

HST 195: History of Vietnam War Sp18 (Escobar 41945)

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Longest War & Video Documentaries

by [Joe Escobar](#) - Saturday, April 7, 2018, 10:17 AM

This thread is for discussions on the Longest War & Video Documentaries topic.

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IMPORTANT - SUBJECT LINES

BE SURE to use an informative subject line for your post, something that describes which one of the questions you are addressing. Do NOT simply leave it RE: Longest War & Video Documentaries

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"Why Vietnam?" Video



by [Madison Zemba](#) - Tuesday, April 10, 2018, 8:33 PM

In the video titled "Why Vietnam?" it is stated throughout by President Johnson that the reason the USA felt obligated to intervene in the war between North and South Vietnam was because South Vietnam did not have the ability to fight for themselves. It was our "duty" to help them keep similar freedoms that Americans had. Knowing these isolated facts, it makes moral sense as to why America felt the need to help the people of South Vietnam, but does anyone think that there could have been some ulterior motives from the US government? As stated in the video at the time stamp 10:00, South Vietnam was full of many goods such as rice, natural resources (coal, zinc, tin), natural rubber, and latex processing factories. Is there a possibility that the US thought that there was something to gain from helping the Vietnamese people?

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Re: "Why Vietnam?" Video

by [Alysia Knapp](#) - Friday, April 13, 2018, 9:31 PM

I wouldn't be surprised! That is part of what France wanted from Vietnam, and over time the United States slowly took over France's role. It is also stated several times that they were obligated to help South Vietnam for "peace" and to help them gain their independence. It seems like if that was how they truly felt then they would have helped the North. Ho Chi Minh's declaration of independence was inspired by the United States', while the South's government was initially put together by the French. Based on the United States' history, you'd think they would choose not to support France and its colonial notions, but they did based on so many aspects of the situation.

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Re: "Why Vietnam?" Video

by [Jacob Egan](#) - Sunday, April 15, 2018, 5:31 PM

That definitely could be a big factor to why. The US had much more to gain from this war than a W. There certainly are other motives, big or small, to stay in Vietnam. Such as the fight against communism and the Cold War. "We viewed communism as a monolithic dragon which controlled all of the Eurasian land mass" says Infantry battalion commander, Bernard Trainor (Pg. 4 Appy book). After the fall of China, the US didn't want to lose another country to communism. "The establishment of close ties among these three communist parties [Russia, China, and Vietnam] revealed Ho Chi Minh in his true colors as the mortal enemy of native independence of Indochina" (pg. 19 Herring book). I do think that there is a possibility the US was

Indochina (pg. 10 Herring book). I do think that there is a possibility the US was helping South Vietnam for its resources, but I don't think that is the only reason.

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2

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SEATO Pact

by [Tyler Cannon](#) - Tuesday, April 10, 2018, 9:25 PM

In the "Why Vietnam?" documentary the creation of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty forming SEATO is discussed. In the documentary it explains this treaty as the solution to the southern Vietnamese desire for peace since they are now prospering and can enjoy in the pleasures of capitalism since they own their farms and can keep their profits.(Why Vietnam?, 8:07). They portray SEATO as this powerhouse alliance that will keep all of Indochina safe from communism and at peace. The view as portrayed in the documentary is very one sided and is exaggerating all of the facts so that SEATO can look like a great move since the video was made by the U.S government after all and we can not allow ourselves to seem weak.

The truth behind the SEATO pact is that it had major weaknesses. One of these weaknesses as pointed out in the Herring book is that "The major neutralist nations of the region-Burma ,India, and Indonesia- declined to join. Because of the restrictions imposed by the Geneva Accords Laos, Cambodia, and south Vietnam could not formally participate."(Herring page 55). It did provide some good such as establishing the foundation if United action was needed and gave southern Vietnam a semblance of a "free" nation. As you can see, the two sources don't fully agree with each other as the Herring book points out the obvious weaknesses to SEATO, while the American Documentary of "Why Vietnam" portrays this pact as one of the best moves America made in the early war. The clear winner of this disagreement would be Herring since he uses facts that are obvious to any observer if they really think about the geography of the area and the countries that signed the pact. The documentary goes a little overboard on the "America is the Greatest" sentiment and doesn't even recognize its flaws. They don't want communism to get a leg up on Capitalism.

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Re: Reasons for United States assisting South Vietnam in war

by [Alysia Knapp](#) - Tuesday, April 10, 2018, 10:50 PM

The first two chapters of *America's Longest War* and the U.S. government produced documentary *Why Vietnam?* both discuss the United States' connection, involvement, and relationship with Vietnam prior to and at the beginning of the Second Indochina War. They discuss explain the reasons for the United States assisting South Vietnam

both financially and militarily.

America's Longest War, states that France took China's place in Vietnam as an invasive and oppressing nation. France had colonial notions for Vietnam, and greatly influenced Vietnamese culture and education, but after World War II, France struggled with maintaining their control. It was implied that the Soviet Union was “the most powerful nation in Europe.” (p. 12 Herring) Since they did not want communism to be as authoritative as it was in World War II, the United States agreed to support France, to help make it a stronger influence in the west. Therefore, they complied with France's colonialism in Vietnam. Throughout the first two chapters, *America's Longest War* explains how the United States commitment to France blended into its commitment to South Vietnam. It seems like the main reason for going to war they give is commitment.

Why Vietnam? does not give as much of an unbiased history as *America's Longest War*, as it is a government made propaganda film. It shares several public promises the United States made regarding assisting South Vietnam to the end of the war. An example of this public promise of commitment is stated at 24:05 by President Johnson “...nor will we blister, or bully, or flaunt our power, but we will not surrender. and we will not retreat.” The speeches shown and statements made sugar coat their reasons for going to war. Several times, it is said the United States is at war for peace. Here are some examples:

~ 3:47 President Johnson: “...retreat does not bring safety, and weakness does not bring peace.”

~ 19:45 Secretary of State Dean Rusk: “Our war aim in South Vietnam is peace.”

~ 22:46 Dean Rusk: “Hanoi is presently resisting the road to peace.”

While *America's Longest War* does give hints to peace, and *Why Vietnam?* definitely brings up commitment and public promises, their separate, main reasons are consistently obvious. However, I do not see their individual justifications as the full story, although commitment and peace can be interpreted as valid. A rationale I do not recall either specifically mentioning is **fear**. Based on the information presented by these sources, I conclude that fear was the main reason the United States greatly assisted South Vietnam. The United States was afraid of Chinese communism spreading throughout southeast Asian. They were afraid of the Soviet's communistic influence in Europe. They were afraid of harming their self image by breaking promises and losing to communism. Commitment and spread of peace are secondary and inferior arguments beneath the fear umbrella.

Sum of ratings:3 (1) [Permalink](#) | [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)**Re: Reasons for United States assisting South Vietnam in war**by [Casandra Fountain](#) - Sunday, April 15, 2018, 9:31 PM

I think we as Americans never like to display our sense of fear to ourselves and especially to the audience of the world. I imagine our leaders behind closed doors shaking in their shoes and then once the camera is on, that fear turns into our greatest strength. In this case, President Johnson took that fear of Communism and fed the public what he wanted them to hear. We were not in Vietnam to destroy, we were there to help and prevent the spread of the Communism. "South Vietnam shall have the right of choice, the right to shape their own destiny in free elections in the South are throughout all Vietnam under international supervision. And they shall not have any government imposed upon them by force and terror so long as we can prevent it." (23:17 Why Vietnam?) If America was there to help it is an easier pill to swallow then if we are there for just another war, I feel anyways.

Sum of ratings:2 (1) [Permalink](#) | [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)**Stopping the spread of disease**by [Casandra Fountain](#) - Tuesday, April 10, 2018, 10:51 PM

The fear of communism was a major concern in the 1950s through the 1980s. It was a race between countries to get as many other countries, especially the small "inferior" ones to follow the communist or anti-communist nations around them. In the video, Why Vietnam?, clips of President Johnson show up throughout the video in his address to why America needed to be in Vietnam. Towards the end, President Johnson says, "Most non-Communist nations of Asia cannot by themselves and alone resist the growing might and grasping ambition of Asian communism," (26:00, Why Vietnam?). The narrator of the film follows that quote with saying, "We are a nation which honors our commitments and a people committed to our honor." Makes you feel proud doesn't it?

Our commitment was stopping the spreading of communism. Our leaders were wholeheartedly believed in the Domino Theory. This is the theory that a political event in one country will cause similar events in neighboring countries, aka the spread of communism. If the Asian communists took control in South Vietnam, they would be rich in rice and natural resources. The south was a gateway to Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Burma, and East Pakistan. South Vietnam had raw rubber and latex processing facilities. They were moving toward greater industrialization. Everything North Vietnam wanted their hands on.

I feel the Herring book shows agreement that the U.S. did not want to lose Southeast Asian to the Communists. The United States was reluctant to participate in the Geneva Conference. The administration was facing a dilemma though; because of international and domestic politics, it did not want to "lose" all or even part of Indochina to the Communists (p.46, Herring). Each side had their ill will intentions towards controlling Southeast Asian, it would come down to who wanted it more.

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"Why Vietnam" Film Exposes American Fears of Socialism

by [Daisy Burge](#) - Thursday, April 12, 2018, 5:44 PM

American interference in Vietnam cannot be examined as an isolated foreign policy decision and must be taken in context with the larger reaction that the United States had to post-WWII third world nationalism. The fear of socialist ideologies that revolutionaries of third world nations adopted was so powerful that when a leader like Fidel Castro or Ho Chi Minh advocated any sort of socialist ideal it resulted in a collapse of political and economic relations.

The case I am making is that, had Americans not had such a severe fear of Communist authoritarianism, or had American political leadership had a more nuanced understanding of the nationalist and socialist aspects of Ho Chi Minh's ideology, political relations would not have collapsed to such a severe and violent degree. It was only after American condemnation of the Vietnamese nationalists that Minh and his political followers turned to Communist China and the USSR for assistance in overthrowing their colonial oppressors. Minh proclaimed independence from French rule quoting Thomas Jefferson, and celebrations made it clear that American democratic precedent was an inspiration behind Minh's initial push toward an independent Vietnam (Herring 3).

Why Vietnam showcases this fear of the Communist authoritarianism by portraying the North Vietnamese as hardline Communists. As the documentary explains, Vietnam is rich in natural resources like rubber, rice, agriculture, and is a rapidly industrializing nation. American fear of third world nationalism was not only political in wanting to prevent Communist and socialist ideals, but also based in very real economic concern. Any risk that a resource-rich nation was going to fall to another power was enough justification to align with old European allies under the secure knowledge that the French would at least be able to secure American political and economic interests long-term. With the Vietnamese nationalists, particularly with Ho Chi Minh's associations at this point with the USSR and China, America ran a risk that their

economic and political interests wouldn't be served long-term.

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Tiger and the Elephant

by [Jacob Egan](#) - Thursday, April 12, 2018, 9:10 PM

The connections I found between the herring book and the documentaries was that the French thought that they would win the war before it had even started. They were to prideful and thought too little of their enemies, which in return lost them the battle of Dien Bien Phu and the war. The French Commander in Chief, General Navarre, was fully confident that the winter campaign would come to an end without any substantial gains by the enemy, despite their desperate methods (9:20 into The First War in Vietnam). On the other end, both sides agreed to hold plebiscites to determine the status of each of the three sections of Vietnam (pg.10 Herring). Until negotiations broke down after Admiral Georges Thierry d'Argenlieu infuriated the Vietnamese by launching a move for separate Cochin China (Pg. 10 Herring). But Ho Chi Minh knew of this too. Ho predicted the outcome of the war more accurately than the French did. He said "If ever the tiger pauses the elephant will impale him on his mighty tusks. But the tiger will not pause, and the elephant will die of exhaustion and loss of blood." (pg. 10 herring) These are the connections I found between the book and the documentaries.

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Re: Tiger and the Elephant

by [Tyler Cannon](#) - Friday, April 13, 2018, 11:50 AM

This arrogance and its path to defeat is something that we have seen in history time and time again. One example that I can think of off the top of my head is another French general named Napoleon Bonaparte and his invasion of Russia. He saw his Grande Armee under his command as the ultimate military force in the world. He set his sights to conquer the rest of Europe and Russia. His plan with Russia was to win an overwhelming amount of victories and force Russia to surrender and come to the negotiating table. As the weather began to worsen and soldier were leaving due to lack of food and supplies Napoleon was still too arrogant and has been quoted "I have come once and for all to finish off these barbarians of the North," he purportedly declared to his top military advisors. "The sword is now drawn. They must be pushed back into their ice, so that for the next 25 years they no longer come to busy themselves with the affairs of civilized Europe."(History.com). The

Russian army was always on the move and would burn the cities that they would pass so that the French could not use it for supplies. In the end just as it was in Dien Bien Phu, the French would ultimately go on to lose to the much more guerilla tactics of the enemy and be caused to retreat.

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How can something as important as the Geneva Accords not be signed by anyone?

by [James Alewine](#) - Saturday, April 14, 2018, 8:57 PM

The Herring book and *The First War in Vietnam* both brought up a major turning point in Vietnam, the Geneva agreements (Geneva Accords) which divided the country in two. "At the Geneva Conference, the accord stipulated that the 17th parallel would serve as a line of demarcation between North and South Vietnam, each would remain under the control of its own civilian government." (10:45 into *The First War in Vietnam* video).

What I find interesting about this conference is the fact that the United States was reluctant to participate because "negotiation with any communist nation was anathema." (p.46 Herring) Yet, the United State gave explicit instructions to participate as an interested nation and not as a principle negotiator (Herring pg. 46) and "not to endorse an agreement that in any way impaired the territorial integrity of the associated states," (Herring pg. 46) but the French were set to get out of Vietnam because they felt the U.S. set them up and left them to die.

With the British, Soviets, and Chinese taking the lead with the intent to keep the United States away, it was inevitable for this to turn out bad for the United States. The final agreement to split the country along the 17th parallel seemed to be the only way to avert a full communist takeover of Indochina and with some diplomatic maneuvering each party could voice its concerns. In the end, the agreement was made but never signed by anyone because the U.S. refused to deal with Communist. (13:40 into *The First War in Vietnam* video).

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America's Longest War- Ngo Dinh Diem

by [Madison Zemba](#) - Sunday, April 15, 2018, 8:09 PM

As stated in the reading from "America's Longest War" Vietnam was set up for failure.

Their government was unstable, there were multiple religions that clashed within the nation, and it was a known fact that it would be difficult to get their own army trained. Yes, their leader Ngo Dinh Diem sounded fitting- he was a nationalist, anti-communist, Catholic, had awards from the French, and was a skillful politician. However, it was also known that he tended to be self-absorbed, a poor listener, and very strong headed. These traits made it very difficult to achieve positive change during the first years of the war. Even after Diem's poor handling of the Sects Crisis, and after the French expressed that they wanted to relieve Diem of his power, America wanted to keep him around. As time went on, Diem became more and more authoritarian. Does anyone think that the war would have taken a different turn if South Vietnam had a leader who was more open to the ideas of others? In my opinion citizens may have cooperated more effectively with the Americans under someone else's influence.

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Why Vietnam

by [Spencer Gutierrez](#) - Sunday, April 15, 2018, 8:26 PM

The topic from the video "Why Vietnam" that I feel shares the most with the book is the impact that it had on everyone and not just the people experiencing the war hands on. In the story from George Watkins he says "Why did all these people die? The majority were my age. Their lives and their families all messed up. What was gained from it?" This shows the questioning that went through the minds of almost all the people who were affected by this war.

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Ruthless Grandfather

by [Casandra Fountain](#) - Sunday, April 15, 2018, 10:12 PM

The video documentaries and the Herring book paint a similar picture of Ho Chi Minh in my eyes. In the Herring book he is described as, "frail, a gentle man who radiated warmth and serenity, he was also willing to sanction the most cold blooded methods to achieve his aims... His dark, piercing eyes revealed the intensity of his commitment to the cause to which he dedicated his life." The video Why Vietnam? demonstrates a similar picture of him, "He was seen as the kindly smiling grandfather. But behind the smile is a mind which is planning a reign of terror in South Vietnam in which children and adults alike will be the victims." (6:45 Why Vietnam?) During Vietnam's struggle from French colonialism, Ho Chi Minh spoke of collaboration and being colleagues with the French people trying to reach an understanding of Vietnam's autonomy. (3:48, The First War in Vietnam) Ho established himself as the symbol of nationalism and the struggle for freedom to the population of Vietnam. But Ho remained

loyal to Moscow and Vietnam was part of a broader Communist drive for world domination. (p.15/19, Herring) Ho Chi Minh proved he would stop at nothing to display his commitment to Communist regime.

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French failures

by [Casandra Fountain](#) - Sunday, April 15, 2018, 11:53 PM

The First Indochina War showed the French were not the imperialists they thought they once were. They were “poor colonizers” as said by Franklin Roosevelt. He claimed they badly mismanaged Indochina and brutally exploited its people. The French were not ready to abandon their empire in Indochina. In Paris, peace was talked about, but in Vietnam, they acted war, Vietnamese fighting for their homes and lives against Frenchman fighting for empire. (4:33, The First War in Vietnam) The Viet Minh had made major gains on French forces, they proved to be well-organized and well-equipped with military forces. With Chinese aid increasing, there was worry of the French withdrawing removing the last obstacle for China and Southeast Asia going into Communist hands. (p.22, Herring) The Viet Minh used guerilla warfare against the French. General Giap, commander of the Viet Minh explains guerrilla warfare, “It is the kind of combat best suited to a revolution which depends on the spirit and heroism of the people to overcome modern armies, to avoid the enemy when he is strong and attack him when he is weak, to scatter and reform, to fight wars of attrition or annihilation as the case may be, to hit at the enemy everywhere so that everywhere the enemy will find himself submerged in a sea of armed and hostile men in order to undermine the enemy's morale and use up his forces.” (5:30, The First War in Vietnam) The video goes on to say, “The French attempted to use Bao Dai because after three years of experience, they'd come to the conclusion that a native movement supported by the majority of the population was bound to win over a foreign army.” This solution was another French disaster. He spent most of his life as a puppet of France. He lacked the temperament for leadership, he isolated himself in one of his palaces. (p.26, Herring) The French had dropped the torch on many things and now it was the US turn to pick it up.

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