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Leadership
 by [Joe Escobar](#) - Thursday, 15 October 2009, 03:13 PM

Discuss the significance of leadership and changes in leadership in the U.S. and Vietnam, during this 1964-65 time period. In particular, what impact did the change from JFK to LBJ and Ngo Dinh Diem to the series of generals have on the conflict?

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Re: Leadership
 by [Glenn Dalgleish](#) - Wednesday, 21 October 2009, 03:48 PM

During the 1964-1965-time period, there were many significant changes in leadership and power in the United States and Vietnam. When JFK was assassinated and LBJ took over, that was one of the most significant changes in leadership in the United States. There were many changes in the Vietnam conflict as the role of power, was inherited by LBJ. JFK did not want to leave Vietnam, because he said that it would lead back to the communist rule of Chinese or other like-minded individuals to Vietnam and other surrounding nations like Laos, Cambodia and Thailand, which would be affected by this.

President Diem had built strategic barriers, but they were being destroyed now that there was new leadership. LBJ offered full support to General Con, who was the new leader after Diem in S. Vietnam. The numbers of Viet-cong forces were stepped up in the South. Ho Chi Minh called all forces in the North to help those in the south, because they were suffering. LBJ did not want to loose in Vietnam, because that would mean he would loose the presidency, not just a war in an Asian country. LBJ did not was to be seen as a "softie," so he created a resolution that would give him the power to make or declare war, with out a war actually having started. American aircrafts started to bomb North Vietnam, due to the 2nd Gulf of Tonkin attack, even though that incident never occurred, but because that couldn't be proved and there were many who backed this up, LBJ made the decision to start bombing. So, after the 2nd Gulf of Tonkin attack, LBJ had the resolution passed by congress that gave him full power to make war without a declaration of war. Although, LBJ didn't want to go to war because he knew it would interfere with everything else he had planned for American, he had to live up to the good name of the United States and not seem as cowards or as a weak country.

The Viet Cong attacked an American air base and then the Brinx hotel where there were many Americans. Saigon's army dealt with a set of deadly blows to their army from the Viet-cong. George Mcbundy urged LBJ to bomb Vietnam, but he declined. Another American air base was attacked and that seemed like the final straw. LBJ did not want to start a war, but after the second attack on an American air base, he gave the green light to start bombing North Vietnam and it was called operation "Rolling Thunder." There was a coop attempt in Saigon and the Vietnam government was in a lot of turmoil. Students were rioting and Buddhists were on strike. General Con had a meeting and said he had to resign because he said he was ill. Con returned 3 days later and said he would do his best to "lead his government in these critical times." Con turned the power to the civilians and remained active as head of the armed forces, until his own military advisors rebelled against him and he was banished to the U.N.

After the air bases were attacked, 3500 marines were deployed to protect those and other bases. Their objective was to defend the air bases, but General Wallace M. Greene Jr. said that the marines couldn't sit around and defend the bases without getting out into the country and aggressively patrolling the area and killing Vietnamese. LBJ made Ho Chi Minh an offer that entailed a development project on the Mekong River, if Minh would abandon his goals. Minh declined and LBJ resumed his duty.

The civilian government or South Vietnam, which was headed by Nguyen Cao Ky, collapsed after the military outpost in Saigon lost 800 of its best troops and the village was almost completely destroyed. General Westmoreland conferred with General Wheeler and Secretary McNamara to have many more troops increased toward Vietnam and LBJ backed their decision.

LBJ was set on not retreating or surrendering from Vietnam and his plan was to show the Vietnam that we, as Americans, would not be defeated by "force of arms or superior power." LBJ called it invasion, but North Vietnam called it liberation. LBJ had many challenging decisions to make when he inherited the Vietnam War as he took presidency. Although we will never know, it is probably safe to say that things would have happened much differently if JFK had lived to make decisions and hold power during those years that Johnson commanded. It is significant that LBJ was the president because he made many decisions, including the one to go to war with Vietnam. The conflict in Vietnam was greatly affected by Johnson and his advisors, as well as those people who were in command of South Vietnam. The change in power from Ngo Dinh Diem to General Con was significant because now that Diem was dead, people viewed things differently and felt that they could do things they couldn't do while he was alive. For example, when they destroy the barriers that Diem had made years earlier is one way in which people were affected by the change in leadership. Clearly, there were many significant changes and shifts in power that changed the conflict in Vietnam.

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Re: Leadership

by [Evan Look](#) - Wednesday, 21 October 2009, 04:46 PM

The leadership in the U.S during the times of the Vietnam conflict did not begin with John F. Kennedy but were gaining momentum after he took the office of president. "In settling the major policy issues, he was cautious rather than bold, hesitant rather than decisive, and improvisational rather than carefully calculating." (91 Herring)

J.F.K had many doubts about the chances for success in Vietnam throughout his presidency and he seemed to be informed incorrectly many times. Lyndon B. Johnson began his presidency with nearly no foreign policy and had to rely on others for advice. "He dismissed out of hand the idea of an American withdrawal from Vietnam, and he rejected without serious consideration the neutralization scheme proposed by de Gualle and endorsed by Senate Majority Mike Mansfield and the columnist Walter Lippman." (137-138 Herring) L.B.J did not want to allow for his presidency to be the time when America is seen as being soft or the loser of a conflict.

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Re: Leadership

by [Patrick Brady](#) - Wednesday, 21 October 2009, 07:00 PM

During the his presidency, Kennedy's policy towards the war was that he thought that the U.S. aided South Vietnam must defeat the Viet Cong on their own. At the time of Kennedy's assassination there was approximately 16,000 "advisors" in South Vietnam. While President Kennedy was willing to aid and train the South Vietnamese, President Johnson was willing to provide a more direct aid. According to the Christian Appy's book President Johnson pushed the total of U.S. troops in Southeast Asia to over 200,000.

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Re: Leadership

by [Matthew McIntosh](#) - Wednesday, 21 October 2009, 09:17 PM

After Kennedy was assassinated the change to Johnson was huge but not at first. Johnson like Kennedy and Eisenhower before him, had no enthusiasm for a massive engagement of American forces in Asia, he and his advisors feared Americanization of the war would further undercut the self-reliance of the

Vietnamese*. After the Tonkin Gulf Johnson decided to escalate the war in Vietnam and "he didn't want to be the one to loose the last domino in the domino sequence, and the final domino wasn't a small country in Asia but the presidency" James Thomson nation security council staff.

*Herring Book page 138

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Re: Leadership

by [Matthew McIntosh](#) - Wednesday, 21 October 2009, 10:54 PM

I think the change from Diem to the other generals really was not that significant because they were just american puppets, who would just do what ever Kennedy or LBJ would say to keep getting aid.

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Re: Leadership

by [Patrick Brady](#) - Thursday, 22 October 2009, 01:11 PM

Although both Diem and the other generals somewhat cooperated with the U.S., it seems that Diem was still wanting to do his own thing but still recieve U.S. aid.

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Re: Leadership

by [Daniel Baszler](#) - Thursday, 22 October 2009, 08:16 AM

The transition from JFK to LBJ was not a smooth one, because JFK was such a man of the people. LBJ inherited an increasing crisis in Vietnam and a war on poverty at home. But after our Government staged a fake attack on one of our warships in the China Sea LBJ's main focus became Vietnam. LBJ then let the Air Force star bombing. The Marines start building up troops and tried to gain Americans support for the war against communism. After General Diem died the North Vietnam government went to shambles, because you had too many diverse social classes, you had your Catholics, Buddhists, communist sympathizers. Nobody even wanted the job General Kahn tried to resign but was thrown back in. When Key took power he didn't even want to do it, his wife didn't even want him to be Prime Minister. This is another reason I think the war was lost, how can you win a war in a country nobody even wants to run.

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Re: Leadership

by [Patrick Brady](#) - Saturday, 24 October 2009, 04:44 PM

Yes, I agree with you 100%. In the Christian Appy book there have been a couple accounts of the South Veitnamese soldiers not even wanting to fight when the time came. How can you defend a country that won't help defend itself?

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Re: Leadership

by [Eric McCorkle](#) - Thursday, 22 October 2009, 09:11 PM

The change from JFK to LBJ was a very significant change in leadership. To start JFK was becoming America's favorite president and everybody loved him. When JFK inherited the growing Vietnam conflict from Eisenhower & Nixon, he strongly felt that this was a no win scenario, and that the Vietnamese people were not behind the corrupt government of South Viet-Nam. He believed if Vietnam fell to communist that every other small country would fall also. After he was killed, LBJ was handed the Vietnam War problem but first of all of his concentration was on his "war on poverty" and his idea of the "great society". LBJ then tried to make a resolution to end the war but he was shot down in congress. LBJ just wanted the Vietnam War to be out of the presidency. I'm not saying LBJ was against the war by any means, because he was anti-communism but he was looking for the easy way out so he could get to his war on poverty. He also didn't want to skimp out on the war because of his commitment to South Vietnam and how that could affect his campaign also. After the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, LBJ took a very direct route toward the war and wanted to end it ASAP to continue on with better things. Diem had good intentions of getting rid of communist and had a good hold of the south. When the rest of the South Vietnamese communist parties started to pressure him with more violent tactics his presidency collapsed. When the Generals Coup came to power the number of forces were stepped up and people didn't have to follow Diems ideals and could now have more power of what they wanted to do.

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Rate... **Re: Leadership**by [Matthew McIntosh](#) - Thursday, 22 October 2009, 10:28 PM

you said "When JFK inherited the growing Vietnam conflict from Eisenhower & Nixon, he strongly felt that this was a no win scenario, and that the Vietnamese people were not behind the corrupt government of South Viet-Nam" I am a little confused and maybe I am missing something but didn't Nixon become president after Kennedy.

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Rate... **Re: Leadership**by [Eric McCorkle](#) - Friday, 23 October 2009, 05:32 AM

ya my mistake, i was tired last night. The point i was getting at was that the conflict in Vietnam was going long before JFK was president. It just became a major US issue during this time.

Thanks for the correction,

Eric

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Rate... **Re: Leadership**by [Evan Look](#) - Saturday, 24 October 2009, 10:31 AM

JFK was a favorite of America and many loved him greatly I agree. I think though that he must have believed that the Vietnamese people had to be behind their countries communistic beliefs significantly. A government would unlikely change unless it had some backing by its citizens and officials. The Gulf of Tonkin incident did altar the events and escalate them to new heights.

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Rate... **Re: Leadership**by [Deborah Thirke](#) - Friday, 23 October 2009, 06:15 PM

I believe that JFK was a very popular figure head and wanted to stay that way by ending the conflict in Vietnam. This might have made a huge difference in history but we will never know. LBJ also wanted an end to things but had a different approach. His actions seemed to change toward a more aggressive manner after the Tonkin Gulf Resolution.

As to internal leadership Diems' presidency took a turn for the worse when the South Vietnamese stepped up efforts to gain control.

This comes mostly from the Herring book and the replies I have read on the forum.

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Re: Leadership

by [Evan Look](#) - Saturday, 24 October 2009, 10:20 AM

I feel like LBJ mostly wanted to protect his legacy as the president as well as the U.S beliefs of being superior to everyone else. I similiarly think he was being more aggressive and think he was displaying this as a stand against the communist beliefs.

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Re: Leadership

by [Daniel Baszler](#) - Saturday, 24 October 2009, 11:02 AM

I too think that JFK was well on his way to ending the war in Vietnam. But when LBJ took office he let the rest of the government convince him that pulling out would make us look weak and that we couldn't stand for communism.

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Re: Leadership

by [Nicholas Holden](#) - Friday, 23 October 2009, 08:33 PM

My assessment on leadership is that not much really changed after JFK was assassinated in '63. Namely because LBJ didn't alter the Kennedy administration's policies on America's involvement in Vietnam until mid 1964. That year Johnson faced a very tough presidential campaign against Republican Sen. Goldwater of Arizona. One of the Goldwater team's main tactics while on the campaign trail was to paint the previous administration as unable to stand up against the communist bloc and provide for the common the defense of the free world. To counter his opponent's claims, Johnson used the Gulf of Tonkin incidents to push Congress into passing a resolution authorizing him powers similar to that of wartime without actually having to declare war on North Vietnam; something I think JFK would have done as well.

Keep in mind that all Johnson actually did in Vietnam during '64 was order retaliatory air strikes against the North and increase the number of advisers. It's not until 1965 that Big Daddy sent in the Marines; and then only to defend the USAF installation at Da Nang after the Viet Cong had attacked the base in retaliation for the air strikes on the North. Only then did the steady uptick of troop numbers and their consequent slide into direct combat operations begin. Once again, I don't think Jack Kennedy would have done anything all that different. Going to a fully declared war risked possible intervention from China (ala Korea 1950) and pulling out would have brought the unvarnished wrath of anti-communist sentiment on the domestic scene. So LBJ did what politicians do best he found a compromise solution that, while politically palatable, did nothing to solve the worsening crisis in Vietnam.

The 1963 coup in South Vietnam heralded a sign of things going from bad to worse for the perennially troubled South. While demise of Diem was celebrated by the Buddhists and lamented by the Catholics, the generals could offer no better solutions than the deposed regime. Corruption was still rampant, black racketeering was still rife on the streets of Saigon, and communists forces continued to gain ground in light of government's incompetence and lack of popular mandate. As with the later ouster of Cambodia's Prince Sihanouk by Gen. Lon Nol the military coup in South Vietnam highlighted that nation's systemic instability and heralded it's coming trial by fire.

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Rate... **Re: Leadership**by [Matthew McIntosh](#) - Friday, 23 October 2009, 08:33 PM

Does anyone else agree that there was no real change in policy from Kennedy to LBJ and any president before Kennedy because no one wants to be known as the president that lost the war and more territory to communism.

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Rate... **Re: Leadership**by [Nicholas Holden](#) - Friday, 23 October 2009, 08:48 PM

With the fall of China to Mao's forces in 1949 it was made clear to American President that they would be held personally responsible for any loss of territory to communism.

Note that the Truman administration was very indifferent to France's attempt to hold its colony from 1945-1949. Once Mao won the Chinese Civil War and the war in Korea broke out in 1950 (and with it the subsequent involvement of 1,000,000+ Chinese troops) the game changed. Truman and later Eisenhower started to develop a VERY keen interest on the events in Indochina, eventually bankrolling 80% the French war effort. After the French leave in '54 the United States under Eisenhower starts to begin the process of providing vast financial and military aid to the Diem regime and covertly funding a secret Hmong army in Laos. Kennedy continued the trend with increasing the number of advisers and the level of aid.

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Rate... **Re: Leadership**by [Glenn Dalgleish](#) - Saturday, 24 October 2009, 02:05 PM

I'm not sure that I completely agree with there being, "no real change in policy from Kennedy to LBJ," because, "no one wants to be known as the president that lost the war and more territory to communism." While this may be true, there was definitely some significant change in policy when and after LBJ became president. JFK would have never made a resolution of war, which would have given him the power to declare war, without a declaration of war. LBJ did make a resolution, which gave him that power. Kennedy wanted to appear tough, but resisted to send combat troops into Vietnam because he thought that once troops were committed, there would only be a need for more and more. (100 Herring) LBJ saw the American commitment in Vietnam was a vital part of the Kennedy program that he was sworn to uphold. (136 Herring)

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Rate... **Re: Leadership**by [Eric McCorkle](#) - Saturday, 24 October 2009, 07:55 PM

Hey got a quick question for you guys, a little off the main topic but while out hunting this morning I was pondering the idea of if I was LBJ what would I have done and if I would have escalated the war to the heights that it reached.

Thinking about it I would have not thought twice about it, I would have gone full force and never looked back. The down fall thou is all the casualties mental illness that it caused .

Give it a thought, sorry Mr. Escobar if this is not okay.

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