coup in November 1963

Leader of the Vietnam Communist Party
- Leader of North Vietnam until his death in 1969
Timeline – Vietnam War

1953: Eisenhower becomes President
1954: Battle of Dien Bien Phu – *French defeated by Vietnamese communists*
1954: Geneva Accords – *Vietnam temporarily divided along the 17th parallel*
1955: Diem kicks Bai Dai out and makes himself president of South Vietnam
1956: Diem refuses to hold elections as agreed at Geneva
1959: North Vietnam starts using the Ho Chi Minh Trail
1961: Kennedy becomes President – *increases US involvement in Vietnam*
1962: Strategic Hamlets Program
1963: Diem assassinated in a military coup
1963: Kennedy assassinated; Johnson becomes President
1964: Gulf of Tonkin incident - *Gulf of Tonkin Resolution authorises the use of ground troops if necessary*
1965: Operation Rolling Thunder launched
1965: Major increase in number of US troops in Vietnam
1968: Tet Offensive
1968: My Lai Massacre
1969: Nixon becomes President – *puts forward the Nixon Doctrine and policy of Vietnamisation; calls for the support of the ‘silent majority’*
1969: Start of secret peace talks with North Vietnam
1970: Expansion of the war into Cambodia
1970: Kent State University Massacre
1971: Expansion of the war into Laos
1971: William Calley sentenced to life imprisonment for My Lai Massacre – *serves 3 ½ years*
1972: USA launches Operation Linebacker – *heavy bombing of North Vietnam*
1972: Start of official peace talks
1973: Paris Peace Accords – *agrees ceasefire and eventual reunification of Vietnam*
1975: Saigon falls to North Vietnam