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Leadership and Policy
 by [Joe Escobar](#) - Monday, 1 November 2010, 10:32 AM

Discuss the significance of leadership decisions and changes in leadership in the U.S. and Vietnam. In particular, what impact did the changes from JFK to LBJ and Ngo Dinh Diem to the series of generals have on the conflict? Also, discuss the significance of the incident in the Gulf of Tonkin and it's repercussions on the conflict. In particular, what impact did it have on North and South Vietnam?

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Re: Leadership and Policy
 by [Spencer Smith](#) - Tuesday, 2 November 2010, 02:54 PM

As far as the leadership in South Vietnam, I think that was best summed up in the PBS series when a man was telling a story about how no one wanted the prime minister job in South Vietnam. and finally he asked a group of gentlemen, "Does anyone want to be the Prime Minister of South Vietnam?" Its kind of funny in a dark sort of way. It shows the extent to how bad leadership was in the region. Ngo Dinh Diem was a joke. He was very ineffective in uniting the people. "America's Mandarin" was more than an appropriate label for him. He was incompetent to achieve a task that was very difficult; uniting the people.

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Re: Leadership and Policy
 by [Jaymie Skeslien](#) - Tuesday, 2 November 2010, 08:08 PM

ngo dinh diem was a big joke.he wasnt very good a uniting the people.

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Re: Leadership and Policy
 by [David Gallegos](#) - Thursday, 4 November 2010, 10:37 PM

One can only do so much to find a resolve to a problem someone else created. If you take a step back and look at his actions after take over he did well to recover.

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Re: Leadership and Policy
 by [Ellen Haxby](#) - Friday, 5 November 2010, 07:20 PM

In my opinion, saying Ngo Dinh Diem was a joke is a bit too harsh when I look at the big picture. Yes, Diem had many downfalls, such as his "stubborn determination" and "all-or-nothing integrity" (Herring 59) and his strategic hamlet program obviously didn't go as planned (Herring 107), but being president of South Vietnam was an extremely difficult task. The South didn't have the unity the North seemed to have.

When the scenario of electing a new prime minister comes into question, I believe it shows that no one wanted such a daunting task. Leadership was not to be taken lightly. I think many were afraid that if they went into leadership, they too would be caught up in a coup because the South was divided in their opinions of a government.

Therefore, I think Diem was not a joke, but he at least *tried*. Many people weren't even willing to do so much as that.'

This of course, is my opinion, and I still can see where you are coming from.

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Rate... **Re: Leadership and Policy**by [Kate Lonstron](#) - Saturday, 6 November 2010, 06:10 PM

He wasn't a joke necessarily, but it was just frustrating to me how stubborn and selfish Diem was with all the help we gave Vietnam and he did not want anything but our money it seemed like.

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)Rate... **Re: Leadership and Policy**by [Spencer Smith](#) - Tuesday, 2 November 2010, 02:44 PM

LBJ was one of the best presidents the U.S. has ever had. He did more for civil rights than Martin Luthar King. He understood that in order to get his policies through he had to appear tough in south east asia. Throughout his presidency Vietnam constantly haunted him. He wasn't Pro-War. He was passed down a problem in Vietnam from JFK. He did his best to deal with a problem he inherited.

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yes he did do his best even though jfk passed the problem to him.

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I completely agree with you that LBJ was not pro-war and he was simply dealing with the massive problem of Vietnam that was passed along to him unexpectedly after Kennedy's assassination. However I also have several critiques of his time in office and I'm not sure that'd I'd agree with your statement that he did more for civil rights than Martin Luther King (but I am curious to know what your reasoning behind this opinion is and would respectfully like to hear further explanation).

On multiple occasions Johnson and his administration went to great lengths to deceive the American public and Congress about decisions he was making and events taking place in Vietnam. An perfect example of this is the incident that took place in the Tonken Gulf. LBJ was basically looking for a reason to retaliate, and only took half of the evidence he was provided into consideration, and it just happened to be the half that was most favorable to him. Later he portrayed the event as "deliberate attacks" and "open aggression on the high seas", which was completely misleading. Another example of his intentional deception can be found on page 166 in Herring, "Although he had approved the immediate deployment of 100,000 troops followed by another 100,000 in 1966, he revealed publicly only that he was sending 50,000".

Again, I appreciate the difficulty of the situation that he was in, and that there were no quick or easy solutions regarding Vietnam. I also respect the fact that at least he was decisive, he developed a plan that he thought gave the U.S. it's best chance of success and he committed to it. However it seems to me that especially towards the end of his presidency he made decisions out of pride, stubbornness, and an unwillingness to admit failure; not the for good of Americans or Vietnamese.

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I agree with you about LBJ. The Tonken Gulf incident was just an excuse to attack and there were a lot of half truths being told to people to get them to approve going to war. Also the war strategy to gradually start, " increasing the bombing and injecting U.S. forces into the ground war," until, " they could coerce North Vietnam into abandoning the southern insurgency . . . on the dubious assumption that North Vietnam would give up its goals rather than risk complete destruction." (Herring 148) I thought that was an interesting way to think about it seeing that Vietnam has been fighting for its independence for years, first fighting multiple centuries to gain

independence from China and then the French. As said by Vo Nguyen Giap, "... we would rather die than live in slavery. Our history proves this. Our deepest aspiration has always been self-determination. That spirit provided us with the stamina courage, and creativity in the face of a powerful enemy." (Appy 42) With all the evidence showing that the Vietnamese will not go down without a fight I am surprised that the U.S. underestimated them so much.

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Re: Leadership and Policy

by [Kelley Allender](#) - Wednesday, 3 November 2010, 09:05 PM

I really like the quote you used from Vo Nguyen Giap. I think this is a testament to America's ignorance of Vietnamese history which in turn led to an underestimate of their spirit and determination. I have read several times that most people (and admittedly myself included) didn't even know where Vietnam was, let alone anything about their country's history or culture. For this reason it is not surprising to me that the U.S. underestimated them, but it is disappointing that our political and military leaders didn't make more of an effort to learn from the French conflict in Vietnam. I think the American's viewed themselves as an international power and looked at Vietnam as a poor third-world country, and thought, there's no way we won't go in and dominate this region. What we didn't understand was that the Vietnamese were fighting with all of their heart and soul, this war and the land it was being fought on was truly meaningful to them. In comparison, our soldiers had no real attachment to the war, its outcome, or the land it was being fought on. Not to say that they were indifferent, but they were in a completely unfamiliar place, with at times unclear orders or goals, and some would argue were being forced to fight with "one arm tied behind their back". All of these things factored into underestimating the Vietnamese and costs of going to war with them.

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Re: Leadership and Policy

by [Sheila Daughtry](#) - Thursday, 4 November 2010, 06:16 PM

Kelley-I also think the American soldiers had a difficult time identifying who they were fighting against. Does a eighteen year old, female, North Vietnamese soldier, look any different from a eighteen year old, female, South Vietnam soldier? It must have been unnerving for the American men to go to battle against women.

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Re: Leadership and Policy

by [Kelley Allender](#) - Thursday, 4 November 2010, 08:33 PM

Yes I completely agree with what you're saying... I re-watched some of the PBS videos today and in episode 4 (or maybe it was 3) some of the Vietnam vets were commenting on the same thing; saying that to them everyone more or less looked the same, and especially with the extra challenge of a language barrier it was hard to know who they could trust, who was a Viet Cong supporter, and who was just an innocent civilian. Plus I think the utter chaos and stress of the war began to take a psychological toll on the soldiers, which they also touched on a little bit in the video, basically saying that after a while everyone became the enemy. In the middle of battle there's not really time to distinguish between an innocent civilian and someone that is a threat, especially since, the "enemy" consisted not only of men, but also some women and children.

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Re: Leadership and Policy

by [David Gallegos](#) - Thursday, 4 November 2010, 10:42 PM

Going into the Vietnam war I believe that the U.S thought they were untouchable. Typical mistake of a powerful nation before defeat. The problem was that our leaders didn't accept it until it was too late. Our men and foreign relations had to pay for it.

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Rate... **Re: Leadership and Policy**by [Jaiirus Godeka](#) - Friday, 5 November 2010, 07:45 PM

Thanks for your view on the claimed fact that LBJ did more for civil rights than Martin Luther King. Civil rights was a long, hard struggle that more blacks than MLK paid for with their dear lives. It involved hard fought battles as compared to LBJ who only saw the passing of legislation.

I believe I am justified to call LBJ a liar. We are told of his decision behind closed doors to deploy 200,000 troops over a two year period. He then has the audacity to go before the American public and tell what he damn well knew was a blatant lie of a decision to send only 50,000 troops!!! What else might this man have lied about?

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Rate... **Re: Leadership and Policy**by [Spencer Smith](#) - Saturday, 6 November 2010, 02:31 AM

Kelley Allender, you asked me a question that I never responded to, and I just noticed it. You wanted me to provide you with reasoning as to why I think LBJ did more for civil rights than Martin Luther King. Well, I think the most obvious thing would be the civil rights act of 1964. I'm not sure if you are familiar with this piece of legislation, but if you look it up you will see that its pretty much the most important thing that ever took place in the civil rights movement. It implemented things like segregation in the schools, equal rights in the work place, put a ban on Jim Crow laws, as well as many other long lasting impacts in the pursuit of equality. MLK seemed to think it was a pretty big deal to (he was standing behind Johnson when it got signed into law). There are several other things that LBJ did for civil rights, and if you would like me to go into further detail about those things I would be more than happy to. The Voting Rights act was another big one. MLK himself acknowledged that change had to come from the federal government and there was only so much he could do. And if you just think about it logically, the president of the united states has more power than any person in the country, therefore he will be able to do more than any one individual.

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Rate... **Re: Leadership and Policy**by [Tracy Allen](#) - Wednesday, 3 November 2010, 08:37 PM

JFK didnt just pass the problem on to Johnson. JFK was assisnated. Johnson became President to replace him and then ran again. LBJ was a great president. I agree with you there but it was not JFK's fault that we were involved in Vietnam.

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Rate... **Re: Leadership and Policy**by [Spencer Smith](#) - Friday, 5 November 2010, 08:46 PM

According to the pbs documentary and the herring book, JFK was very much a part of why we were in vietnam. After the bay of pigs he didn't want to appear weak in south east asia. He initiated counter-insurgency programs in Vietnam, and in my opinion bares more blame than most. One can't point the finger at any one person, but as far as the sources we are looking at are concerned, JFK initiated military action in Vietnam. When they say "advisors" people tend think of guys with pens and paper making suggestions to the south vietnamese army. These advisors were combat trained special forces. They saw action. These "advisors" today could easily be compared to what special forces are currently doing in afganistan. JFK shares responsibilty with many others for 58,000 americans dying. When you screw around with other countries with guns, sometimes you end up in a big war even if it wasnt your intention.

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**Re: Leadership and Policy**by [Kate Lonstron](#) - Saturday, 6 November 2010, 06:12 PM

He did do his best, but I think there could have been better ways to deal with the issues than he way he did. His proof of "toughness" in south East Asia i felt could have been dealt with in better ways as well. I think he should have been better at constructive criticism.

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**Re: Leadership and Policy**by [Spencer Smith](#) - Tuesday, 2 November 2010, 02:53 PM

The Gulf of Tonkin incident was the most important thing that happened in the war. It led to a resolution that gave the president the right to wage war without approval from congress. Giving the president the right to wage war without approval from congress is a very dangerous thing. It disrupts the separation of powers that holds the country together. Most people overlooked the importance of the resolution at the time because it was U.S. ships being attacked. Only 2 senators opposed the resolution.

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**Re: Leadership and Policy**by [Jaymie Skeslien](#) - Tuesday, 2 November 2010, 08:04 PM

yes and just like when jfk gave the order for withdawl of 1,000 american personnel.

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**Re: Leadership and Policy**by [David Reagan](#) - Wednesday, 3 November 2010, 01:43 PM

Since that resolution came from Congress, doesn't that mean that he had approval from Congress?

One thing that struck me about it, was that Congress was lied to about the incident. They were told that it was an unprovoked attack, when it wasn't.

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**Re: Leadership and Policy**by [Kelley Allender](#) - Wednesday, 3 November 2010, 04:28 PM

My interpretation of what I have read and heard in this class, is that Johnson basically used the Tonken Gulf incident to obtain a congressional resolution that gave him the authority to take "all necessary measures to repel any armed attacks against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression" (Herring, p. 144). During a time of war, that was more or less granting Johnson open-ended discretion to handle the situation in Vietnam, any way he pleased, and with whatever resources he felt necessary.

The fact that he lied to Congress about the incident also struck me. I found several different scenarios in Herring, in which LBJ lied to both, the American public and Congress. While campaigning for re-election, he lied about his intentions in Vietnam, frequently using the slogan "no wider war" which suggested he would not escalate U.S. involvement in Vietnam; and then went on to secretly approve of a two-phase air attack against North Vietnam that included regular bombing, as well as deployment of American combat troops to South Vietnam for the first time. Another example of his deception can be found in July of 1965, when he "approved the immediate deployment of 100,000 troops followed by another 100,000 in 1966, he revealed publicly only that he was sending 50,000" (Herring, 166).

I'm sure he and his administration did a lot of things of similar nature during the Vietnam War, that still aren't known about today. Ultimately not even hiding the ugliest statistics and events of the war was enough to keep America from speaking out against it. I think it was by 1967 that not only the general public, but the White House was more or less divided in it's support for the war. Anti-war protesters and/ or supporters came in just about every form and included celebrities like Jane Fonda and Muhammad Ali, college students and professors, peace loving hippies, and even politicians like Senator Fulbright, Bill Moyers, George Ball, and eventually Johnson's own Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara.

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Rate... **Re: Leadership and Policy**by [Tracy Allen](#) - Wednesday, 3 November 2010, 09:32 PM

Yes, McNamara became one of the most vocal antiwar protestor in Johnson's political circle. I think a contributing factor to that was Norman Morrison: the American who immolated himself in front of McNamara's office. In fact, we never really got to discuss him and I know it is not topic oriented but I would like to know what others thought about his actions.

President Johnson's actions did seem secretive when he dealt with the American public and with Congress. In the Herring book, it mentions that Johnson made the struggle in Vietnam into something personal. Vietnam was a test of his personal strength, I think his eclectic, and insecure personality, especially in the area of foreign affairs is part of the reason that the war spread under his presidency.

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I definitely think seeing Norman Morrison immolate himself, had a big impact on McNamara; in my opinion he already saw the war as a failure and was against it, but this event only strengthened those feelings. *Patriots* talks about this incident a little in Anne Morrison-Welch's (Norman's widow) testimonial. She says that read McNamara's book, *In Retrospect*, and was so moved by his admission of the war being a "tragic mistake" that she decided to write him a letter expressing her appreciation. McNamara called Anne a few days later and thanked her for her forgiveness and went on to explain how he hadn't been able to talk to his family about Norman's death even they were all "deeply affected by it". Appy quoted a line from McNamara's book in the prelude to Anne's account and it says, "Morrison's death was a tragedy not only for his family but also for me and the country... Marg and our three children shared many of Morrison's feelings about the war... and I believed I understood and shared some of his thoughts" (Appy, 150).

I agree with what you're saying about LBJ making the Vietnam war into something personal. Actually that has been one of the single most frustrating things for me to accept as I'm learning about this war. I think he was a good politician, but I lost a lot of respect for him based on the decisions he made after being re-elected. I think his refusal to withdraw from Vietnam was a reflection of his absurd stubbornness, huge ego, and unwillingness to admit his personal mistakes and failure as the president. Even though he was too egotistical to admit it, at some point he must have realized that this war was a failure, and it's really, really sad to me to think about all of the lives that were lost after he came to this realization. He had many, many opportunities to withdraw from the war but he chose his person pride over the well-being of our nation and the thousands of soldiers that lost their lives serving it.

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I wouldn't refer to Mcnamara as a "vocal anti-war protestor." We haven't looked at Mcnamara under the microscope in this class, because time is limited when we are dealing with 30 years of policy. But I assure you he was very much pro-war if you took the time to look at a bio of him. If you ever have the time I would recommend the documentary "the fog of war" where Mcnamara basically gives his personell account of his time in politics. He was the engineer of a lot of blood shed. I've enjoyed reading your posts, and you seem very intelligent, however I think you need to re-evaluate your view on Mcnamara. And maybe im the one that is mistaken, but I just can't think of one shred of evidence that would support a position that Mcnamara at that time was "anti-war."

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**Re: Leadership and Policy**by [David Verner](#) - Friday, 5 November 2010, 06:51 PM

This is the exact same interpretation i have gotten out of the book, and i would think most would have the same thought. LBJ and his lackeys completely deceived the American public on matters about the war, leading up to it and then during those first few years of war. I am honestly not totally surprised, I guess modern society hasn't changed much either has it. This whole situation was basically rehashed in '02/03 with the WOMB issue being used as a half-baked excuse for war, and when reading about the Tonkin incident I was amazed at how similar it felt to me compared with the Iraq issue. I guess the difference there is America didn't have any deep foot holds in Iraq that they felt obliged to finish out anything there.

The Herring book states that the decision was made based on the frenzied reports coming from the Maddox, and didn't even take into account the fact that later on those on the ships said they "weren't even sure they had been subject to an attack" and said there had been bad visuals that night alongside "freak weather conditions" that had confused those on board. Yet this was used as a basis for passing a congressional order to allow "all necessary measures to repel any armed attacks" - come on! Considering the USA holds itself up as the true world power of capitalist democracy, and a standard bearer, this is a horribly bundled attempt at a means for going to war. It wasn't going to stay a secret forever, and it now looks a massive blight on the political history of the nation.

I do believe that LBJ felt he had no choice with the war, being burdened with it from the Kennedy administration - however he did not do anything to help it in any means. It would be interesting to turn back history and see what would have happened had Kennedy not been shot. I don't know if i can bring myself to believe that he would have been able to successfully withdraw as had been discussed in the text, but maybe he would have taken a more measured approach than LBJ's bluster about having to preserve his image. I feel Kennedy, though also a proud man im sure, maybe would not have let image get in the way so much. LBJ seemed to be more worried about his own prestige in regards to Vietnam, and that didn't allow him the objective mind needed to look at the situation.

Deceit was never the right way to go about things though, and unfortunately it seems little was learned from that. Government is there for the people, yet ironically they feel that things of utmost importance such as war should be kept from the people, or more-so twisted to fit their agenda. V

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**Re: Leadership and Policy**by [Spencer Smith](#) - Friday, 5 November 2010, 08:30 PM

I'm not sure the american public as Jack Nicholson would say "can handle the truth." However, you're point on the similiarities of the wmods in iraq and the Tonkin Resolution was awesome.

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**Re: Leadership and Policy**by [Jaymie Skeslien](#) - Tuesday, 2 November 2010, 08:02 PM

JFK presented himself as someone held conservative views on both domestic and foreign issues,he also gave the order for the withdrawal of 1,000 american personnel by the end of 1963.JFK also found it impossible to persuade Ngo dinh Diem to broaden his government in south vietnam.

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**Re: Leadership and Policy**by [Ellen Haxby](#) - Friday, 5 November 2010, 08:57 PM

If I am thinking of the same 1,000 troop reduction in Vietnam as you are, then I have a few ideas to add to yours.

According to Herring, this proposal to draw out troops was mostly to "reassure the American public and undercut the Communists 'best propaganda line' that the United States was running the war" (Herring 113). I think the 1,000 troop withdrawal was more of an idea put out. I'm not completely sure if the troops were ever actually taken out... It does talk about Kennedy approving the Taylor-McNamara's report that suggested "selective pressures," but I am unsure if

that was when troops were actually taken out or not (Herring 123).

Another idea to keep in mind is at the same time Kennedy was planning a withdrawal, he was also was "planning for overt military actions against North Vietnam" (Herring 113).

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Re: Leadership and Policy

by [Tracy Allen](#) - Tuesday, 2 November 2010, 11:19 PM

There were many Presidents involved in the Vietnam War; Roosevelt, Truman, Kennedy and Johnson are the ones that were in the White house during the time that we have read about so far (1950-1968). The changes in leadership helped keep the war in a stalemate. Each man had to take over something that started before him. Kennedy died before his term was up. There were many who argued that he had been planning to remove the United States from South Vietnam, however, there is no evidence to support this statement. Whether or not Kennedy would have extricated from Vietnam is a moot point. He died and Lyndon Johnson took over the Presidency. Looking back, they were completely different men. Kennedy stuck mainly to the middle ground when it came to Vietnam, sending aide and advisors when needed but he was extremely averse to sending ground troops. Johnson was also concerned about the repercussions caused by U.S troops in Vietnam but he was a man who did not want to appear weak, in anyone's eyes. He used the Gulf of Tonkin incident to practically ensure his re-election and push his opponent Goldwater (a hawk) out of the running. He also took the opportunity to get Congress to pass a resolution allowing him to "take all necessary measures to repel any armed attacks against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression" (144). Eventually ground troops were sent to Vietnam and America was really at war.

The coup that occurred to remove Diem and his family from power also had a profound effect on the war in Vietnam. Diem was hated by many of the people in the South because of his strategic hamlet program and the other policies that he made while in office. He did not have a good report with his people. Diem did not listen to U.S. advisors but took U.S. aide. He chose military officials who were loyal to him and not ones who had skill. It was a struggle for Washington to work with him. The generals who took over after the coup were even worse. The junta, as they called themselves, lacked training and support from other factions. Due to all of the uncertainties and suspicions among themselves, not much was accomplished. So even though Diem, a rallying point for opposition in the South, was gone the instability in the government continued. Khanh, a man who played on both sides of the field, replaced them in a coup. The government of South Vietnam was in a constant turmoil and each new government faced massive problems.

The Gulf of Tonkin incident was the firing of North Vietnamese torpedo on the USS Maddox and a few days later the Turner Joy. The first attack on August 2 actually happened but there is evidence that the second attack a few days later did not. The whole thing helped Johnson win his re-election and get a "predated declaration of war" (145). The U.S. was now even more deeply committed to the South and now they had a commitment to respond to the North's provocations. Johnson's forceful response to the Gulf of Tonkin incident fueled the North into escalating their actions in the South. For the first time the government in the North sent units of its own army south. The goal was to end the war before the U.S. became more deeply involved. In the South, Khanh tried to take dictator like powers, imposing restrictions on civil liberties. He went too far and had to resign. This left the South even more vulnerable because there was no government. People fought for power while anarchy raged in the streets. Since the government was in such turmoil, Washington did not escalate the war against the North further.

All though it feels like I have just paraphrased a lot of the information from the Herring book I think it is important to realize this information when we look back and try to find someone to blame for the war. When in reality there is no one person that we can point at and say, "It's your fault". The assassination of JFK was a horrible thing and I would like to think that if he had lived he would have phased the United States out of the war, but he did not. The Gulf of Tonkin was very important to the war. It seems as if the U.S. was itching for a reason to retaliate against the North for not giving in to their superior weaponry. The Gulf of Tonkin gave them that. Just like in the attack on Pleiku. From there things continued to escalate.

*Sorry for how long this is everyone but I really got into this prompt

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Re: Leadership and Policy

by [Spencer Smith](#) - Wednesday, 3 November 2010, 08:06 AM

That's a good point, there really is no one we can point our finger at and say "its your fault". Good points Tracy.

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Re: Leadership and Policy

by [Jaymie Skeslien](#) - Wednesday, 3 November 2010, 01:23 PM

excellent point. pointing fingers is not a good thing to do especially when no one knows who did it or said it. great job keep up the good work.

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Re: Leadership and Policy

by [Kate Lonstron](#) - Wednesday, 3 November 2010, 06:35 PM

I enjoyed how deep you got with this part of the forum, I think you have some great information and I will also have to agree with you and the others that there is no one to point the finger at specifically, jointly we could point the finger at any of the people involved with the war, but that would not get us anywhere.

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Re: Leadership and Policy

by [Tracy Allen](#) - Wednesday, 3 November 2010, 09:45 PM

Thank you Kate, Spencer and Jaymie.

I brought up the pointing finger thing because I happened to be discussing the situation with a friend from work and she said "Oh it's Kennedy's fault that the U.S. went to war with Vietnam." I felt that was unfair so I wanted to set things straight. It was a serious cycle of problems. One thing I agree with from the audio file "American Soldiers Speak" is that even if we disagree with the wars always support the soldiers. They are people like us doing their duty to their country. There are many who come back and do great deeds to make up for the things they did on the battlefield. I am getting off topic again. In reality, the war started with the French Colonization of Vietnam (or even all the other occupations before the French), WWII and the rise of Communism pushed it further.

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Re: Leadership and Policy

by [Sheila Daughtry](#) - Thursday, 4 November 2010, 06:24 PM

Tracy-What about Eisenhower? He had a role in the Vietnam war.

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Re: Leadership and Policy

by [Tracy Allen](#) - Friday, 5 November 2010, 06:22 PM

True Eisenhower had a role in the war. He was the President who came up with the Domino Theory: if South Vietnam fell to the powers of Communism then the rest of Asia would follow. Because of this theory, Vietnam became even more important to U.S. policy makers. This was after Dien Bien Phu and the Geneva accords. Free elections were supposed to occur in 1956 and Ho Chi Minh was sure to win. He was a nationalist as well as a Communist, (something I like to call a double-edged sword) the peasants loved him (around 90% of the population). With backing from the U.S. Diem held fraudulent elections only in the South and won. Therefore, the Eisenhower administration helped to lead the United States into war with a third world country. Each event that happened in the past led up to others in the future. For example, WWII had a huge impact on American foreign policy. Europe had appeased the Nazi's prior to the start of the war. The USSR was the same type of force, so

the U.S. decided to be aggressive instead of appeasing.

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Re: Leadership and Policy

by [David Verner](#) - Saturday, 6 November 2010, 09:12 AM

I very much enjoyed your point about finger pointing as well. I am very much of the opinion that in history, unless you know the full story, don't point fingers. The issue of Vietnam was one that grew basically right from the end of World War II until the fall of Saigon - so to blame one man for that really would be quite ludicrous. You could blame the Soviets? After all they were the reason for the the paranoia at communism and therefore the interest in Vietnam. The French? They couldn't fight their own war and therefore half blackmailed the Americans into heavier involvement and you could say the reason the Americans developed a foothold there in the first place. Eisenhower? Kennedy? LBJ? Advisors? Diem? There is so many different factors that all stewed together to create what became the Vietnam War, blaming one area would be incredibly naive - i have had friends who have done the same kinda thing, and i always make a point to set them straight!

Your point about WWII effect on foreign policy is quite a good one as well. I have often thought that WWII was what changed American approach to foreign conflicts and interest in years to come. Both WWI and WWII were wars that the US had no interest in at all at first, WWI they only turned up to a year before it send (crucial as they were) and WWII it took a direct attack to get them involved 2 years after its beginning as well. However, the subsequent fighting and intense war i feel changed the thinking of those in the White House. It seems ever since WWII the US has taken up a role almost as the police of the world, and have almost always been at the forefront of any major conflict.

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Re: Leadership and Policy

by [Tracy Allen](#) - Saturday, 6 November 2010, 05:57 PM

I never really made the whole connection but you are right. Ever since the atrocities of WWII the United States has made a point of being involved in every conflict that has happened since then. A world police. At least it started, in a way, with good intentions. Yet almost all good intentions end badly.

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Re: Leadership and Policy

by [Justin Powell](#) - Wednesday, 3 November 2010, 09:18 AM

By allowing our president to engage in war without the approval from congress due to the Gulf of Tonkin incident, in my opinion, broke the bond of leadership in this country and is not a smart decision to do especially during war. Even if it seemed like the right thing to do at the time, there is no evidence that the second attack actually happened. It was a rash decision that could have been avoided.

It is a sad thing that Kennedy died before his term was up, i think that everyone would of liked to have seen if he would have removed the United States from south Vietnam. By doing that, it would have changed the outcome of the war for sure. when Johnson took over, his forceful response to the Tonkin incident forced the north to enhance their actions in the south. From that point on, things just continued to escalate.

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Re: Leadership and Policy

by [Jaymie Skeslien](#) - Wednesday, 3 November 2010, 01:26 PM

yes i think that we all would have liked Kennedy. I feel that if he was still here we would not have war today. things probly would be alot easier.

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Rate... **Re: Leadership and Policy**by [Sheila Daughtry](#) - Thursday, 4 November 2010, 06:27 PM

Justin & Jaymie: I think Kennedy was just as deceitful and arrogant as Johnson. They just had different styles.

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Frankly, I do not think anyone should have or should engage in war without the approval of others, special ones that specialize in a certain area of knowledge. I Found the decision made by the president very selfish and adolescent.

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I totally agree with your comment. I have lived in civilian world and in a fox hole. once you pass by all the ego crap soldiers have, there is a lot of men and women that feel the same way.

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Lyndon B. Johnson's decision after the Gulf of Tonkin incident to mobilize American troops into Vietnam may have been a little selfish, but the president is allowed to have his own agenda on any kind of decision he makes, that's why he is the president. Though Johnson admitted the events of the Gulf of Tonkin did not happen, I still do not question his decision in joining the war. Instead of sitting back and watching a country destroy itself the U.S. gave aid to those in Vietnam who desperately needed it.

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I haven't found any evidence that would support the opinion that JFK was planning on removing any support from south Vietnam. In fact, with the sources we have been given, you will find the opposite, that he very much wanted to get involved in south Vietnam and stop the spread of communism. And what does it matter if a second attack ever took place in the Gulf of Tonkin incident? When a U.S. ship is fired upon once isn't that enough to respond?

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In my eyes the main difference between JFK and LBJ was that Johnson was less prone to listen to his advisers and ambassador. Johnson had a big ego and would not except defeat against what he saw as an inferior North Vietnam. His pride drove the Gulf of Tonkin resolution and in turn created a more apparent rift between the north and the south. Ho Chi Minh one said, "Don't take property away from the peasants." His understanding of the Vietnamese people and our lack there of was a major factor in getting the Vietnamese to fight for him and against the U.S. and the south. With U.S. bombing and implementation of the "Strategic hamlet" program, the U.S. and ARVN forced the South Vietnamese to be more open minded towards the communist North and by association sealed the fate of Ngo Dinh Diem and those who followed after him.

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Rate... **Re: Leadership and Policy**by [Jaymie Skeslien](#) - Wednesday, 3 November 2010, 01:29 PM

I have to agree with you a 100% on this. Johnson did not like to listen to people this sounds like.

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Rate... **Re: Leadership and Policy**by [Kate Lonstron](#) - Wednesday, 3 November 2010, 06:37 PM

LBJ to me was somewhat like Diem, they did not like taking advice and listening to people as much as they should have. LBJ listened by far a lot more than Diem, but he still had that ego and pride to try and keep up. A good example of that would be the Gulf of Tonkin and trying to show our "toughness."

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Rate... **Re: Leadership and Policy**by [Ellen Haxby](#) - Friday, 5 November 2010, 07:51 PM

That is a very good point! When I read your post, I thought about how Kennedy reacted to being informed of Diem and Nhu's murders. It proves to me that although trying to keep a middle ground, got sucked into the opinions of his advisors, and "was deeply troubled" and "rushed from the room with a look of shock and dismay on his face" after hearing of the successful coup.

Johnson, on the other hand, seemed to have his own ideas. It does say that Johnson "recognized his foreign policy inexperience" and therefore "retained and relied heavily on Kennedy's advisors" (Herring 136). Over time, though, I think Johnson became "comfortable" with the situation and then began to rely more so on himself. Robert McNamara sticks out in my head because he fiercely opposed many of Johnson's ideas, but Johnson went with what he wanted. Another idea to keep in mind was that Johnson really wanted to work on his Great Society (Herring 136).

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Rate... **Re: Leadership and Policy**by [David Gallegos](#) - Saturday, 6 November 2010, 03:21 PM

Ego is a dangerous thing that could cause more harm than good. Johnson is a prime example of that. The U.S. bombing was not as effective as hoped for and it had actually provided reason for locals to fight against the American soldiers and their allies. When the Strategic hamlet program was created they made it sound like it was going to be a safe place where the locals could move to avoid the war. The conditions in the hamlets was not acceptable, in result aided the North Vietnamese fight against the U.S and South Vietnam. My question is, if the U.S could see that the plan wasn't working why not stop and re evaluate the situation, So the overall goal could be achieved?

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Rate... **Re: Leadership and Policy**by [Kelley Allender](#) - Wednesday, 3 November 2010, 03:20 PM

In my opinion Kennedy had a very realistic view of the Vietnam War and the potential consequences the United States and the rest of the world would face if the U.S. made no effort to intervene. As Herring put it "Kennedy did not eagerly take up the burden in Vietnam... he was cautious rather than bold.. he delayed making a firm commitment for nearly a year and then acted only because the shaky Diem government appeared on the verge of collapse" (p. 91). Many of Kennedy's advisers were suggesting that he make a much greater commitment (in the form of money, manpower, and weaponry) in Vietnam. Diem himself asked for more aid despite continuously rejecting offers of more U.S. combat troops. Many of Kennedy's advisers were in disagreement about what step should be taken next; some such as Taylor and Rostow suggested extreme measures of expanding U.S. involvement, while Bowles and Harriman opted to pull out of

Vietnam. Kennedy's solution was to take a "middle-of-the-road approach. He flatly rejected a negotiated settlement" and "would go no further than approve Taylor's recommendations to increase significantly the volume of American assistance.. in hope this would arrest the military and political deterioration in South Vietnam" (Herring, p. 99-101). One major criticism that I have of Kennedy however is, as stated in Herring, that the Kennedy administration went to great lengths to deceive Americans about the extent and nature of it's involvement, even refusing to state out exact numbers, devising elaborate schemes to cover up what was happening, and flat out denying facts. While Kennedy and his administration concluded that a change in government (meaning Diem) was necessary, they didn't technically support a coup, but they did agree to "support a new government that appeared to have a good chance of success" (Herring, 118). Some speculate that Kennedy ultimately saw Vietnam as an unwinnable failure, and was planning to withdraw American troops and aid. However there is no solid evidence of this plan and due to his unexpected assassination in late 1963, we will never know.

Lyndon Johnson inherited an even bigger mess than JFK had from Eisenhower, so to say he had his work cut out for him from the beginning, and no quick or easy solutions in sight, would be a massive understatement. If you boil it down to the simplest of terms, LBJ did however have two choices; American withdrawal from Vietnam or to engage in further military and economic assistance. After being re-elected in 1964, he chose the latter of the two; expanding from Kennedy's "limited commitment" to an open-ended commitment, authorizing air attacks over North Vietnam and increasing ground forces and advisors in South Vietnam, and by 1965 the U.S. was fully engaged in a major war on the Asian mainland. I think LBJ made several rash decisions regarding Vietnam during his presidency; the mishap that took place in the Tonkin Gulf being a perfect example. The Maddox opened unprovoked fire on a North Vietnamese torpedo boat. Johnson was reportedly enraged when he learned of this unprecedented event, but ordered no reprimand of the American leaders involved. Only two days later, the Maddox was again involved in controversial activities, along with another ship the Turner Joy. Due to "freak weather effects" and "technological errors" false reports of attack against the ships were relayed back to Washington. LBJ and his advisors decided to respond with a "firm, swift retaliatory [air] strike" against North Vietnamese torpedo boat bases (Herring, 143). These air strikes culminated in the damage of 25 Vietnamese patrol boats and 90% of the oil storage facilities at Vihn. More importantly, LBJ used this incident to secure congressional authorization allowing him to take "all necessary measures to repel any armed attacks against the forces of the U.S. and to prevent further aggression". Initially the results of the Tonkin Gulf incident seemed favorable for Johnson, leading to overwhelming victories in both Congress and the race for the U.S. Presidency. However he had also brought the war to the north, providing a motive for North Vietnam to raise their efforts in the south.

LBJ is even more guilty of the very thing I criticized Kennedy for, and that is not only deceiving the American public but also Congress. The events that occurred in relation to the Maddox were depicted to the public and Congress as "deliberate attacks and open aggression on the high seas" while the Maddox was [innocently] engaged in routine patrols (Herring, 144). As we know now, and certain members of LBJ's administration knew then, there most likely was no "attack" to begin with.

Despite one of his biggest campaign promises being "no wider war" LBJ secretly approved a two phase air attack, which included regular bombing against North Vietnam and sent U.S. group combat troops into South Vietnam for the first time. This decision highly escalated the war and blatantly contradicted his campaign promise. In July of 1965 Johnson continued on this path when he "approved the immediate deployment of 100,000 troops followed by 100,000 more in 1966" and also continued to deceive Americans of his decisions in order to "avoid undue concern and excitement in the Congress and in domestic public opinion" (Herring, 166). These tactics reflected his real interest, which was to "achieve his goals in Vietnam without sacrificing the Great Society" (Herring, 167). The decisions made in 1965 by a stubborn and arrogant LBJ, were made without consulting his South Vietnamese ally, put a majority of the costs of the war on the U.S.'s shoulders (costs that were seriously miscalculated by Johnson and his administration), and led to eight years of bloody warfare. In 1967 the U.S. was in a state of serious turmoil, Americans were divided over the issue of Vietnam, as was the Whitehouse. Even with anti war protests going on almost daily in Washington, and even after many of his trusted aides and advisors had deserted or turned on him, Johnson still refused to reevaluate the goals he had set in Vietnam. His unwillingness to admit failure, didn't display bravery or the morals involved in sticking with a commitment he had made. It showed arrogance, unmatched stubbornness, and above all else reckless neglect for the good of Americans and American soldiers, which he shamelessly put second to his own ego and pride.

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Re: Leadership and Policy

by [Jaymie Skeslien](#) - Thursday, 4 November 2010, 01:16 PM

i agree with you.and it tells in the book that lyanden johnson was a liar to everyone.

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**Re: Leadership and Policy**by [Benjamin Trautman](#) - Saturday, 6 November 2010, 06:12 PM

Good points about Kennedy! I agree that he was smart in his approach to the Vietnam crisis, "cautious rather than bold." In Kennedy's presidency he seemed to take more interest in domesticated problems, which may explain his cautious approach to the conflict in Vietnam. Also, Kennedy may have been taking a slow approach because he was looking for the kind of benefits there was in aiding Vietnam. But then comes the question, to what extent of violence will trigger another country to help intervene in a conflict?

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**Re: Leadership and Policy**by [Kyle Hutton](#) - Wednesday, 3 November 2010, 05:00 PM

This is going to be pretty similar to what others said. I think the difference between JFK and LBJ was that Johnson was a lot more hot headed than JFK was. Meaning, it was his way or the highway. He didn't like to take advice from other people, such as his advisers, because he believed he was right. I also would like to throw in that perhaps he was a lot more temperamental than JFK was? When i read about how he screamed at his advisers, and unloaded obscenities on them, i could hardly believe it, i just don't think most presidents behave that way, nonetheless JFK. I think LBJ was very unique? With how he handled himself in office, and his attitude in office, especially towards other people. As for the Gulf Of Tonkin incident, it was one of the most important things that happened in the war. It basically gave the president the ability to whatever he wanted without getting approval from congress.

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**Re: Leadership and Policy**by [Kate Lonstron](#) - Wednesday, 3 November 2010, 06:40 PM

You got it on the spot with LBJ Kyle, I found this some what comical, but kind of interesting reading a part in the Patriots where someone purposed an idea to LBJ and he just went off at him, I do not have the Patriot with me at the moment, but when I get the book back I will put the actual story I am referring to.

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**Re: Leadership and Policy**by [Jaymie Skeslien](#) - Thursday, 4 November 2010, 01:18 PM

yes lynyden was really hot headed, but not only that he was a liar.

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**Re: Leadership and Policy**by [Kate Lonstron](#) - Thursday, 4 November 2010, 03:43 PM

The story I was referring to in my other post was Charles Cooper Pg 121-123. LBJ Just goes off on him.

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**Re: Leadership and Policy**by [Dustin Wilson](#) - Friday, 5 November 2010, 09:36 AM

LBJ did have a terrible temper, but i think it was more than just him wanting to be an a-hole all the time. As Kate points out in reference to the Charles Cooper interview, LBJ chewed out his top political advisers on a normal basis. I feel that this was more for his fear of failure rather than him just trying to be mean. As it has been stated in numerous places LBJ was very prideful and it seems his main argumentative point to voice his true opinion was through anger. I think in comparison to JFK, Kennedy had a more smoothed, polished way of getting his true objectives achieved.

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**Re: Leadership and Policy**by [Ellen Haxby](#) - Friday, 5 November 2010, 08:38 PM

Kyle, be confident in your opinion! I can see where you are coming from with these ideas. Good job!

Herring describes Johnson as “an extraordinarily complex individual”, “a physically imposing man [that] had an ego and ambitions the size of his native Texas,” “a driven man, prodigiously energetic, single-minded, manipulative, often overbearing” (Herring 135).

He certainly seemed more outspoken compared to the presidents before him. He is also described as “generous, warm, and compassionate toward other people,” having an “unbelievable combination of sensitivity and coarseness” (Herring 135).

Unique is certainly a great word to use for LBJ. Great ideas.

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**Re: Leadership and Policy**by [Kyle Hutton](#) - Saturday, 6 November 2010, 02:35 AM

Thank you, i probably should have included the quote from the book, and page number for when he went off on his advisers, luckily Kate did that for me in her response!

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**Re: Leadership and Policy**by [Sheila Daughtry](#) - Saturday, 6 November 2010, 05:14 PM

I think Kennedy is getting off the hook too easy here. Kennedy did not listen to his own Joint Chief of Staff (JCS) after the Bay of Pigs fiasco. Kennedy was just as untrustworthy (secret war in Laos) as Johnson, and I think he would have gone for exclusive power if the opportunity had presented itself.

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**Re: Leadership and Policy**by [Justin White](#) - Wednesday, 3 November 2010, 05:43 PM

In my opinion the leadership of LBJ was fairly decent for having to deal with a war that was passed down to him by JFK. The main problem I have with LBJ's leadership is the fact that he was not very good at taking criticism. In the Appy book (pg119) Seth Tillman a Foreign Relations Committee member says “you had to walk very carefully in dealing with Lyndon Johnson; that overt criticism infuriated him and could have the opposite result of what you hoped and intended.” The overall impression I got of LBJ was that he was insecure and was mostly worried about how he was going to look by the end of the war, either victorious or as the first president to lose a war. He should have been worried about what was best for the people, Americans and Vietnamese, not how he was going to look.

The leadership in South Vietnam was quite complicated because after Diem was killed every new government they put into power would end with a coup. In the PBS series they talk about how no one wanted the job of prime minister and how they just asked a group of people if anyone wanted the job. The person that they picked was just thrown into it and couldn't really turn it down; even he didn't think he was right for the job. This to me just shows how fragile the leadership of South Vietnam was. All of this had a significant effect on the conflict because of the lack of leadership.

The incident in the Gulf of Tonkin led to the resolution that allowed the President to go to war without the approval of Congress. The attacks from the North Vietnamese put the U.S in a situation where action had to be taken. LBJ's retaliation against the North led to the full commitment of the U.S in the South. The retaliation also led to the North escalating their actions by sending troops directly into the South. The goal of the North was to end the war before U.S involvement was too great. Overall the incident in the Gulf of Tonkin was the determining factor that led to full U.S involvement and had a huge effect on North and South Vietnam in initiating the war.

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Re: Leadership and Policy

by [Jaymie Skeslien](#) - Thursday, 4 November 2010, 01:22 PM

this is all true about what you wrote.my favirote was jfk.lyenden johnson was selfish and not trustworthy in any way.

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Re: Leadership and Policy

by [Tracy Allen](#) - Friday, 5 November 2010, 07:52 PM

Jaymie,

Do not forget that even though Lyndon Johnson's foreign policy may have been negligent. His dealings with the American public and the U.S. Congress were not always straightforward as well. However, he did have his domestic policy that had very good intentions. He called it the Great Society and theses reforms helped fund education, medical care and transportation issues as well as the creation of National Endowment for the Arts and National Endowment for the Humanities agencies. He set in programs to try to eliminate poverty and racial injustice. He passed the Civil Rights act as well. Therefore, he was a good President, definitely, when it came to here at home. Foreign Policy was his weakness, where he felt the most insecure. This is probably why he didnt back down in Vietnam.

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Re: Leadership and Policy

by [David Verner](#) - Saturday, 6 November 2010, 09:21 AM

Agreed.

I think thats what we need to remember as a crucial point in this discussion, is foreign policy was not LBJ's strong point. His dream as president was his Great Society, nothing to do with war. As far as what he wanted to do at home, he was a brilliant president for the time. Racial issues were huge still, and he was taking a very progressive stance on that, as well as his other policies.

Herring talks about how LBJ was quite insecure when it came to issues of foreign policy, and had a lot of insecurities about his abilities in that facet of leadership. This was the reason i feel for a lot of his temperament, the stress he felt at the decisions for foreign policy would have shortened many a temper. Along with the incredible pride he had as a man, and his ideas of what he wanted his legacy to be, he simply had no choice but to keep the American interest in Vietnam, and unfortunately this led to his deceptive policies - trying to protect interests in Vietnam whilst protecting his own image. It was never going to be pretty.

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Re: Leadership and Policy

by [Brock Berg](#) - Thursday, 4 November 2010, 03:51 PM

I agree with you Justin, you make great points. The retaliation of US in the North (due to the Gulf of Tonkin) was to me as well, the determining factor that led to full U.S. involvement.

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Re: Leadership and Policy

by [Kate Lonstron](#) - Friday, 5 November 2010, 04:37 PM

You have very well though out points Justin, and I will definitely agree with you on how the gulf of Tonkin was the determining factor that led to full U.S. involvement. I think any president should be able to take criticism without throwing a fit, LBJ definitely should have thought more about the people in his country and the Vietnamese more so than just his rep.

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Re: Leadership and Policy

by [David Verner](#) - Wednesday, 3 November 2010, 06:09 PM

Leadership and Policy - where do you start!

In South Vietnam, it was an absolute shambles in my opinion. Even with my limited knowledge on South Vietnamese politics coming into this class, I had the opinion from what i did know that South Vietnam was a paper thin version of a government at best, and the reading and viewing in this class has only served to strengthen that position.

Diem, for me, was just not a good leader at all. He seemed intent only on implementing policy that would help increase this consumerist lifestyle that the US were trying to bring in with the commercial-import program. As mentioned in the Herring text, the commercial-import program "has been a large scale relief effort that had not promoted significant economic development in Vietnam." A lot of this was down to Diem simply ignoring the villages in his own policy of whats good for Vietnam. Again, the text mentions how much of the Vietnamese population is in villages - but Diem's ideas for Vietnam largely ignored the villages and focused solely on the cities and the consumerist ideals. "Villagers were not gonna care for consumer products, so why bother with them seemed to be what the thought process was - or at least thats how i saw it.

American policy did not help either, and though LBJ may have not wanted the war, with his whole better society policy - he in my mind was just as deceptive and instrumental in the degeneration of the Vietnam situation into war. The Gulf of Tonkin incident stands out as a key point here for me, as he and his advisors threw a quick plan of action out to be used without even really caring if the second incident had actually happened! Now if LBJ was REALLY not pro-war, he would have (I would think) taken a lot more of a measured approach to the whole situation. Unfortunately, he had a war thrust upon him he may not have wanted. But his deceptive policies did not help curb the war in anyways.

This was the issue for me, and something I have come to see as a major key to why the Vietnam issue deteriorated - policies on either side were just too rushed or not thought out properly, and thus there was never a set plan towards setting South Vietnam on a track towards independence. The American policies often seemed like just one band-aid after another being applied to a gaping wound that was the fragile South Vietnamese government.

The Gulf of Tonkin was also the catalyst in my eyes to the whole thing going south. The incident, and the subsequent actions by both sides set them on a collision course that would inevitably lead to conflict. Before that, if policy had been improved maybe war could have been avoided (unlikely scenario as it is) but after the Tonkin incident, and the subsequent increasing of forces in Vietnam - war was inevitable.

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Re: Leadership and Policy

by [Jolene Powell](#) - Wednesday, 3 November 2010, 06:30 PM

Kennedy came into office cautious. Kennedy was willing to support and train Diem in anyway possible, Diem refused. Diem was a horrible leader with no real qualities of leadership, he could not get it together and run his country or its people, when he finally decided to seek help from the US he was wanting it based on his conditions. The Gulf of Tonkin gave the president the ability to make decisions without congress approval, it was very important in this war, however I am not so sure it was right.

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Re: Leadership and Policy

by [Kate Lonstron](#) - Thursday, 4 November 2010, 03:48 PM

Right to the point, Diem didn't listen and really appreciate what we had to give him in my opinion, I think he should have taken our suggestions into consideration along with the money, but instead he just kept asking for more from us in other ways like money and troops but did not take any constructive criticism or ideas.

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Re: Leadership and Policy

by [Jolene Powell](#) - Friday, 5 November 2010, 12:50 PM

I think we continued to support Diem at our countries expense, not just financially but at a terrible price to our soldiers and to our morale. We hurt ourselves for a lost cause, we should have taken care of him alot sooner, we were there trying to support someone who was killing us? what was the point in that?

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Re: Leadership and Policy

by [Kate Lonstron](#) - Friday, 5 November 2010, 04:40 PM

I do not see the point either... but then again in a lot of situations that happened in the Vietnam war I did not understand why we took a certain stance in or made a certain decision for "this" reason. While reading and learning more about this war, I find myself asking what was the point in that, a lot!

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Re: Leadership and Policy

by [David Gallegos](#) - Saturday, 6 November 2010, 02:47 PM

I totally agree with your comment. All Diem wanted was our resources and military aid to support his way of doing things. The U.S should not have been so late to have him out of power. The U.S should not have been so shady about taking Diem out of power, we should have done it ourselves. That would have sent a message.

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Re: Leadership and Policy

by [Kate Lonstron](#) - Wednesday, 3 November 2010, 06:33 PM

@font-face { font-family: "Cambria"; }p.MsoNormal, li.MsoNormal, div.MsoNormal { margin: 0in 0in 0.0001pt; font-size: 12pt; font-family: "Times New Roman"; }div.Section1 { page: Section1; }

The leadership in the U.S compared to the leadership in Vietnam in my opinion was a lot better. South Vietnam had Ngo Dinh Diem, who was not the best leader. He did not listen to what anyone had to say and he kept asking for money and help from the U.S. but he did not want to hear anything from the U.S. He was very selfish in that way; I feel that if one was asking a lot of someone, especially 80% of the money that was funding the war, he should have taken input from the US. As for the US, they were going through a transition of presidents from JFK to LBJ. The rumor floating around was that JFK wanted to pull the U.S. from Vietnam, but since he was assassinated before that took place, there was no proof. LBJ I feel did the best with what he had to work with. He was handed down with an ugly war. The Gulf of Tonkin was something I found when reading as something frustrating. Although the second ship in Tonkin was not proven to have gotten shot at, it gave the president an excuse to send more over to Vietnam. The public was told it was an alleged attack even though the captain of the *Maddox* said that the "North Vietnamese gunboats may have been operating in the area, but no evidence has ever produced to demonstrate that they committed hostile acts and it now seems certain that no second attack took place." (Herring, 142) Even though these attacks may, or may not have taken place, Johnson and his advisors decided it would be good to act upon this issue as if we did get attacked to prove the "toughness" of America.

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Re: Leadership and Policy

by [Jaymie Skeslien](#) - Thursday, 4 November 2010, 01:28 PM

yes that is understandable,even though it was or was not a attack,they did the right thing and acted to the attack instead of ignoring it.

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Re: Leadership and Policy

by [Jolene Powell](#) - Friday, 5 November 2010, 12:53 PM

I do not think we (US) should spend our money, nor our priceless lives in any war or country to help unless we have control or say and respect for that in that country. Period. Diem used us and we allowed it, respectfully that was our fault for allowing that and we paid a price.

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Re: Leadership and Policy

by [Kate Lonstron](#) - Friday, 5 November 2010, 04:41 PM

we paid the price of thousands of soldiers and billions of dollars!

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Re: Leadership and Policy

by [Benjamin Trautman](#) - Saturday, 6 November 2010, 06:31 PM

I feel as if a country decides to help aid another country in any kind of conflict then that is a statement of respect. The U.S. respected the ideals and values South Vietnam proclaimed to have. We found a connection with them in their stance against communism. Diem may have used us a little, but that's exactly what the U.S. was there for, to help aid them in their defeat against North Vietnam and communism.

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Re: Leadership and Policy

by [David Gallegos](#) - Saturday, 6 November 2010, 02:42 PM

The time came were LBJ had to make a decision to fully support the war or pull out. The fact is that it was going to be a highly criticized decision either way. The second attack was just a way to justify the choice LBJ made. What is the point of even being part of a war if your not going to be aggressive enough to achieve the goals of your country?

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Re: Leadership and Policy

by [Sheila Daughtry](#) - Wednesday, 3 November 2010, 07:04 PM

Kennedy and his administration entered the White House with a arrogant and naive attitude (Herring 90 & 92) in regards to the global scene. Eisenhower failed to mention Vietnam in his briefings with Kennedy (Herring 92), and Kennedy assumed Vietnam as a low priority in his early days in office. Discouraged with his Joint Chiefs of Staff (Bay of Pigs fiasco), the unstable leadership of Ngo Dinh Diem, and concerned how the American citizens would respond to sending in troops; Kennedy moved cautiously and secretly with his decisions regarding the Vietnam war.

The combination effort of Diem with the strategic hamlet program and Kennedy's project "Beef Up" escalated the war in a negative way. The strategic hamlet program uprooted the peasants and invoked fear among the Vietnamese people. The "Beef Up" program was a major turn in Kennedy's role in the Vietnam War. Kennedy increased the number of "advisors" from 3,205 to more than 9,000 within a 12 month period of time (Herring 104), and then deceived the American people about the level of involvement with Vietnam. The U.S. was ill prepared to fight the kind of war the North Vietnam presented.

The final straw for the removal of Diem was the raid on the pagodas. Kennedy could no longer explain to the American people why we would support Diem and his brother, Nhu, after Americans witnessing on the television nightly news the brutal attacks against the Buddhist monks. The South Vietnamese Army generals met secretly with the U.S. government

on their intent to overthrow the Diem government. The Kennedy administration would not assist with the coup, however, the U.S. would support the new government (Herring 118).

Ngo Dinh Diem, his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, and John F. Kennedy were all assassinated within a four week period of Fall 1963.

Lyndon Johnson began his service to "preserve an independent, non-Communist South Vietnam" (Herring 131) in a secretive way. Determined not to jeopardize his chance for reelection, he opted to increase financial aid and more "advisors" until after the election when he would be able to "engage in a large-scale involvement" (Herring 131). The death of Diem only confused the turmoil in South Vietnam. The junta in place had no idea what to do next and had little support. The series of generals did little to stabilize the region of South Vietnam and promote confidence and support of the U.S.

The two leadership decisions that strike me as significant during Johnson's term as President would be the Tonkin incident and the landing of ground troops at Da Nang.

Johnson thought Vietnam was important for the U.S. foreign policy goals. "The United States must continue to display to the major Communist powers its certainty of purpose and strength of will" (Herring 137). The Tonkin incident was a huge victory for Johnson. He gained total power and control over the decisions made in regard to the Vietnam war, no debate, no lectures, no appeals; Johnson was now able to do whatever he pleased. The Tonkin illusion also helped unite and build confidence that Johnson showed good judgment and restraint during the so called attack. The effects of the Tonkin incident for North Vietnam was to increase their presence in South Vietnam and gain support from the Chinese government. For the South, the impact was with the latest leader in South Vietnam, Khanh, seized the Tonkin incident to assume "...near-dictatorial powers and imposed severe restrictions on civil liberties" (Herring 146).

Once the ground troops arrived on March 8, 1965; Johnson committed the United States to many more years of bloodshed and violence in an attempt to help the South Vietnamese people escape Communism.

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Re: Leadership and Policy

by [Kate Lonstron](#) - Thursday, 4 November 2010, 03:49 PM

You got it Shelia! I like how much you put into this forum, and found your thoughts and information interesting.

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Re: Leadership and Policy

by [Tracy Allen](#) - Friday, 5 November 2010, 08:17 PM

I remember noticing while reading the Herring book that after practically every recommendation Kennedy received from the JCS and his other military advisors was that he took the middle ground. Sometimes, to me at least, it felt like he was not actually making a decision. I do not think that the naivety in his administration was entirely his fault. As you said, Eisenhower did not mention Vietnam in his briefing, which is somewhat odd considering its importance earlier and his speech about the domino theory.

What about the landing of ground troops at Da Nang did you see as significant? I find it interesting that the first to land were the Marines (sorry that is a bit of a plug, my brother is a Marine and I love him), that pretty girls who gave them flowers greeted them. After this first landing, Westmoreland requested more troops, two U.S. Army divisions to go to Saigon and to the highlands. The JCS backed him and even pushed for more divisions that could take the war to the enemy. Taylor was right "once the first step had been taken, it was very difficult to hold the line." (Herring pg 156)

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Re: Leadership and Policy

by [Sheila Daughtry](#) - Saturday, 6 November 2010, 05:59 PM

The ground troops landed in Da Nang escalated the Vietnam war and caused further deceit within the United States government. Once the American soldiers were on the ground there was no turning back, "no solution...other than to put our own finger in the dike" (Herring 156). From there, Johnson realized he would need to commit more and more troops to prevent South Vietnam from total collapse.

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Re: Leadership and Policy

by [Benjamin Trautman](#) - Wednesday, 3 November 2010, 08:54 PM

The transition from John Kennedy to Lyndon Johnson in the U.S. presidency had a negative impact on the conflict. Lyndon Johnson dealt with the congress much more efficiently than John Kennedy had in his time in office. President Johnson and the Democratic party owned the congress therefor it was easier for them be granted authorization to send troop into Vietnam. Lyndon Johnson had a more aggressive campaign towards communism. This resulted in massive attacks in South Vietnam, many of which them failed. Citizens of the U.S. became more impatient as the struggle for victory in South Vietnam continued to lengthen. Although some may argue Kennedy left Johnson with this ordeal and it is not his fault for the war, but ultimately Johnson made the decision to send troops to Vietnam. The Gulf of Tonkin incident only solidified a reason for the U.S. to join in on the fight against communism. This incident negatively effected the conflict that was going on, instead of the U.S. just sending in equipment to help aid North Vietnam they involved themselves completely in the war.

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Re: Leadership and Policy

by [Jaymie Skeslien](#) - Thursday, 4 November 2010, 01:29 PM

I agree with you.good job

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Re: Leadership and Policy

by [Jairus Godeka](#) - Friday, 5 November 2010, 07:18 PM

Hello Benjamin, Good insight. The way I see it, Kennedy left Johnson with a more complex state of affairs than he had inherited. However, this does not mean that Kennedy was an ineffective president, rather, it was the natural progression of events and also, Johnson's interpretation of the events might have led to the escalation. Here is a hypothetical situation. I might not get any points for it, non the less I will let it off my chest. Suppose LBJ, faced with a lower support base in upcoming elections, saw an opportunity and staged the gulf of Tonkin incident? He then would have had a double edged sword. The first would have been to justify the deployment of troops, justify the bombings, and yes there is one more, shore up the support of the Americans at election time?

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Re: Leadership and Policy

by [Brock Berg](#) - Thursday, 4 November 2010, 03:49 PM

Lyndon Johnson tried to be a fair leader. The leadership of President's prior set him up for the disaster that many hang on his head. I normally would say that the president is a puppet to his advisors, and the congress; however, in this case, LBJ was fundamentally the 'Man in Charge.' Lyndon made many mistakes, like any president who would have been faced with these decisions. JFK ultimately began the interest in Vietnam, and our French allies, which led to our involvement. Lyndon had a problem with objectively, and openly, listening to ideas. On numerous occasions, he let his fear control his emotions, and letting his emotions dictate his strategy. Many members of his counsel as well as Seth Tillman of the FRC (Foreign Relations Committee) would agree that "overt criticism infuriated him and could have the opposite result of what you ... intended." Pg 119 Patriots. I would say that the most important characteristic to note of LBJ was his fear of destrouing his self-image as well as the image of the nation.

The incident in the Gulf of Tonkin involving the Maddox, and the Turner Joy, was a complicated incident. The information was not presented quick enough, and the President, as well as members of his administration, decided to take advantage of the situation. The idea was if the American people could believe that we had been attacked unprovoked the majority of America would agree with going to war. The retaliation in North Vietnam was the doorway to full commitment

in the South. Of course this created a reason for the North to begin work on the Ho Chi Minh trail and expand it to begin their retaliation in the South. The Gulf of Tonkin was the straw that broke the camel's back; it enabled the President full control over military. When the information was presented that the Turner Joy was not attacked, and that the two navy ships were not simply wandering aimlessly but on reconnaissance missions, the American public would feel betrayed. Once Diem was assassinated, South Vietnam would go through many complications. Many did not want the position to be Prime Minister, and many were fearful of their life had they been elected. The fragility of the government in the South was the U.S.'s main concern. The government was subject to influence, and the influence which the officials of Vietnam were most likely to take would be that of the Soviet Union, or China, both being Communist. Overall I would say the knowledge of the Vietnamese from American perspective, and vice versa, would be the ultimate failure from our leaders. There were many opportunities to allow the Vietnamese to try to govern themselves as an independent nation, and we failed to meet those opportunities. It was our prejudice of less powerful nations that led our mindset to believe only our way can effectively keep the nation up to the standards of the United Nations.

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Re: Leadership and Policy

by [Justin White](#) - Saturday, 6 November 2010, 02:04 PM

Great points, I agree that the retaliation in North Vietnam was the doorway to full commitment in the south. America's prejudice against less powerful nations was a misguided view on our part. Good post

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Re: Leadership and Policy

by [Jairus Godeka](#) - Thursday, 4 November 2010, 08:42 PM

Leadership decisions are significant in a variety of ways. Some decisions are made by leaders based on existing policy. Other decisions are made based on current or prevailing conditions. LBJ's decision to deploy American troops in Vietnam was such a decision. The significance is directly related to the results you get from making those decisions and how those decisions affect those directly involved. LBJ may have considered for example the risk and significance of sending American troops into battle in a foreign land to fight what basically amounted to a bush war on misunderstood terrain. How was the decision of deployment going to affect his bid at reelection? What if there was a significant amount of death to American troops? How would these conditions affect his ability to lead? Would he be seen as a weak but compassionate leader, or aggressive and reckless?

Kennedy took a middle-of-the-road approach when it came to handling Vietnam.....Vietnam stands as the most tragic legacy of the global activism of the Kennedy era. The president had long taken a close personal interest in Vietnam-once labeling it the "cornerstone of the Free World in Southeast Asia".....Page 91 The above quote I believe gives any observer of the Kennedy era an analysis of the path to the eventual decisions regarding Vietnam. Hence the modernization of conventional military forces to permit a "flexible response to various types and levels of aggression.

LBJ was completely torn on the decision of sending or committing American troops to Vietnam. Torn between his policy and the mixed advice he was getting from those close to him, the president chose to continue to deceive the nation as to the significance of the steps he was taking. A good example is his revealing to the public that he was sending only 50,000 soldiers, in actuality he had approved the immediate deployment of 100,000 troops followed by another 100,000 troops in 1966.

Ngoh Dinh Diem, a promising up comer who had shown a lot of promise as the liberator of South Vietnam during Eisenhower's administration didn't result into what Americans had hoped. Between the fall and winter of 1954-1955, Diem was the focal point of a protracted conflict between the United States and France. Eventual plots against Diem's life were suspected to be American in origin but never substantiated. His economic development programs were ill-conceived by those in his government who lacked expertise. Diem needed and for the most part got American aid, in most cases he got the aid on his own terms.

In Rusk's view the attack at the gulf of tonkin was an act of war by the government of North Vietnam. LBJ was reportedly enraged when he heard of the incident but no retaliation was ordered. The significance is that, a small nation's ports were attacked by CIA backed South Vietnam, and the North responded appropriately, knowing the risks involved in such an act. They (north Vietnam), stood up to the giant (US). The north Vietnamese might also have been testing LBJ's character and resolve. The result was that, it escalated the North /South conflict.

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Rate... **Re: Leadership and Policy**by [Ellen Haxby](#) - Friday, 5 November 2010, 08:30 PM

I believe that leadership change was good throughout the Vietnam War. Yes, there was the downfall that once a president really got going on something, his term either ended or in Kennedy's case, assassinated. The reason why I think change was good is that war, especially the war in Vietnam, is a difficult task to take on. It must have been extremely exhausting for each one of the presidents, and therefore possibly refreshing to be out of the spotlight of what to do in the First Indochina War, and then the Vietnam War.

Although LBJ was Kennedy's former Vice President, he had slightly different views on how to handle the war. Johnson remained hesitant and went for the middle ground like Kennedy at first. Later, though, I believe Johnson gave up on doing things the safe way. Proof for this comes when Johnson "altered the U.S. commitment by initiating the regular bombing of North Vietnam and by sending the first U.S. ground combat troops to South Vietnam" (Herring 147).

In Secretary of State Dulles' opinion "there [was] no one to take [Bao Dai's] place who would serve US interest better," than Ngo Dinh Diem (Herring 62). Obviously this viewpoint changed overtime, but at the beginning, Diem was the only one the U.S. saw fit to be in such a position. Therefore, the loss of Diem (although practically encouraged by the U.S.), was a slight tragedy. Yes, Diem was not listening to the U.S., but he was willing to do the job. After his death on November 1, 1963 (Herring 128), the generals who took his place were not much better. The junta that came into power after Diem's murder "lacked experience, had no program, and found little support among the various groups who had opposed Diem" (Herring 133). Not long after, the junta was overthrown by General Nguyen Khanh, who "faced staggering problems" (Herring 134). Overall, the government was even harder to handle because no one had the experience Diem had.

The Gulf of Tonkin incident impacted both the North and South in different ways. The North saw it in an optimistic way, while Khan had to fight to keep himself in power. The North "decided in September 1964 to send to the south the first units of its own regular army to support a push for victory before the spring of 1965," while Khan "attempted to exploit the Tonkin Gulf affair to save his political skin" because of the "political turmoil in South Vietnam (Herring 146). People from Saigon actually "took to the streets," leading to Khan's resignation and an anarchy ruling Saigon in which "mobs rampaged through the streets, Buddhists and Catholics waged open warfare, and gangs of thugs fought and pillaged with hatchets and machetes" (Herring 147).

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Rate... **Re: Leadership and Policy**by [Spencer Smith](#) - Friday, 5 November 2010, 08:32 PM

I get the feeling that communism in the 60's was viewed the same as terrorism today. I think about how I would have handled the situation in Vietnam if I were president, and it seems so easy to say, "what's the big deal?" "just pull out." I wasn't raised in a society where I was taught to hide under my desk in case of a nuclear war. I wasn't raised during the red scare. So it's easy to be critical of these leaders we are discussing, but we must put it in the context of the times. I wasn't around. I don't know how the everyday American viewed communism. Maybe everyone in this class would have supported the war. Maybe not. One parallel that I've thought about is how similar the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution was to when Bush got the go ahead from congress after 9/11. In the heat of the moment, it's easy to get things passed through congress. But the individuals like senator Morse that didn't let emotion, or being in the overwhelming minority take their integrity away from them when they cast their vote. To even go on another rabbit trail, this is one purpose that the practice of history serves. To record who supported what, without any escape.

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Rate... **Re: Leadership and Policy**by [Kyle Hutton](#) - Saturday, 6 November 2010, 02:30 AM

That is a very interesting comparison, a new way to look at it!

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**Re: Leadership and Policy**by [David Gallegos](#) - Saturday, 6 November 2010, 03:02 PM

You made a really good point. It is human nature to get fired up after something huge occurs. As leaders it is their duty to the American people to be able to make clear headed choices. As the public we need to always let our opinion be heard. For times like this when sometimes the leaders need to be reminded who they make decisions for.

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**Re: Leadership and Policy**by [Sheila Daughtry](#) - Saturday, 6 November 2010, 06:52 PM

I was a kid in the mid-1960's and I had no idea what the Vietnam war was all about. I was too busy caught up in my own drama of being a kid. I recently had dinner with a couple of friends who were in their late teens or early twenties when Vietnam was unfolding. One marched in protest, but had no idea what she was protesting against. She did not know where Vietnam was or why the United States soldiers were there. I think her reaction was typical. I don't think many people at the time, knew why we were there or what was going on.

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