

continued this policy. When the Soviet system started to deteriorate in the mid-1980s, the **USSR was no longer seen as an immediate threat**. Diplomatic relations were established at senior level and relations improved. In 1989, Gorbachev went to Beijing in an attempt to end the Sino-Soviet split. The visit took place amid mounting student demonstrations for democracy (which led to the massacre at Tienanmen square) but Gorbachev concluded that their relationship had reached a 'new stage'. China found her way out of the Cold War during the period of détente in the late 1980s while the USSR finally disintegrated.

How was Vietnam affected by the Cold War?

1945–1950: The start of the conflict in Indochina after 1945 was mainly the issue of **decolonisation**. The power vacuum left by the Japanese after WWII led to Ho Chi Minh being able to declare the independence of the People's Republic of Vietnam in 1945. This was opposed by the French who were keen to re-establish their colonies in South-East Asia. In 1946, a full-scale war started between the Viet Minh (the Vietnam League for Independence) and the French. The US was initially reluctant to support the French in Indochina but realised that cooperation with the French in Europe was very important after the war—hence support was given to them in Asia. With the advent of communist control of China, this country became involved in Vietnam. China was not prepared to accept a US ally south of her border so Vietnam was a part of the Cold War as early as in the 1940s.

1950–1960: The NSC-68 report in January 1950 advocated a substantial US military build-up. The Korean War had not started but recommendations in the report were affected by the development in Asia. China had been 'lost' to communism and a full-scale war had raged in Vietnam since 1946. With the start of the Korean War in June 1950, the US started to support the French in Vietnam.

China increased its support for the North in the 1950s. The Chinese feared the US would intervene. At the time of the Geneva agreement, the **US paid for more than 70%** of France's cost, showing the importance of the conflict. Stalin was more reluctant to support Ho in the war against the French. Khrushchev wrote that Stalin 'treated Ho insultingly' when he visited the USSR in 1950.

When **SEATO** was formed in 1954 one of the main aims was to prevent the spread of communism in South-East Asia. **Vietnam was now seen by the Americans as a key country in the region**. The region provided the Japanese with important markets and strategically it was of major importance, hence the idea of the **Domino Theory**. If Vietnam was lost there would be a chain reaction throughout Asia.

Both the USSR and China favoured a settlement over Vietnam at Geneva in 1954. China didn't want to risk US intervention on its southern borders. Vietnam was temporarily partitioned at the 17th parallel, and under the terms of the Geneva Accords, elections were to be held in 1956 to establish a unified government. Diem came to power in the South with US support. He soon cancelled the promised elections. The French left after Geneva and was replaced by the US. But the late 1950s was a calm period when the Communists were consolidating their control in the North.

No priority was given to the Vietnam question from the communist camp in the late 1950s. If Vietnam should be united it had to be through peaceful means. In the USSR, Khrushchev had introduced his policy of peaceful co-existence and China feared a US intervention.

In 1959, the North decided to unify the country by military means if necessary. In **1960**, the guerrilla in the South, the **Viet Cong, intensified its activities**. Kennedy responded by increasing US economic aid and military advisers from 400 to 16,000 men in 1963.

1960–1970: In the early 1960s, Khrushchev declared that the victory of socialism would be achieved through **Wars of national liberation** in the Third World. Both the USSR and China now supported the North in its struggle and it was seen as a threat by the US. This was one reason for Kennedy's '**flexible response**' policy and Vietnam became a testing ground for flexible response. But Kennedy didn't escalate the conflict. When he was assassinated in 1963 there were around 16,000 US advisors in the country. Diem was also killed the same year in a coup d'état when some generals seized power. The US had foreknowledge about the coup. South Vietnam went through a very turbulent period where different generals led the country.

When Johnson started to **escalate the conflict in 1965**, Vietnam became the **centre of Cold War** struggle in the world. In 1967, there were more than 500,000 US soldiers (and from many other nations as well) in Vietnam but no victory was delivered. It deeply affected the US economy and jeopardised her international role in the struggle against communism. To Vietnam this war was a disaster with more than half a million foreign combat troops and extensive air bombing.

As a response to the escalation, both **the USSR and China promised military aid** in 1964 and 1965. Due to the Sino-Soviet split there were no co-ordinated actions. These undertakings were of a massive nature. In the late 1960s, China had 50,000 road and rail construction forces and anti-aircraft divisions in Vietnam. The Vietnam War led to a drastic increase of military installations in China.

1970s: The failures in Vietnam led to a new US foreign policy. Nixon introduced his 'Vietnamisation' of the war and his Nixon Doctrine. There should be a gradual withdrawal and the army of the South should fight the war. The US needed to get out of Vietnam and Nixon realised that it was necessary to establish good relations with both the USSR and China. The new policy of **linkage and détente** had other reasons than only Vietnam, but this conflict was probably the single most important reason behind détente and it totally changed the Cold War. The US now abandoned her policy of a **communist 'rollback'** and believed in a 'modus vivendi', i.e., a balance of power with the Soviets and China. The Sino-Soviet split showed that the communist world was no longer seen as one, monolithic, power where everything was led from Moscow. The Cold War Triangle had been established and the Vietnam War and the US desire to get out of this war 'with honour', had been an important part in this process. The US left Vietnam in 1973 and in 1975 the regime in the North conquered the South.

No country in the world has suffered as much as Vietnam from the Cold War. The war of decolonisation which started in 1946, soon developed into a Cold War conflict. **The country was at war for about 40 years fighting for its independence in a Cold War context.** But it didn't end with this. There were regional conflicts after 1975 resulting in a war against China in 1979. The casualties are difficult to estimate. Around 110,000 French soldiers died in the Indochina War. 58,000 US soldier died in the Vietnam War. The number of victims from Vietnam is very difficult to estimate but figures of more than 3–4 million have been mentioned by some. Even if it were fewer than this, the price in human suffering to the Vietnamese population is beyond imagination.

How was Cuba affected by the Cold War?

Castro seized power in Cuba in late 1959. In 1960, he declared himself a Marxist-Leninist. After that, the Cuban revolution became **a key area in the Cold War**. A communist state in the Caribbean was very difficult for the Americans to accept. When industries were nationalised in 1960, the US responded with a trade embargo and the same year Cuba signed a trade agreement with the USSR.

When Kennedy was elected US president, he inherited a plan from the CIA to attack Cuba with the help of Cuban exiles. The US trained the exiles, financed the operation and provided necessary equipment. The idea was that an attack would spur a spontaneous revolt in Cuba. When the plan was implemented at the **Bay of Pigs on 17 April 1961**, everything went wrong and the exiles were easily defeated by the Cuban army. It was a fiasco and Cuba became an obsession with Kennedy. There was no doubt that Kennedy still wanted to overthrow the Cuban regime. Only three days after the Bay of Pigs he gave Castro a warning that the US government would not hesitate in meeting its primary obligations, the security of the nation. The trade embargo was maintained, the CIA continued with sabotage actions and there was strong political and military pressure from the US.

It was in this situation that Khrushchev decided to offer medium range nuclear missiles to Cuba. There were many reasons for this, but the main reason was to protect Cuba against a second invasion. The Soviet leader also believed in 'many Vietnams' and Cuba could be a very important springboard for this in America. Medium range missiles on Cuba would also compensate for Soviet nuclear inferiority in terms of intercontinental nuclear missiles. **When the US found out about the missiles, it led to a 13-day crisis where the world stood at the brink of a nuclear Armageddon.** The solution was that the USSR would bring back the missiles if the US promised to not invade Cuba. Castro was left out from the negotiations.