

13. Assess the role played by Vietnam in the Cold War. *(in this question you have to go through both "Vietnam Wars" chronologically. There is a lot to write here so don't overwrite but assess how this conflict affected the Cold War. The key word is "assess" i.e. show the importance. It doesn't necessarily mean that it was an important conflict)*

- The start of the conflict was mainly a **war of de-colonisation**. US support for a return of the French may be seen as a part of the Cold War, but notice that this US decision was made in May 1945, before the Cold War had really started.
- With the advent of communism in China, the new regime in started to support the Viet Minh in 1949. China was not prepared to accept a Western power and an ally of the US south of her border.
- The NSC-68 report in January 1950 advocated a substantial US military build up. The Korean War had not started but recommendations 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. The **implementation of the recommendations of the NSC-68 report was affected by the development in Vietnam but it was far from the only reason.**
- 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.
- The importance of Vietnam was one reason behind the formation of SEATO. The formation of SEATO was seen as a threat by China. This was one reason why China started to shell some islands outside her coast in 1954 and 1955, known as the **Taiwan Straits Crisis**. The US threatened with nuclear weapons and signed a mutual defence pact with Taiwan. It is correct to conclude that Taiwan was more important than Vietnam in the mid 1950s.
- The formation of SEATO and Western presence in South East Asia in the mid 1950s was one important reason for the Bandung Conference in 1955 which would lead to the creation of the non aligned movement.. It was an attempt by Asian and African states to find a "third way" during the Cold War.
- **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.
- When Kennedy came to power in early 1961 there were only 400 US military advisers in Vietnam. The evangelist Billy Graham met Kennedy in January 1961 and Kennedy told him that the US couldn't allow Vietnam to fall to communism. It was the first time Graham heard that Vietnam was such a problem. That ordinary Americans didn't know about Vietnam doesn't necessarily mean that this conflict wasn't of major importance to the **Kennedy administration**. Both Kennedy and McNamara, the Secretary of Defence, believed in the **Domino Theory**. In the US it was believed that China stood behind the North and that the USSR stood behind China and controlled developments.
- 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.

14. How did the Vietnam War affect the Cold War? A similar question to question 13. But notice that it is asking for the Vietnam War. Show that you know the distinction between the Indo-China War and the "American" Vietnam War).

- There is no definite starting point for this conflict. But start with Diem and how elections were cancelled. The formation of **SEATO** caused problems in the region and was probably one reason for the **Taiwan crises** in 1955 and 1956. Vietnam did not have a major impact on Cold War relations in the mid 1950s. Both the USSR and China wanted to achieve a peaceful unification of Vietnam in the late 1950s.
- There was an escalation in 1960 when the North decided to unify the country with arms if necessary. Both the USSR and China decided to support the North, anxious to maintain good relations with an important ally in times of Sino-Soviet disputes. This help in the **early 1960** must be described as **limited**.
- **The Kennedy administration never questioned the strategic importance of Vietnam**, hence they believed in the Domino Theory. But with limited fighting the US advisers were increased from 400 to 16,000 men. It is a significant increase but no combat troops were sent and the escalation cannot be compared to Johnson's.
- From 1965 **Johnson** started to escalate the US involvement by sending combat troops and starting air attacks on the North. As a response to this the USSR and China initiated with massive military aid. The Vietnam War was by now the **main trouble spot in the Cold War**.
- **The Vietnam War undermined the American position globally**. The Bretton Woods system - the leading role of the dollar in the world economy - collapsed. The US soon suffered from inflation caused by the war and as a consequence faced her first balance of trade deficit in the 20th century in 1971. Worldwide the US was seen as an aggressor and lost support especially in the Third World. US credibility as a "champion of freedom" in the struggle against communism also suffered. If the US should be able to continue her leading role as a defender of Western liberalism, the war had to be brought to an end. The Vietnam War led the Americans to **reconsider her Cold War strategy**, to support détente. You could say that this was the first genuine US attempt to accomplish a détente process during the Cold War. But notice that the détente process was also due to Soviet nuclear parity and the Sino-Soviet split.
- With détente, "**roll-back**" of communism was abandoned and the balance of power, an acceptance of communist sphere of influences, was established. The US needed the support of both the USSR and China to get out of the war. China was finally accepted into the United Nations in 1971 and opened up after the Cultural Revolution. The US desire to end the conflict resulted in **better relations with both the USSR and China**. The Cold War in the 1970s saw new relationships and the Vietnam War was one reason for this.
- **US reluctance to get involved in a new conflict in the Third World** in the 1970s made the US more cautious. According to some historians and the New Right, this led to the Soviets to trying to extend their influence in Africa especially, but also Afghanistan.

Conclusion: It was from the mid 1960s that the Vietnam War had a major impact on the Cold War and in the 1970s it was one major reason for the détente process. It also led to US reluctance to get involved in new conflicts.