The United States and the World

Lyndon B. Johnson and the War in Vietnam
Today we will learn about:

3. The Progress of the War.
4. Public opinion on the War.
5. Eventual change in foreign policy.
Introduction

- After the Second World War, the United States was involved in the Cold War with the USSR.
- The two opposing sides looked to spread their ideas of capitalism and communism.
- The two superpowers supported opposing sides in conflicts in order to spread their influence.
The two key policies that the US would follow in their foreign relations are ‘Containment’ and ‘Domino Theory’.

In order to spread their influence, the US employed a policy called containment. This meant that the U.S would fight to contain Communism within its existing borders.

Following on from this was the Domino Theory. This stated that if one country fell to Communism, others would follow.
The first example of containment was The Berlin Blockade. Berlin and German had been divided into Communist East and Democratic West after the war. Berlin was in the Russian sector of Germany. The USSR cut off land and rail access to Berlin in order to force the Allies out of the city and take control. Over 12 months, the Allies flew thousands of tonnes of supplies into West Berlin. This was called Operation Vittels. In the end, the USSR backed down.
Korea (1)

- After the Second World War, Korea had been divided into Communist North and Democratic South.
- In 1950, the North attacked the South, looking to unite the country under communist rule.
- Truman had no choice but to pursue containment again.
- He got UN permission for US troops to come to the aid of South Korea.
The US drove the North back, but China came to the aid of the North, leading to a bloody war.

The war dragged on for 3 years before the armistice was signed. Both sides went back to their pre-war boundaries.

Tensions still exist today and there is still no peace treaty.
Vietnam before the War

● Vietnam became a French colony in the 19th Century.
● In 1941, Japan invaded and occupied the country. Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh fought the Japanese and then the French after the war.
● The U.S supported the French and later the South Vietnamese as the country is divided into Communist North and French controlled South.
● The French then withdrew from South Vietnam.
● Kennedy increased US personnel in the South from 1,500 to 23,000 after the Vietcong look to unite the country under Communist control.
LBJ’s Policy

● Kennedy was assassinated in 1963 and was succeeded by Lyndon B Johnson (LBJ).
● He supported Eisenhower’s Domino Theory and believed that US credibility was at stake.
● He also didn’t want to be the first US president to lose a war.
● Johnson’s advisors also believed in a military solution to the problem.
The 1964 Presidential Election

- In the 1964 election LBJ was faced by the Republican Barry Goldwater.
- Goldwater wanted to use atomic weapons on Vietnam and achieve total victory.
- LBJ campaigned as the candidate of peace.
- Johnson realised that the Vietcong were extending their control on the country and the South Vietnamese army were too weak to resist.
- LBJ was face with two choices, either withdraw from Vietnam or commit huge numbers of US troops to support South Vietnam.
The Gulf of Tonkin and the change in US policy

- In 1964, the US claimed that North Vietnamese boats attacked the USS Maddox in the Gulf of Tonkin.
- Some historians believe that the US deliberately provoked the North Vietnamese.
- LBJ used the incident to escalate US involvement in the war.
The Tonkin Resolution

- Congress passed the Tonkin resolution after LBJ gave a misleading account of what happened.
- The Tonkin Resolution gave Johnson almost unlimited powers to wage war.
- It also allowed the US to attack North Vietnam as Johnson claimed the North was supplying the Vietcong.
The Escalation of the War 1965-68

- Johnson waited until after the election to take action.
- In 1965, he announced Operation Rolling Thunder in response to a Vietcong attack on a US airbase.
- This operation launched huge air attacks on North Vietnam.
- He also increased US troops in Vietnam from 23,000 in 1964 to 180,000 in 1965, to 350,000 in 1966 and to 534,000 by the end of 1967.
- By the end of 1968, the war was costing over $30 billion a year.
The Fighting

The US used many tactics against the Vietcong:

- **Search and Destroy**: Any village suspected of helping the Vietcong was destroyed. This led to the Mai Lai massacre in 1968.

- **Chemical Warfare**: The US Air Force dropped napalm and chemicals on the forests of South Vietnam to remove cover for the Vietcong.

- **Blanket Bombing**: The US dropped a greater tonnage of bombs on North and South Vietnam between 1965-68 than the Allies dropped on Europe during World War II.
My Lai Massacre
Agent Orange - A Monsanto product
Progress of War

- LBJ claimed that the bombing was of military targets but news film showed otherwise.
- US tactics were proving to fail against the guerrilla forces.
- The blanket bombing of Vietnam was proving to fail as well as Vietnam was an agricultural country.
- US deaths in Vietnam increased, 2,000 in 1965, 6,000 in ’66, 11,000 in ’67 and 15,000 in ’68.
The turning point came in 1968 when the Vietcong and North Vietnamese launched a surprise attack on all the major cities of South Vietnam.

They had many successes including the capture of the US embassy in Saigon.

The offensive was only defeated after savage fighting in which 8,000 US and South Vietnamese troops were killed along with 15,000 civilians.

An estimated 60,000 communists were killed.
Consequences of the Tet Offensive

- Although it ultimately failed, it proved that LBJ’s claim that the US was winning the war was a lie.
- It showed that the only way the US could defeat the Viet Cong was to use the entire resources at it’s disposal.
- LBJ didn’t wish to do this as the war was already taking away from his Great Society programme.
- Riots against US involvement in the war began and the people accused the government of lying to them.
- LBJ’s support dropped hugely.
Johnson Changes Policy

● Johnson realised he had to change his policy.
● He called a partial halt to the bombing of North Vietnam.
● He made a proposal for peace talks which were accepted by the North Vietnamese.
● The talks ended in 1968 in deadlock.
● He also withdrew from the US presidential election.
● Just prior to the election, Johnson announced the complete halt of US bombing of North Vietnam.
● However, no agreement was reached before Johnson left office in 1969.
Conclusion. The Vietnam War:

- Showed the role of the US President in shaping US foreign policy.
- Highlighted the growth in power of the US President and led to conflict between Congress and the White House during Nixon’s presidency.
- Showed that the US was more interested in foreign policy than domestic policy as the Great Society Programme was neglected.
- Caused LBJ not to seek re-election.
- Caused huge budgetary problems and inflation.
- Caused 200,000 US casualties including over 30,000 dead.