Introduction

Vietnam has witnessed two major conflicts in the past three decades. The Viet Minh (The League for the Independence of Vietnam) fought French forces in the First Indochina War and a South Vietnamese side heavily backed by the United States.

France formerly governed Vietnam as part of French Indochina but had its administrators suffer from destruction by Japan during the Second World War. This destruction left Vietnam less tightly controlled, giving way for the rise of nationalist organisations such as the Viet Minh. The Viet Minh was able to expand after Japan weakened the French administration in March of 1945. However, French forces returned to Vietnam in December of the same year that Japan surrendered to the United States in August. Negotiations between the French and the Viet Minh were held and went on for a year. However, the First Indochina War started in December 1946 after the Viet Minh and France could not reach a peaceful agreement.

The exact date the Second Indochina War (the Vietnam War) started is an issue of debate. However, the war did escalate after the Tonkin Gulf incident. In 1964, two U.S. destroyers reported attacks from North Vietnamese vessels and President Johnson convinced Congress to pass the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. The U.S. then began systematic bombing of North Vietnamese targets the following year.

The recent escalation began in January of this year during the Tet holiday (Vietnamese new year). In the past, there had been a tradition of declaring a truce so that people could celebrate the holiday with families. North Vietnamese and Communist forces (despite having declaring a truce) launched a coordinated surprise attack against number South Vietnamese targets. This report will provide information about the situation and offer insight so that solutions could be discussed to deescalate the situation.

Definition of Key Terms

Communism

Communism is the political and economic set of beliefs that centres on communal ownership of all property and a classless society.
Guerilla Warfare

Guerilla warfare is a form of warfare in which small groups or individuals resort to tactics such as ambushes and sabotages against a larger traditional army.

Corruption

The United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) does not have a specific definition for corruption. However, it does state that it often involve “the abuse of entrusted power for private gain”. Transparency International states that corruption can be classified as grand, petty, and political depending on the size of funds involved and the sector where it occurs.

Background

The 1940s witnessed the rise of the Viet Minh, which consisted of leaders mostly from the Indochinese Communist Party, and the declaration of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. The declaration followed the Japanese surrender to the United States in 1945. Soon after, the French returned to Vietnam intending to regain control of the country, beginning with negotiations with the Viet Minh. The First Indochina War erupted in December 1946 when it became clear that a peaceful settlement could not be reached between France and the Viet Minh. Although French soldiers were better equipped, they were vastly outnumbered and did not have the cooperation of peasants in the countryside.

The Geneva Accords

By mid-1954, whilst France was losing the war and a conference was held in Geneva in order to peacefully resolve the conflict. The conference produced the Geneva Accords, which stated that Vietnam was to hold elections in 1956 under international supervision to choose a new government for an independent Vietnam. Meanwhile, Vietnam was temporarily divided into North and South Vietnam at the 17th parallel. The United States strongly opposed the Geneva Accords as it felt that the Viet Minh (with mostly communist leaders) were likely to win the elections and gain control of the South.

Ngo Dinh Diem

Following the Geneva Accords, the United States began to strengthen the State of Vietnam (also known as South Vietnam), a puppet government formed by the French during the First Indochina War led by Ngo Dinh Diem (a patriot lacking in administrative experience). Diem declared that he was not going to hold nationwide elections as stated in the Geneva Accords, but instead renamed the State of Vietnam to the Republic of Vietnam and won South Vietnamese elections that were held to select a government for the Republic of Vietnam.

Between 1955 and 1959, Diem established himself as a dictator whilst the Viet Minh was busy with internal affairs. Diem’s government grew corrupt and brutal, and generally siding with landlords instead of peasants. By 1959, many peasants in the South Vietnamese countryside were against Diem’s government. With
permission from North Vietnam, communists and communist sympathisers initiated a guerrilla war against the Saigon government in the same year.

Diem’s army, the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) was poorly trained and had an incompetent leadership in place. Meanwhile, the National Liberation Front (NLF) was established in 1960 to lead the guerrilla war against Diem’s government. Although also not necessarily well-equipped or well-trained, the NLF was able to obtain more South Vietnamese support, as its fighters did not consist of foreigners unlike the ARVN.

In spring of 1963, officials of Diem’s government banned the public display of Buddhist flags during a major Buddhist holiday in the city of Hue. This sparked demonstrations during which Buddhist monks burned themselves as a form of protest. In the Summer of 1963 the United States came to the conclusion that Diem’s government was incompetent and lacked support amongst its people and even its own officers.

U.S. officials in Saigon soon began to encourage the ARVN to overthrow Diem, and within months, Diem was overthrown and killed. His death was followed by years of repeated military coups as officers sought to gain control of the government, whilst the problems of incompetence and corruption that plagued Diem’s government remained.

By early 1964, the communist forces had taken advantage of the struggle for political power and wealth within the ARVN and continued gaining ground in the countryside.

The Tonkin Gulf Incident

In August 2nd of 1964, two U.S. destroyers (the Maddox and the Turner Joy) reported an attack from North Vietnamese vessels. A second attack was reported on August 4, but it later emerged that it was merely the radar playing tricks. Immediately following reports of the second attack, President Johnson used it as justification for the use of U.S. combat forces in Vietnam. The Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution and Operation Rolling Thunder (a systematic bombing campaign against North Vietnam) began in the following year.

The Tet Offensive

In January of 1968 during the “Tet” (lunar new year) holiday North Vietnamese and Viet Cong (officially known as the NLF) forces launched a surprise attack on major cities in South Vietnam. In previous years, there had been a tradition of declaring a truce during the Tet so that people could celebrate this holiday with families.

The attack was an attempt by the Communist forces to win the war in a single blow. They managed to strike the major cities of Saigon and Hue, with the NLF even managing to breach the outer walls of the U.S. Embassy in Saigon, thus proving that they were stronger than the Johnson Administration had claimed.

The attacks were conducted in three phases, the last of which began in August and lasted six weeks. In the following months, despite suffering considerable losses, U.S. and South Vietnamese forces have been retaking towns secured by the NLF over the course of the offensive.
Major Parties Involved

Democratic Republic of Vietnam

The Democratic Republic of Vietnam (also known as North Vietnam) was established in 1945 after the surrender of Japan and the Viet Minh seized control in most of Vietnam. The leader of the Viet Minh (the League for the Independence of Vietnam) Ho Chi Minh became the head of the government. The Viet Minh’s leaders were mostly from the Indochinese Communist Party. The Democratic Republic of Vietnam fought against U.S. and South Vietnamese forces in the Second Indochina War. The Democratic Republic of Vietnam enjoyed popular support in North Vietnam, but was not recognised internationally by other non-communist states.

National Liberation Front for South Vietnam (NLF)

Also known as the Viet Cong, the NLF was formed in 1960 by North Vietnam to lead the guerilla war against the South Vietnam. The military branch of the NLF depended met its equipment needs were met within South Vietnam or obtained through the Ho Chi Minh trail (which was a series of jungle paths and trails connecting North and South Vietnam). The NLF fought South Vietnamese and U.S. forces during the Second Indochina War. Its soldiers composed of a combination of full-time professional soldiers and local (mostly teenage) recruits.

The United States of America (U.S.)

Following the Geneva Accords, the United States began building up strength in South Vietnam. Determined to curb the spread of communism, the United States sent many advisors to strengthen South Vietnamese government. Following the Gulf of Tonkin incident, the U.S. Congress Gulf of Tonkin Resolution and ramped up military efforts against North Vietnam.

Republic of Vietnam (previously the State of Vietnam)

The Republic of Vietnam is also referred to as South Vietnam. France first established the State of Vietnam as a puppet government during the First Indochina War. Ngo Dinh Diem became Prime Minister of the State of Vietnam 1954. By the end of the following year, Diem was able to acquire control of most of South Vietnam. He declared that national elections as outlined in the Geneva Accords would not be held and renamed the State of Vietnam into the Republic of Vietnam after winning rigged elections that decided the government of the Republic of Vietnam. The United States started trained the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) since 1956, after taking over the responsibility from France. The Republic of Vietnam has been fighting the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and Viet Cong forces with the aid of the United States.
## Timeline of Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description of event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>December 1946</td>
<td>The First Indochina War erupts after the Viet Minh and France could not reach a peaceful agreement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 20-21, 1954</td>
<td>The Geneva Accords was produced and intended to bring an end to the First Indochina War and stated that Vietnam was to hold elections in 1956 under international supervision to choose a new government for an independent and Vietnam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 1954</td>
<td>Ngo Dinh Diem is named as Prime Minister of the State of Vietnam. He managed to gain control of most of South Vietnam by the end of 1955.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1955</td>
<td>Diem rejects the Geneva Accords and refuses to partake in nationwide elections.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 23, 1955</td>
<td>State of Vietnam referendum decides the future government for the State of Vietnam, which was renamed the Republic of Vietnam. Ngo Dinh Diem wins 98% of votes against Bao Dai in rigged elections (600,000 votes cast for Diem when there were 450,000 registered voters). These elections were not national or internationally supervised as called for in the Geneva Accords, but were instead restricted to the South Vietnam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>Communist leaders in Hanoi give permission for communists (and communist sympathisers) to begin a guerilla war against the Republic of Vietnam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>The National Liberation Front is established to lead the guerilla war.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 1, 1963</td>
<td>A coup is staged and Diem’s government is overthrown.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2, 1963</td>
<td>Diem is assassinated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 1964</td>
<td>The Tonkin Gulf Incident prompts the United States Congress to pass the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. The resolution provided justification for the U.S. to escalate the situation in Vietnam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 13, 1965</td>
<td>Operation Rolling Thunder, a U.S. military bombing campaign against North Vietnamese targets, commences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 1968</td>
<td>North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces launch a coordinated surprise attack on numerous South Vietnamese targets, despite having declared a truce for the Tet holiday.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

The Geneva Conference was held in 1954 and produced the Geneva Accords, was originally intended to bring a peaceful resolution to the First Indochina War. The Geneva Accords set a date for internationally monitored elections to be held to unify Vietnam. The United States strongly opposed the Geneva Accord and instead began supporting the State of the Vietnam. Ngo Dinh Diem was appointed as Prime Mister and won rigged elections that made him the President of the Republic of Vietnam. Diem obtained U.S. support and declared that he was not...
going to hold nationwide elections. In other words, the Geneva Accords did not achieve its intended target and instead, a guerilla war against the Republic of Vietnam began 6 years after the Geneva Conference.

Possible Solutions

• One possible solution is to limit the involvement of foreign parties in the situation. Following the Gulf of Tonkin incidents, the United States increased military presence and devoted more resources to fighting North Vietnam and the Viet Cong. It is important to note that the Republic of Vietnam does receive significantly more help from foreign parties compared to North Vietnam. Certain parties could be reluctant to accept such measures due to the possible bias and its ramifications. Sanctions, trade restrictions, tax policies could be possible ways of deterring foreign involvement in this conflict.

• There is also a possibility of holding ceasefire talks between the involved parties. It is important that all the parties partake in these talks. If the parties do indeed agree to a truce, it could be possible to deploy United Nations peacekeeping forces in order to ensure that all parties abide by said agreement. It is important to note that a North Vietnam did indeed declare a truce prior to the Tet (as it has done for years), but instead launched a surprise attack. This could lead to reluctance in some parties to agree to a truce due to questions about the integrity of such an agreement.

• Another possible solution is to hold negotiations to bring a peaceful resolution to the situation. Negotiations should set a date for elections to decide the government for Vietnam. It is important that all parties involved participate in the negotiations and agree to all conditions set forth as a result of these negotiations (including election dates). If not all parties participate in the discussions and agree with the conditions set as a result of such discussions, there is a possibility of parties refusing to participate in elections and therefore result in more conflict (much like what happened after the Geneva Conference). There should also be discussions about where the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the Republic of Vietnam will be split. The arbitrary splitting of Vietnam at the 17th parallel should not be repeated and a more reasonable location should be determined. This could help further decrease the volatility of the situation.

• It is important to be acutely aware of the Geneva Accord’s failed attempt to put a peaceful resolution to the First Indochina War and ensure that it is not repeated again. Election dates must be agreed upon by all parties, and must be reasonable and allow for all parties involved to adequately prepare for elections. Elections, if decided, should be enforced and monitored by international observers to ensure fairness and validity. The observers should be from politically neutral countries and must not be involved directly or indirectly in the conflict to ensure fairness.
Bibliography


