



HUNSC

HISTORIC UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL

Study Guide



AGENDA

***The Vietnamese Conflict:
Establishing Long-term
Peacekeeping Frameworks
and Assessing the United
Nations' Role in Mitigating
Third-Party Interference in
Domestic Affairs Amidst the
Cold War.***

Freeze Date for research:
May 4th 1970

Contents

COMMITTEE OVERVIEW.....	2
Membership.....	3
Voting Procedure.....	3
INTRODUCTION TO AGENDA.....	4
Historical Background.....	5
The Question of Sovereignty and Intervention.....	5
The Challenge of Long-Term Peacekeeping.....	7
THE BROADER IMPLICATIONS OF THE CONFLICT.....	8
WAR TIMELINE AND KEY EVENTS.....	9
September 1945 – Proclamation of Independence.....	9
December 1946 – Outbreak of the First Indochina War.....	9
May 1954 – The Battle of Dien Bien Phu.....	9
July 1954 – The Geneva Accords.....	9
1955–1959 – Rise of Ngo Dinh Diem and Growing Resistance.....	10
1961–1963 – U.S. Escalation under Kennedy and Diem’s Fall.....	10
August 1964 – The Gulf of Tonkin Incident.....	10
March 1965 – Operation Rolling Thunder and U.S. Ground Troops.....	11
January 1968 – The Tet Offensive.....	11
March 1968 – The My Lai Massacre.....	11
November 1968 – Nixon’s Election and “Vietnamization”.....	12
April 1970 – U.S. Invasion of Cambodia.....	12
May 4, 1970 – The Kent State Shootings.....	12
PRO TIPS.....	13
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	14

COMMITTEE OVERVIEW

The Security Council is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations (UN). After holding its first session on 17 January 1946 in London, its meetings now take place at the UN Headquarters in New York City. The Security Council is the only UN institution that can adopt resolutions which are legally binding for all 193 UN Member States (Art. 25 UN Charter). It deals with matters on the protection of international peace and security (Art. 24 I UN Charter).

Membership

The Security Council has 15 members of which five are permanent members (P5). The so-called P5 are China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America. Each year, five of the other ten Member States are elected by the UN General Assembly for a two-year term in the Security Council.

Voting Procedure

Every member state represented in the Security Council has one vote. The adoption of a resolution requires a qualified majority of nine Member States, which can either vote in favour or against a resolution, or abstain (Art. 27 II UN-Charter). The P5 have a “veto power” and can block the adoption of a resolution by voting against it. During the Cold War, the lack of agreement between the P5 caused a frequent use of the veto power. Normally, the Security Council adopts resolutions unanimously.

INTRODUCTION TO AGENDA

The Vietnamese Conflict: Establishing Long-term Peacekeeping Frameworks and Assessing the United Nations' Role in Mitigating Third-Party Interference in Domestic Affairs Amidst the Cold War.

The Vietnamese conflict shows that the roots of the conflict lie in the aftermath of colonialism, to be additionally fomented through Cold War rivalries, pressing acutely on the need for sustainable peacekeeping and the control of external influence in domestic affairs. In the wake of the 1954 Geneva Accords, a divided Vietnam at the 17th parallel achieved a precarious balance between the communist North and the South, aligned with the West. This soon set off an ideological competition that brought major powers into what had been an internal political struggle and turned it into an international confrontation. The presence of foreign troops, economic aid, and military alliances on both sides blurred the line between national sovereignty and external manipulation. This constant interference ruled out any prospects of lasting peace or stable governance. The establishment of a durable peacekeeping framework in this context requires mechanisms that would avoid escalation, guarantee political neutrality, and help reconstruction after hostilities have ended. At its core, the agenda was driven by the need to reconcile the right of nations to self-determination with the great-power involvement characteristic of much of the mid-twentieth century. The Vietnamese conflict serves as a defining moment in showing how uncontrolled foreign intervention and ideological polarization can prolong warfare, destabilize regions, and undermine efforts toward sustainable peace in the developing post-colonial world.

Historical Background

Vietnam's modern conflict cannot be understood without tracing its roots to colonial exploitation and the rise of nationalist movements. Under French rule from the mid-nineteenth century (starting with the invasion of Đà Nẵng in 1858 and the establishment of French Indochina in 1887), Vietnam became part of French Indochina, a colonial entity focused on extracting natural resources and maintaining strict administrative control. Harsh labor conditions, cultural suppression, and economic inequality created fertile ground for nationalist sentiment. By the early twentieth century, resistance movements emerged, many inspired by Marxist thought and anti-imperialist ideology. Among these movements was the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP), founded in 1930 by Ho Chi Minh, whose leadership would later define the course of Vietnam's struggle.

The outbreak of the Second World War reshaped Vietnam's political landscape. Japan's occupation from 1940 to 1945 weakened French authority and empowered local resistance groups. During this period, Ho Chi Minh's Viet Minh—a coalition of nationalists and communists, officially the League for the Independence of Vietnam—strengthened its influence through guerrilla warfare and social mobilization. When Japan surrendered in August 1945, the Viet Minh seized control in what became known as the August Revolution, proclaiming the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) on September 2, 1945. (Elaboration: This moment marked Vietnam's first declaration of independence, establishing the DRV as the sole legitimate government in the North.) However, the end of the war brought French forces back to reassert control, marking the beginning of another protracted conflict (the First Indochina War, 1946–1954).

The Question of Sovereignty and Intervention

The heart of the Vietnamese conflict lies in the contest between sovereignty and foreign involvement. After the 1954 Geneva Accords, which formally ended the First Indochina War and French rule, Vietnam was temporarily divided at the

17th parallel into two distinct entities: the communist-led North Vietnam under Ho Chi Minh and the Western-backed South Vietnam led by Ngo Dinh Diem, who established the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) in 1955.

The division was meant to be temporary, with nationwide elections planned for 1956. However, these elections never occurred—largely due to U.S. fears, and the fears of the Diem regime, that Ho Chi Minh would win overwhelmingly—leaving the country politically fractured and ideologically polarized. (Elaboration: The U.S. opposed the elections, violating the spirit of the Accords, and subsequently committed to supporting Diem's anti-communist, though increasingly authoritarian, government in the South.)

For the United States, Vietnam was not merely a local conflict but a key battleground in the broader Cold War struggle against communism. American policymakers viewed the situation through the "Domino Theory," fearing that the fall of Vietnam to communism would trigger a chain reaction across Southeast Asia. Consequently, U.S. support for South Vietnam expanded from financial aid to direct military involvement, escalating dramatically after the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which granted the U.S. president broad war-making powers. Meanwhile, North Vietnam received substantial support from both the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. What began as a civil war quickly evolved into an international confrontation between two global power blocs—each justifying its actions as defensive rather than interventionist.

This level of third-party involvement complicated any prospects for peace. The concept of national sovereignty was undermined as both sides relied heavily on external aid, advisors, and weaponry. For the United Nations, which was founded on principles of non-intervention and peaceful dispute resolution, the Vietnam War presented a unique challenge: the world's primary military powers—each holding veto authority within the Security Council—were directly engaged on opposing sides. This made meaningful UN mediation or peacekeeping intervention politically impossible, exposing the limitations of the organization during the height of the Cold War.

The Challenge of Long-Term Peacekeeping

Establishing a long-term peacekeeping framework in Vietnam would have required overcoming both political and structural barriers. Traditional UN peacekeeping missions relied on the consent of warring parties and the neutrality of international actors. Yet in Vietnam, neither condition existed. The conflict's ideological nature—communism versus capitalism—meant that compromise was often perceived as defeat. Furthermore, the direct involvement of superpowers meant that any UN action risked being interpreted as favoring one bloc over another.

Long-term peacekeeping in such contexts demands more than military observation or ceasefire enforcement. It requires mechanisms for political reconciliation, reconstruction, and regional security cooperation. Vietnam's devastation—millions dead, cities destroyed, and the countryside ravaged by chemical warfare (specifically, the extensive use of Agent Orange)—illustrated the need for peace frameworks extending beyond disarmament. Economic rebuilding, refugee resettlement, and reconciliation between divided communities were essential for lasting stability. However, during the war years, such discussions remained secondary to military objectives. The absence of a sustained peacekeeping strategy not only prolonged the conflict but also destabilized neighboring countries such as Cambodia and Laos, where violence and external interventions (including U.S. bombing and ground incursions) soon erupted.

THE BROADER IMPLICATIONS OF THE CONFLICT

The Vietnamese conflict holds enduring significance for international relations and the evolution of global peacekeeping. It exposed how superpower competition can paralyze collective decision-making, especially within institutions designed to maintain peace. It also demonstrated that without mechanisms to prevent or regulate foreign involvement, domestic conflicts can escalate into international crises. The extensive humanitarian impact—civilian casualties, environmental destruction, and displacement—showed the limits of military solutions in resolving political disputes.

Moreover, the war's influence extended beyond Southeast Asia. Globally, it reshaped public opinion about interventionism and the ethics of warfare. The use of chemical defoliants, the bombing of civilian areas, and incidents such as the My Lai Massacre (discovered and publicized in late 1969/early 1970) eroded moral legitimacy on all sides. Domestically, the conflict sparked massive anti-war movements, culminating in tragedies such as the Kent State shootings in 1970. (Elaboration: The Kent State shootings—the killing of four students by National Guardsmen on May 4, 1970—occurred during protests against President Nixon's decision to expand the war into Cambodia.) These events signaled the deepening disillusionment with interventionist policies and forced a reconsideration of how international institutions, including the United Nations, should manage conflicts influenced by great-power politics.

WAR TIMELINE AND KEY EVENTS

September 1945 – Proclamation of Independence

Following Japan's surrender at the end of World War II, the Viet Minh, led by Ho Chi Minh, seized control of Hanoi and declared the Democratic Republic of Vietnam on September 2, 1945, quoting from the U.S. Declaration of Independence. This marked the beginning of Vietnam's struggle for self-determination after nearly a century of French colonial rule. However, French forces soon returned to reclaim control over Indochina, sparking renewed conflict between the colonial authorities and Vietnamese nationalists.

December 1946 – Outbreak of the First Indochina War

Tensions between the Viet Minh and the French escalated into open conflict in December 1946, after failed negotiations over Vietnamese sovereignty. The ensuing First Indochina War became a protracted and brutal struggle, as the Viet Minh relied on guerrilla warfare to combat French military superiority. Both sides suffered heavy losses as the conflict spread across northern Vietnam, marking the start of nearly three decades of continuous warfare in the region.

May 1954 – The Battle of Dien Bien Phu

The turning point came with the Battle of Dien Bien Phu, fought between March and May 1954. The Viet Minh forces, under General Vo Nguyen Giap, besieged and ultimately defeated the French garrison in a decisive victory. This humiliating defeat for France effectively ended its colonial ambitions in Indochina and paved the way for international diplomatic intervention.

July 1954 – The Geneva Accords

The Geneva Conference in July 1954 formally ended the First Indochina War. The Geneva Accords established a ceasefire and temporarily divided Vietnam along

the 17th parallel, creating North Vietnam under Ho Chi Minh's communist leadership and South Vietnam under the Western-backed government of Ngo Dinh Diem. The agreement also called for nationwide elections in 1956 to reunify the country, but these elections were never held due to political disagreements and U.S. opposition.

1955–1959 – Rise of Ngo Dinh Diem and Growing Resistance

With U.S. support, Ngo Dinh Diem consolidated power in the South, declaring the Republic of Vietnam in 1955. His regime became increasingly authoritarian, alienating the rural population through land reforms and religious favoritism toward Catholics. Meanwhile, communist sympathizers in the South—organized under the National Liberation Front (NLF) or Viet Cong—began an insurgency against Diem's government in 1959, marking the beginning of direct North-South confrontation.

1961–1963 – U.S. Escalation under Kennedy and Diem's Fall

President John F. Kennedy increased U.S. involvement starting in 1961, sending thousands of "military advisors" and financial aid to bolster the South Vietnamese Army (ARVN). However, Diem's unpopularity continued to rise, especially after the Buddhist Crisis of 1963, where his government violently suppressed Buddhist protests. Disillusioned with Diem's leadership, the U.S. tacitly supported a military coup on November 2, 1963, resulting in Diem's assassination and political instability in South Vietnam.

August 1964 – The Gulf of Tonkin Incident

On August 2 and 4, 1964, U.S. naval vessels reportedly came under attack by North Vietnamese patrol boats in the Gulf of Tonkin. Although the details of the attacks remain disputed, the event prompted the U.S. Congress to pass the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, granting President Lyndon B. Johnson broad authority to

use military force in Vietnam. This marked a turning point, transitioning American involvement from advisory support to direct combat operations.

March 1965 – Operation Rolling Thunder and U.S. Ground Troops

In March 1965, the U.S. launched Operation Rolling Thunder, an extensive and sustained bombing campaign targeting North Vietnam's infrastructure and supply routes. Simultaneously, the first contingent of U.S. combat troops landed at Da Nang, officially marking the beginning of the American ground war in Vietnam. By the end of the year, over 200,000 American troops were stationed in Vietnam, with numbers continuing to grow.

January 1968 – The Tet Offensive

In January 1968, during the Lunar New Year holiday (Tet), North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces launched a massive surprise attack on over 100 cities and military installations across South Vietnam. Although militarily repelled, the Tet Offensive was a psychological blow to the United States, revealing the resilience and coordination of the communist forces. The offensive eroded public support for the war in America and exposed the gap between government optimism and battlefield reality.

March 1968 – The My Lai Massacre

On March 16, 1968, U.S. soldiers massacred hundreds of unarmed Vietnamese civilians in the village of My Lai, including women, children, and the elderly. Although initially covered up, the atrocity later became public, fueling global outrage and intensifying anti-war sentiment within the United States. The My Lai

Massacre symbolized the moral decay of the conflict and highlighted the devastating impact of prolonged warfare on civilian populations.

November 1968 – Nixon’s Election and “Vietnamization”

Richard Nixon was elected U.S. President in November 1968, promising to achieve “peace with honor” and end U.S. involvement. His administration introduced the policy of Vietnamization, which aimed to gradually withdraw American troops while strengthening the ARVN to assume greater combat responsibility. However, the war continued to spread beyond Vietnam’s borders as Nixon authorized secret bombings of neighboring Cambodia and Laos to disrupt North Vietnamese supply routes along the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

April 1970 – U.S. Invasion of Cambodia

On April 30, 1970, Nixon announced that U.S. and South Vietnamese forces had invaded Cambodia to target communist sanctuaries. This decision was met with fierce domestic backlash, as many viewed it as an expansion rather than a de-escalation of the war. The Cambodian invasion sparked massive protests across the United States, reigniting the anti-war movement on college campuses.

May 4, 1970 – The Kent State Shootings

The growing opposition to the war culminated in tragedy on May 4, 1970, when the Ohio National Guard opened fire on student protesters at Kent State University, killing four and wounding nine others. The Kent State shootings became a symbol of the deep national divide over U.S. involvement in Vietnam, underscoring the war’s profound social and political repercussions at home.

PRO TIPS

1. Read as many news articles as you can. Not necessarily for research, but rather to understand the framing of arguments relevant to your stance.
2. Although the use of AI is prohibited in the conference, you may use it during research to simplify any complex line/article/lexicon you come across. (Use the Prompt "Simplify xyz for a 12-year-old" on Google Bard)
3. Research from wherever you feel comfortable, however make sure that the research is also backed by a MUN prescribed "valid source"
4. Write minimum 2-3 GSL's and prepare for at least 4 Moderated Caucus Topics.
5. When the facts don't support you, argue the law. When the law doesn't support you, argue the facts.
6. Do not hesitate to read laws, conventions, resolutions and adjudications. They might seem intimidating, but frankly speaking they are not at all complex to read, understand or decipher.
7. Research well upon your foreign policy.
8. You may listen to lectures by many professors or even personalities explaining their point of view. Although they are a terrible source for research, they very often provide you with some well framed arguments.
9. **Know your freeze date. Country stances and policies have changed very often during the cold war - be careful to know your country's military ability, UN recognition, and stance on the issue as of May 4th 1970.**

BIBLIOGRAPHY

<https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en>

<https://www.history.com/articles/vietnam-war-history>

<https://history.state.gov/milestones/1961-1968/tet>

https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000652931.pdf

<https://www.britannica.com/list/vietnam-war-timeline>

We, the Executive Board Members, hope that this guide was of help to you, but please do not limit yourself to these. Go ahead, and research as much as

you can. We look forward to seeing you in the conference, pumped up to discuss, debate and deliberate!

