

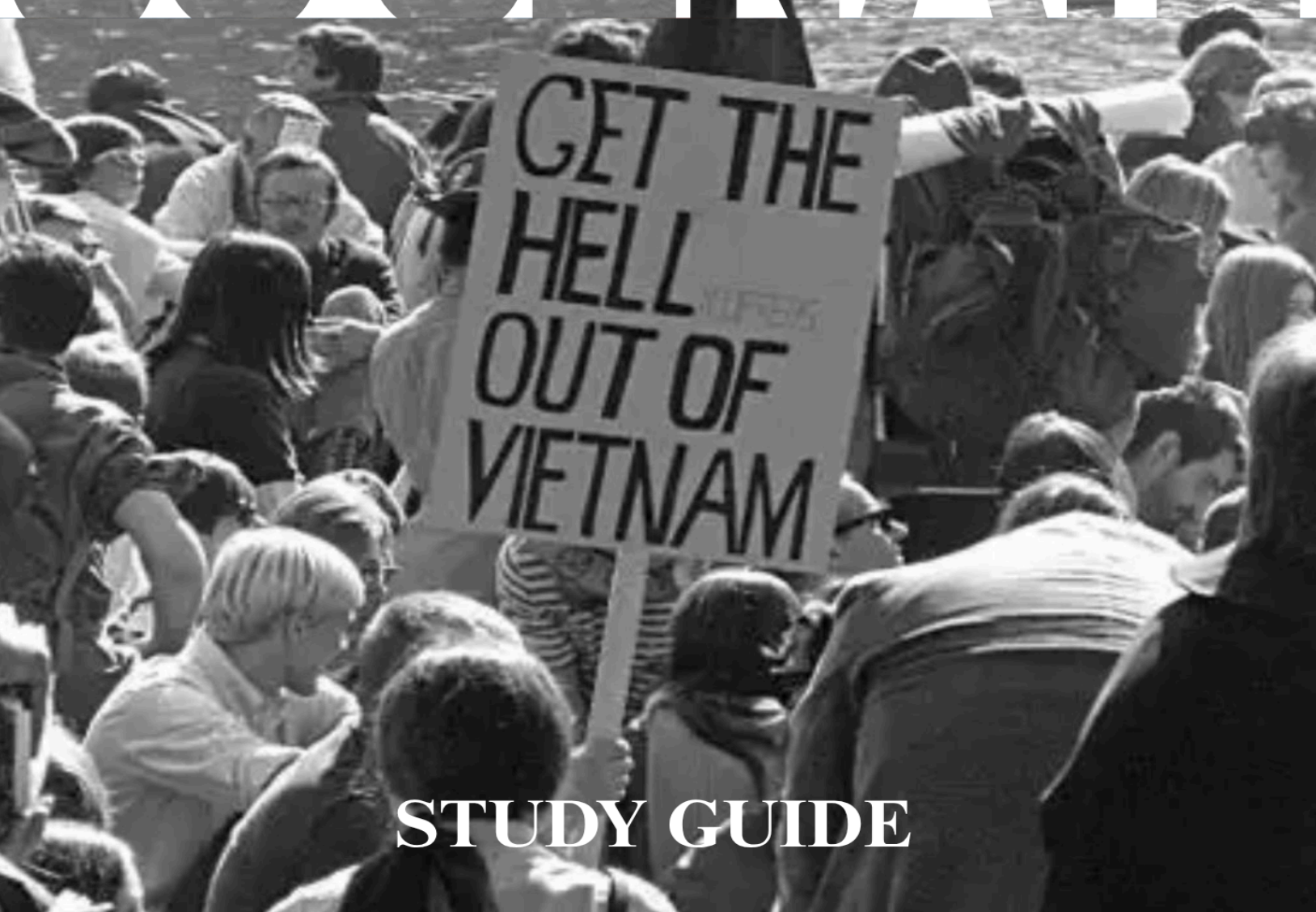
United States Senate



AGENDA:

**Reevaluating Executive Authority in the Context of U.S.
Involvement in the Vietnam War**

U.S. SENATE



STUDY GUIDE



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LETTER FROM THE BUREAU

Greetings delegates,

We are delighted to welcome you to the 10th iteration of the Shishukunj Model United Nations. It is a matter of great pride for us to serve as the Bureau of the United States Senate, a committee being simulated for the first time at Shishukunj MUN.

The Senate, one of the two chambers of the U.S. Congress has long stood as a cornerstone of American democracy. Its responsibilities include reviewing legislation, confirming appointments, and checking executive power. It also serves as a forum for extensive debate and upholds constitutional responsibility.

This year, the committee is set against a historical backdrop with a freeze date of April 29, 1975, just one day before the Fall of Saigon, a critical moment in U.S. history. The agenda before this Senate is: **“Re-evaluating Executive Authority in the Context of U.S. Involvement in the Vietnam War.”** The committee will investigate how the Vietnam War, which escalated through successive executive decisions, tested the limits of presidential power. Senators must reflect on the implications of this overreach and explore what reforms, if any, are necessary to uphold the integrity of the U.S. Constitution and maintain the balance of powers it establishes.

As your Bureau, we expect you to think critically, research thoroughly, and speak with conviction. We urge you to use credible and verifiable sources; plagiarism of any kind will not be tolerated. The guide you’ve received is meant to help you get started; it offers an outline, not a limit. We encourage you to delve deeper, ask questions, and challenge assumptions.

If you have any queries, concerns, or simply wish to discuss your ideas, please do not hesitate to reach out to us. We are here to help you and make your experience in this committee both meaningful and memorable.

We look forward to seeing you in August and to the debates, decisions, and directions you will bring to this Senate floor.

Namya Doongarwal, President
Anay Laddha, Vice President
Shubhi Tandon, Senate Secretary



INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMITTEE

The United States Senate is one of the most powerful governmental bodies in the world. It was formed in 1787 as a result of the Great Compromise, according to which a bicameral legislature with two houses was created. The Senate has equal representation from each state of the United States, irrespective of their population. Together with the House of Representatives, it forms the U.S. Congress and is central to creating, debating, and passing laws that shape the lives of millions.

Our committee is a historical replica of the Senate, which met on the 29th of April 1975, a day before Saigon (the capital of South Vietnam) was captured by North Vietnamese forces. It aims to discuss and reevaluate the powers and limits of the executive, particularly in the context of its involvement in the Vietnam War. This moment in history marks a crucial turning point in U.S. foreign policy and democratic oversight.

The Vietnam War, which spanned nearly two decades, exposed divisions in American society and polity and also raised several impending questions about the extent to which the president could use their authority, especially in sending troops to another country without formally declaring war. This committee aims to analyse the balance of power between the executive and legislative branches and determine how future conflicts should be governed under U.S. constitutional principles.

Structure and Powers of the Senate

According to Article I of the U.S. Constitution, the Senate holds several key responsibilities:

- It collaborates with the House of Representatives to draft, debate, and pass federal laws i.e. laws that apply to the entirety of the United States.
- High-level positions, such as cabinet members, ambassadors, federal judges, and heads of independent agencies are nominated by the President and this nomination is approved or rejected by the Senate.
- It is responsible for ratifying treaties and investigating matters of national importance along with holding the executive accountable for its actions.
- The Senate acts as a jury for the impeachment of federal officials including the President of the United States.



Each Senator serves a six-year term, with elections held every two years to replace approximately one-third of the seats. The Senate is presided over by the Vice President and the president pro tempore presides over the Senate in the absence of the Vice President.

Committee Mandate

- Most delegates will act as U.S. Senators and debate per the Senate rules of procedure.
- Observers, nominated members and guest delegates can fully participate in debate and procedural votes, but they can't vote on any kind of legislation or impeachment.
- The committee will follow the Senate's Standing Rules (parliamentary procedures adopted by the United States Senate that govern its procedure) which will ensure a structured flow of motions, debates, and amendments.

The U.S. Senate has always been a forum for intense deliberation and debate. As senators in this committee, you must rise above party lines, face the consequences of decisions made in the past and shape a legacy of responsible governance.

History is often said to be unchangeable, something we can only study and learn from. But at this moment, that very belief is challenged. You, as Senators, hold the extraordinary power to rewrite the course of history. Whether that change is for better or for worse lies entirely in your hands.



INTRODUCTION TO THE AGENDA

As helicopters lift the last American personnel from the rooftop of the U.S. Embassy in Saigon, the capital of South Vietnam, a haunting question echoes through the chambers of Congress: How did we reach this point? The Vietnam War, once described as a necessary effort to stop the spread of communism and defend democracy, has become a symbol of strategic misjudgment, weakened institutions, and unchecked presidential power.

This committee meets at a turning point. For more than a decade, Presidents from both parties have committed American troops, money, and influence to a war carried out with little input or approval from Congress. From the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution in 1964 to secret bombings in Cambodia and Laos, the Executive Branch has steadily expanded its power in the name of national security, often without consulting or informing the legislative branch. Today, as South Vietnam is on the brink of collapse, we face the consequences of decisions made with limited oversight but far-reaching impact.

Our agenda is not only to understand how and why power became so concentrated in the Executive but also to examine the legal, political, and moral consequences of America's actions in Southeast Asia. Was the President right to send troops without an official declaration of war? Were secret missions and classified talks necessary for security or did they undermine the democratic process? And most importantly, have the balance and limits of power between our branches of government been permanently altered?

To fully explore these questions, this committee will hear from a wide range of voices: senators, military leaders, intelligence officials, legal experts, anti-war advocates, and international observers including representatives from both North and South Vietnam, and key regional powers like China, the Soviet Union, and the Vietcong. Their role is not only justifying their positions but also helping us understand how American decisions have shaped the world beyond our borders.

With the fall of Saigon just hours away, we are not just witnessing a foreign policy failure. We are facing a constitutional crisis. Have the values that guide our democracy been upheld or quietly weakened during this war? This committee's task is not merely retrospective. It is preventive. It is our responsibility to ensure that the mistakes of Vietnam do not set a precedent for future conflicts waged without clarity, consent, or accountability.

The question before us is no longer what went wrong in Vietnam, but who had the authority to decide, and who failed to stop them.



OVERVIEW OF THE WAR

1. Origins

Vietnam had been under French colonial rule since the mid-19th century but post World War II France began losing control of its colonies. Taking advantage of this situation nationalist forces led by a communist named Ho Chi Minh declared Vietnam an independent country in 1945. However, France again tried to assert its control and this led to the First Indochina War (1946-1954) between the French Forces and the Viet Minh which were Ho Chi Minh's nationalist communist forces.

2. U.S. Enters the Picture

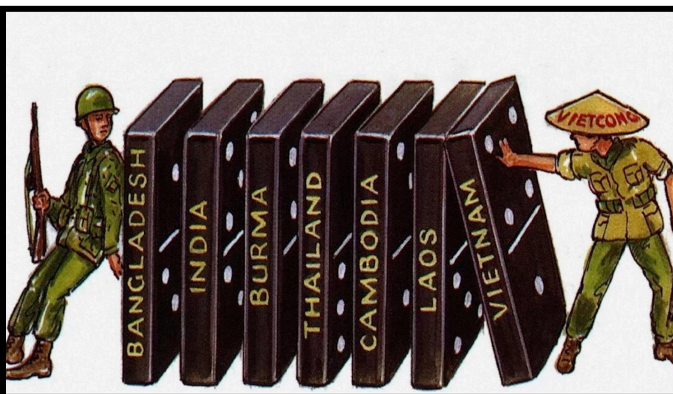
During the Cold War, the U.S. feared that a communist Vietnam would trigger a regional domino effect. It thus embraced the Domino Theory and supported France in the First Indochina War by supplying it with resources and military aid.

After France was defeated at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954, the Geneva Accords were signed. These accords temporarily divided Vietnam at the 17th parallel (a latitude) into:

- North Vietnam: It was led by Ho Chi Minh thus forming the *Democratic Republic of Vietnam* (communist)
- South Vietnam: Backed by the United States which led to the formation of the *Republic of Vietnam* (anti-communist).

At first, South Vietnam was led by Emperor Bảo Đại, but in 1955, Ngo Dinh Diem, with support from the United States, removed the emperor and declared himself President. His government was strongly anti-communist but it faced extreme criticism for being repressive and unpopular.

The Geneva Accords also called for national elections in 1956 to reunify the country, but these elections were never held because Diem refused to participate in them. This further deepened the divide between North Vietnam and South Vietnam and moved the country closer to war.



This image shows the **Domino Theory**, where a Viet Cong soldier pushes Vietnam, risking a chain collapse of nearby nations into communism which the U.S. soldier tries to prevent.



3. Formation of South Vietnam



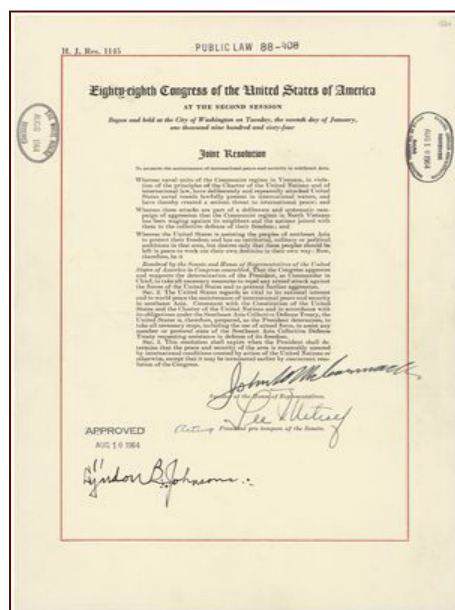
The United States, having supported the French in their colonial effort, was now determined to prevent a communist regime from taking over Vietnam. The U.S. intelligence acknowledged that Ho Chi Minh would likely win a nationwide election, so the U.S. worked to establish a friendly government in the South instead of supporting these elections.

The U.S. backed Ngo Dinh Diem as the leader of South Vietnam, despite his autocratic leadership and growing unpopularity. He favoured the Catholic minority and suppressed the Buddhists who constituted the majority of Vietnam at that time. This rising discontent against Diem led to the formation of the Viet Cong which was a guerrilla force operating in the South supported by North Vietnam.

4. Escalation of U.S. Involvement

The number of U.S. military advisors in South Vietnam increased from a few hundred to over 16000 by 1963. The same year Diem (president of South Vietnam) was assassinated.

In August 1964, the Gulf of Tonkin Incident occurred which involved attacks on U.S. destroyers namely USS Maddox and USS Turner Joy by North Vietnamese torpedo boats. In response, Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution which authorised President Lyndon B. Johnson to use military force without a formal declaration of war. This event essentially marked the beginning of full-scale U.S. military involvement and combat troops landed in Vietnam by 1965.



On August 5, 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson presented the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution to Congress, requesting the authority to take all necessary measures to repel attacks on U.S. forces and prevent further aggression. It was overwhelmingly approved by both houses and signed into law on August 10.



5. The War Intensifies

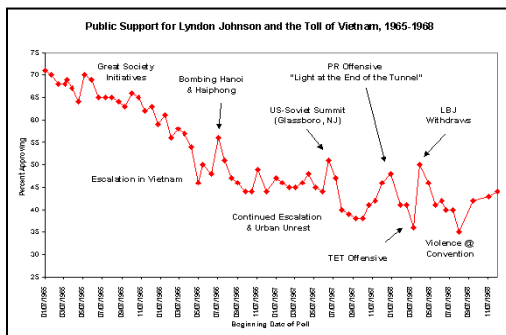
The Vietnam War quickly turned into a brutal conflict. The Viet Cong employed guerrilla warfare, while the U.S. relied heavily on air power. The U.S. also launched Operation Rolling Thunder from 1965 to 1968, which was an aerial bombing campaign with its main aim being the destruction of North Vietnam's infrastructure and morale.

Although the U.S. had over 500,000 troops stationed in Vietnam and was also technologically superior, the American forces struggled against an evasive enemy and failed to win the "hearts and minds" of the Vietnamese people. The war was extremely costly both in terms of lives and morale.

6. The Turning Point (Tet Offensive -1968)

In January 1968, during the Tet holiday (Vietnamese New Year), North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces together launched a massive, coordinated surprise attack on over 100 cities and military targets across South Vietnam. Though the U.S. forces gained back control, the American public suffered a severe shock because the executive had always claimed that victory in Vietnam was near.

It marked a psychological turning point and triggered widespread public disillusionment and anti-war protests across the United States.



This graph shows how public support for President Johnson declined from 1965 to 1968 due to the Vietnam War's escalation, rising casualties, and events like the Tet Offensive, leading to his decision not to run for re-election.

7. Vietnamization

When Richard Nixon became president in 1969, he introduced a strategy of Vietnamization which meant the gradual withdrawal of U.S. troops while simultaneously training and equipping the South Vietnamese army so that they could completely take over the fighting. At the same time, Nixon expanded the war into Cambodia and Laos, targeting North Vietnamese supply routes (Ho Chi Minh Trail), which eventually led to widespread protests at home.



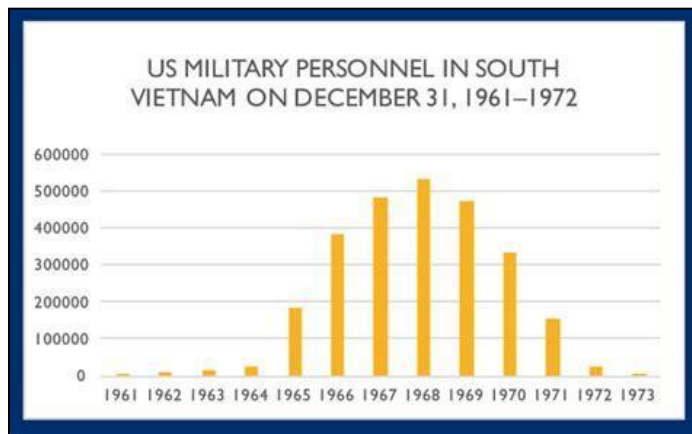
Despite ongoing peace talks, fighting continued.

8. U.S. Withdrawal and Aftermath

By 1973, the U.S. had withdrawn its combat troops following the Paris Peace Accords, which aimed to end the war and restore peace. However, the fighting between North and South Vietnam resumed shortly after.

Despite U.S. promises of continued aid, support for South Vietnam had diminished, and the North Vietnamese forces were increasingly gaining territory by early 1975.

As of April 29, 1975, Saigon is under threat, and the future of South Vietnam remains uncertain.



This graph shows the rise and fall of the U.S. military presence in South Vietnam, peaking in 1969 and steadily declining afterwards. By the freeze date of April 29, 1975, U.S. troops had fully withdrawn, marking the end of direct American military involvement.



TIMELINE OF THE WAR

1) 1954 – The First Indochina War

After nearly a decade of fighting, the French Empire faced a crushing defeat where Viet Minh fighters, motivated by the nationalist and communist ideals of Ho Chi Minh, surrounded the French garrison for 56 days. This battle not only marked the end of France's imperial ambitions in Southeast Asia but also ignited a fire which could not be put out, the Cold War.

2) July 1954 – Geneva conference

The Geneva Conference which was intended to bring peace to Vietnam ended up further dividing it. Due to a difference in opinions between the leaders and the people of South and North Vietnam it was decided that Vietnam would be temporarily divided into two parts at 17th parallel: the communist, North Vietnam led by Ho Chi Minh, and non-communist, South Vietnam led by Ngo Dinh Diem and backed by the United States. Elections were promised to bring the nation together in 1956, but due to deep mistrust and Cold War politics, they never took place, and ultimately led to a bloody civil war and global conflict.



The Geneva Conference was intended to settle issues from the Korean War and the first Indochina War and took place in Geneva, Switzerland from 26 April to 20 July 1954.

3) August 2 & 4, 1964 – Gulf of Tonkin Incident

The Gulf of Tonkin incident can be divided into two parts: a) The Attacks on August 2nd

b) The Attacks on August 4th

These attacks were described as “unprovoked attacks by the Vietnamese” on 5th of August to the United States Congress



a) August 2nd: USS Maddox, a US ship which was sent out to collect data about the conditions in Vietnam and was also agreed upon by the North Vietnamese, was approached by two North Vietnamese torpedo boats. The destroyer fired warning shots, but the torpedo boats opened fire. The Maddox escaped harm, retreated and took down one of the torpedo boats in the process.



In response, the US sent Turner Joy to reinforce the Maddox. The North Vietnamese believed that the Maddox was one of the parts of the raids which had taken place.

- b) August 4th: The events which occurred on August 4th are highly speculative to date as two contradicting findings were reported to the States. The Navy destroyers Turner Joy and Maddox reported that there were multiple torpedoes which opened fire against them but a plane piloted by Commander James Stockdale which was flying at low altitude at that time reported seeing no torpedo boats.
- These incidents were used to justify the rapid escalation of U.S. military involvement.
 - The vague and rushed nature of the reported attacks sowed the seeds of controversy and mistrust among Americans.

In early August 1964 two US destroyers stationed in the Gulf of Tonkin reported to Vietnam radio that they had been fired upon by North Vietnamese forces.

4) August 7, 1964 – Gulf of Tonkin Resolution

In response to the attacks which occurred in the Gulf of Tonkin, the Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution which handed the then-President, Lyndon B. Johnson a blank check to wage war without a formal declaration. This resolution unleashed the full might of the U.S. military on North Vietnam, leading to hundreds of thousands of American troops flooding the region.

5) 1965 – Arrival of U.S. Combat Troops

The arrival of American combat forces in Da Nang in 1965 was the first instance which transformed the Vietnam War from a civil one into a large-scale international war. The US had the notion that it would easily save South Vietnam and crush the North, but instead of being the saviour it thought it would be, it faced devastating losses and understood the potential of guerrilla warfare the hard way.

6) January 30, 1968 – Tet Offensive

The Tet Offensive shattered the trust of any person in the imminent U.S. victory. On the 30th of January, 1968, the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces launched surprise attacks across South Vietnam during the lunar year (“Tet”) holiday, targeting major cities, including the heavily fortified U.S. Embassy in Saigon. Although the U.S. forces militarily retaliated, the scale and boldness of the attack stunned the American public and media, eroding trust in government assurances and fueling anti-war sentiment. Tet marked a psychological turning point, revealing the true cost of the war.

7) March 16, 1968 – My Lai Massacre

The horrific slaughter at My Lai by the U.S. troops exposed the brutal realities and ethics of the war. Over 500 unarmed Vietnamese civilians including women, children, and elders were mercilessly killed in a tragic event that shocked the entire world. The massacre flipped a switch in the minds of people and they



began contemplating whether it was right to meddle in the war of a country on the other side of the world at the cost of the lives of its people.

- Occurred: March 16, 1968
- Reported: November 1969
- Initial internal reports were downplayed or covered up by military leaders until a soldier, Ron Ridenhour got to know about the massacre following which he wrote multiple letters to the Pentagon and the Congress and requested an internal investigation.

8) **January 27, 1973 – Paris Peace Accords**

After years of meaningless combat, diplomatic efforts prevailed in Paris, which promised an end to U.S. military involvement and a ceasefire. Yet, the peace was only temporary, with both sides violating the agreement immediately.

The Paris Peace Accords symbolised the beginning of America's withdrawal but failed to bring lasting peace to a country deeply scarred by war, leaving the South Vietnamese government vulnerable and defenceless.



FREEZE DATE CONTEXT

This committee begins its work on April 29, 1975, one day before the Fall of Saigon, which marks the collapse of South Vietnam and the end of direct American military involvement in the Vietnam War. At this point, North Vietnamese forces are rapidly advancing toward the city. On the ground, American helicopters are racing against the clock to evacuate diplomats, civilians, and allies. The scene is one of urgency, confusion, and deep human sorrow.

By choosing this moment, we are stepping into the final hours of the conflict. The decisions made now carry the weight of history. They will not only reflect on the past but could also shape how this war ends and how it is remembered. This is a test of leadership, of moral clarity, and of the Senate's role in guiding the nation during a crisis.

These hours are critical. The choices before you could determine whether the United States ends its involvement with dignity and responsibility or deepens the crisis. More than that, this is a chance for the Senate to reclaim its voice in matters of war and peace, a voice that many feel was lost during the escalation of this conflict.

This moment calls for more than political calculation. It demands honesty and courage. As the war draws to a close, we must ask ourselves one essential question: when everything is on the line, what matters more—saving lives or saving face?



GLOSSARY

1. **Guerrilla Warfare**- A form of irregular combat where small groups use surprise attacks, ambushes, and mobility to fight larger traditional armies.
2. **Insurgency**- A rebellion or uprising against a government, often involving armed conflict and political resistance.
3. **Overreach (Presidential Overreach)**-When the President takes more power than allowed by the Constitution, often by bypassing Congress in decision-making.
4. **Credibility gap**- the growing difference between what the U.S. government told the public about the war and what people believed or saw.
5. **Authorisation-Official** permission or power given to take action, usually by Congress or law.
6. **Impeachment**-A formal process where a public official is accused of misconduct. The Senate acts as the jury in such trials.
7. **Coup**-A sudden and illegal seizure of government power, often by the military.
8. **Proxy War**-A conflict where two powerful countries (like the U.S. and USSR) support different sides in a smaller country's war without directly fighting each other.
9. **Escalate / De-escalate**-To increase or reduce the level of intensity or involvement, especially in war or conflict.



HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Vietnam War, which is one of the most crucial conflicts of the 20th century, has a deep historical background. To understand the involvement of the United States in the Vietnam War and how presidential powers were used in this process, it is essential to look at the history of the event.

French Colonial Rule and Vietnamese Nationalism

Vietnam was under the control of French colonial rule from the late 1800s as part of French Indochina. The French treated Vietnam as a source of wealth. They took control of the land, extracted resources and used the people of Vietnam as cheap labour. They also tried to change the culture of people by introducing the French language, and customs and also suppressed any form of political opposition or independence movements.

By this time, Vietnamese nationalism had begun to grow. Many people began to fight against colonial rule and demand freedom. One of the famous nationalists was a young man named Ho Chi Minh, who later became an important figure in Vietnam's fight for independence. He was a keen supporter of communist ideas and believed that a united Vietnam under communism would be the best path. He formed a group in 1941 called the Viet Minh, which aimed to free Vietnam from foreign control.

Japanese Occupation and Post-War Power Struggles

During the phase of World War II, Japan invaded and occupied Vietnam, pushing the French rule aside but allowing them to remain in some administrative roles. This opportunity was used by the Viet Minh to grow stronger by fighting against the Japanese Occupation. In 1945, when Japan finally surrendered 1945, Ho Chi Minh declared Vietnam's independence. However, the French wanted to return and reclaim control of Vietnam, which led to conflict.

The result of this was the First Indochina War between the French and the Viet Minh. This War lasted from 1946 to 1954. This was a brutal and destructive conflict for both sides, but the turning point came in 1954 when the French were defeated at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu, a military loss which forced France to consider giving up its control over Vietnam.



The Geneva Accords and the Temporary Division of Vietnam

In 1954, several countries including the United States, Soviet Union, China, France and Britain met in Geneva to decide the future of Vietnam. This meeting is called the Geneva Conference and it led to the signing of the Geneva Accords. According to the agreement, Vietnam would be divided at the 17th parallel until national elections could be held in 1956 to unify the country.

Vietnam would be governed by Ho Chi Minh's communist government in the North. In the south, a non-communist government would be set up under Emperor Bao Dai initially and later under Ngo Dinh Diem, a strong anti-communist leader backed by the United States. The main idea behind the temporary division was to keep peace until elections could decide the country's future.

The Cancelled Elections and The Rise of Two Vietnams

Although the elections were scheduled for 1956, they were never held. The South Vietnamese government, which was backed by the United States, refused to participate. They felt that free and fair elections were not possible under the communist regime of the North. Many observers believe that Ho Chi Minh would have easily won those elections as he was popular among both northern and southern Vietnamese, especially amongst the poor.

Because the elections were cancelled, the temporary division became permanent and two states were formed: North Vietnam and South Vietnam. South Vietnam became a non-communist republic, supported mainly by the United States and other Western countries. This division laid the framework for future conflict.

Political and Social Conditions of North and South

The government was built on communist principles in North Vietnam. The land was taken from wealthy landlords and redistributed to poor farmers. The economy and Media were controlled by the state and people were expected to follow the rules of the Communist Party. Efforts were being made to industrialise the economy and strengthen the military.

However, South Vietnam struggled with corruption, political repression, and poor governance under the leadership of Ngo Dinh Diem. Although the government claimed to be democratic, it acted like a dictatorship. Political opposition led by the communists and Buddhists was suppressed by Diem. They were also treated unfairly.



His government became increasingly unpopular among the people, which allowed communist rebels in the South, known as the Viet Cong to gain support.

The Vietnam War began as a fight for independence but quickly became part of the larger Cold War struggle between communism and democracy. For the United States, what started as support for an ally turned into a long and costly war. Most decisions were made by the president, with little involvement from Congress or the public. Over time, the war revealed the dangers of giving too much power to one branch of government. It also left deep scars on American society and changed how the country thought about war, leadership, and accountability.



US INVOLVEMENT IN VIETNAM

We've already seen how Vietnam was divided into North and South at the 17th parallel after the Geneva Accords in 1954. That division didn't just separate two halves of a country, it became a symbolic frontline in the global Cold War which means it led to a proxy war. The United States came to support the anti-communist South Vietnamese government, while the Soviet Union and China backed the communist North. This war would eventually draw the U.S. into a conflict that would become one of the most controversial in its history.

But how and why did the United States become so deeply involved in a war on the other side of the world?

At its core, U.S. involvement was shaped by a broader Cold War worldview. American leaders believed that communism was a threat to democracy and global stability. If Vietnam fell to communism, they feared the rest of Southeast Asia would follow and this was the essence of the *Domino Theory*. U.S. foreign policy at the time was driven by the policy of *Containment* which meant that communism had to be stopped wherever it tried to spread. South Vietnam was seen as a crucial defence. So, from the late 1950s onward, the U.S. began sending money, weapons, and military advisors to help the South Vietnamese government oppose the communist insurgency also known as the Viet Cong.

Involvement Under Different Presidents

- Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953–1961)



Eisenhower's presidency laid the foundation for American involvement. He did not send combat troops to South Vietnam but believed in the domino theory and understood the Cold War context of the war. His administration began sending military advisors to South Vietnam and dramatically increased economic and military aid. This gradually resulted in deeper involvement by future presidents of the U.S. in the war



- John F. Kennedy (1961–1963)

Kennedy further expanded the U.S. role in Vietnam. He increased the number of American military advisors from 900 to over 16,000 and promoted counterinsurgency operations to combat the Viet Cong's guerrilla tactics. His administration also supported a coup that overthrew South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem, who had become deeply unpopular. Diem's removal, however, led to political instability in South Vietnam and increased dependence on the U.S.

- Lyndon B. Johnson (1963–1969)

It was under Johnson that the Vietnam conflict turned into a full-scale war for the United States. One major turning point was the *Gulf of Tonkin Incident* in August 1964. U.S. Naval ships were attacked by North Vietnamese boats and this was used as a justification to substantially increase military involvement in Vietnam. As a result, the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution was passed which allowed for combat troops to be sent to Vietnam without a formal declaration of war.

Johnson soon launched *Operation Rolling Thunder*, a massive bombing campaign against North Vietnam meant to weaken its supply lines and morale. In 1965, U.S. ground troops were deployed. By 1968 about half a million troops were stationed and what began as a military advisor programme turned into a full-scale military commitment.

To fight the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces, the U.S. adopted aggressive tactics such as:

- Search and Destroy Missions were used to locate and kill Viet Cong fighters, but they often harmed civilians and destroyed villages, thus angering the local population.
- Chemical Warfare included the use of *Agent Orange*, a toxic herbicide meant to strip away jungle cover. It led to devastating health effects for both the U.S. troops and Vietnamese civilians.
- Napalm, a flammable gel was used in bombing raids and caused horrifying injuries and widespread civilian casualties.



This photograph captures the devastating legacy of Agent Orange in Vietnam. The U.S. military's widespread use of this



toxic herbicide during the war led to severe environmental damage and long-term health effects.

Rise in Public Mistrust and Opposition

In January 1968, during the Vietnamese New Year (Tet), North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces launched a massive surprise assault on more than 100 South Vietnamese towns and cities including an attack on the U.S. Embassy in Saigon. Although U.S. and South Vietnamese forces were eventually able to push them back, this offensive known as the *Tet Offensive* shattered the illusion that America was winning the war.

Until that point, government officials had been telling the public that victory was near. Tet proved otherwise. The attack was a psychological blow to American confidence, and it marked a major shift in public opinion. President Johnson's popularity reduced significantly, and he eventually announced he would not seek re-election.



This map shows the widespread scale of the Tet Offensive in 1968, highlighting major attacks by communist forces across South Vietnam, including key cities like Saigon and Hue, despite the presence of major U.S. bases.

As the war dragged on, the mood in the United States shifted dramatically. What had begun as a relatively distant foreign policy issue became a national crisis.

- The anti-war movement gained momentum, especially among college students, civil rights activists, and returning veterans. Protests were held nationwide, with slogans like, “Hey, hey, LBJ, how many kids did you kill today?”
- Television channels and newspapers brought the brutal realities of the war into America's living rooms. The credibility gap i.e. the growing disconnect between what the government said and what people saw widened.
- In 1968, news of the *My Lai Massacre*, where U.S. soldiers killed more than 500 Vietnamese civilians who did not possess any arms, shocked the nation and further



reduced faith in the war effort.

- The unrest peaked with the *Kent State shootings* in May 1970, when National Guard troops shot and killed four students who were protesting against the war's expansion in Columbia.

When Richard Nixon took office, he promised to end the war honourably. His strategy, called *Vietnamization*, involved withdrawing American troops while handing over the fighting burden to the South Vietnamese Army (ARVN). This policy led to a gradual reduction in U.S. forces.

However, Nixon did not keep his promises. In fact, he secretly expanded the war. The U.S. launched *Operation Menu*, a bombing campaign in Cambodia and Laos, aimed at destroying North Vietnamese supply routes, without informing Congress or the public. Once these bombings became public, they caused major outrage.

The Paris Peace Accords signed in 1973 marked the official end of U.S. military involvement. It was signed by all major parties and the agreement called for a ceasefire, the return of all prisoners of war, full U.S. troop withdrawal, and a non-binding (legally enforceable) promise from North Vietnam not to invade the South. By March 1973, all U.S. combat troops had left Vietnam. However, American involvement didn't end completely.

The U.S. continued to support South Vietnam diplomatically and logistically. However, by April 1975, it was clear that South Vietnam could not keep the North at bay without direct U.S. support.

On April 29, 1975, the U.S. launched *Operation Frequent Wind* which was the final helicopter evacuation of American troops and thousands of South Vietnamese allies from the U.S. Embassy in Saigon. The image of helicopters lifting people off rooftops as communist forces became one of the most iconic symbols of the Vietnam War.



This photo captures Operation Frequent Wind (April 1975), the final U.S. evacuation of Saigon. American personnel and at-risk South Vietnamese were airlifted by helicopter to U.S. Navy ships as North Vietnamese forces closed in—marking the chaotic end of U.S. involvement in Vietnam.



Aftermath and Consequences

The Vietnam War left a deep and lasting impact on both Vietnam and the United States.

- Over 58,000 Americans died, with more than 300,000 wounded. On the Vietnamese side, an estimated two million civilians and soldiers were killed.
- The war severely damaged trust in the U.S. government. The term “*credibility gap*” became a commonly used term, highlighting the lack of connection between official statements and reality.
- In 1973, Congress passed the War Powers Act to prevent future presidents from unilaterally involving the U.S. in prolonged conflicts without approval from Congress.
- *Vietnam Syndrome* emerged which was a term describing the public and political reluctance to engage in foreign military interventions essentially rooted in the trauma and perceived failure of Vietnam.

The war’s legacy would shape American foreign and domestic policy for decades to come.



U.S INVOLVEMENT IN VIETNAM WAR

Phase	Time Period	Presidents	Key Actions	Outcome
Initial Support	1951-1960	Eisenhower	Backed South Vietnam with money & advisors, Believed in the Domino Theory	U.S. began involvement without formal war declaration
Escalation	1961-1963	Kennedy	Increased advisors to 16,000, Secretly backed coup against Diem	Deepened U.S. role; political instability in South Vietnam
Full-Scale War	1964-1968	Johnson	Gulf of Tonkin Resolution passed, Sent over 500,000 troops, Launched Operation Rolling Thunder	Peak of U.S. military involvement; growing public skepticism
Public Backlash	1968-1969	Johnson (end of term)	Tet Offensive shook U.S. confidence, My Lai Massacre revealed	Surge in anti-war protests; Johnson declines to run for re-election
Exit Strategy Begins	1969-1973	Nixon	Introduced Vietnamization, Secret bombings in Cambodia & Laos, Signed Paris Peace Accords (1973)	Gradual troop withdrawal; War Powers Act passed to check presidential power
Final Phase	1973-April 1975	Nixon~Ford	Troops fully withdrawn, Operation Frequent Wind evacuation, No military re-entry	U.S. exits the war; Saigon about to fall; end of direct American involvement



MAJOR INCIDENTS AND EXECUTIVE ACTIONS

1. The Geneva Accords

The Geneva Accords marked the end of French colonial rule in Vietnam. They were signed in July 1954 after France's defeat at the battle of Dien Bien Phu and were responsible for temporarily dividing Vietnam at the 17th parallel. The North then came under communist rule led by Ho Chi Minh, while the South was controlled by a U.S.-backed, non-communist regime. The Geneva Accords called for elections in 1956 to reunify the country, but these elections were never held.

2. Gulf of Tonkin Resolution

In August 1964, following reported attacks on U.S. naval vessels by North Vietnamese patrol boats in the Gulf of Tonkin, Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. This gave President Lyndon B. Johnson extreme authority to use military force in Vietnam without a formal declaration of war. It was later that doubt was cast on the possible inaccuracy of the reports and this raised concerns about the manipulation of events to justify military action.

3. Operation Rolling Thunder

Operation Rolling Thunder was a sustained bombing campaign against North Vietnam which was launched in March 1965 and intended to weaken the enemy's capacity and will to fight. Despite the enormous scale of the attacks, they failed to achieve their purpose. Instead of breaking North Vietnam's resolve, it hardened it. The operation also caused extensive civilian casualties and infrastructure damage thus fueling anti-war sentiment back at home.

4. The Tet Offensive

On January 30, 1968, during the Vietnamese New Year also known as the Tet holiday, North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces launched a massive, coordinated surprise attack on more than 100 locations across South Vietnam. Although U.S. and South Vietnamese troops eventually repelled, the psychological impact due to the offensive was profound. It shattered the public opinion that the U.S. was close to victory and also raised serious questions about how honestly the executive branch was reporting the war's progress to the American people and Congress.

5. Kent State Shooting

As U.S. military operations expanded into Cambodia, protests erupted across college campuses. On May 4, 1970, Ohio National Guard troops opened fire on unarmed students during an anti-war protest that was being held at Kent State University, killing four and injuring nine in the



process. This tragedy highlighted the extent of national division over the war and the consequences of decisions made without the proper involvement of all parties.

6. The Pentagon Papers

In 1971, Daniel Ellsberg, a former military analyst, leaked a top-secret Department of Defence study known as the Pentagon Papers. These documents revealed that successive administrations had misled the public and Congress about the scope, progress, and prospects of the Vietnam War. Their publication in major newspapers was a deep shock to public trust.

7. The War Powers Act

In response to the unchecked use of military power in Vietnam, Congress passed the War Powers Act in 1973. The law aimed to limit presidential authority by requiring the president to notify Congress within 48 hours of deploying troops and to withdraw forces within 60 days from the war-torn area if Congress did not approve of the action. Though this act was passed despite President Nixon vetoing it, it was a critical step toward regaining Congressional control in matters of war.

8. The Paris Peace Accords

After years of intense fighting and prolonged negotiations, the United States, North Vietnam, South Vietnam, and the Viet Cong signed the Paris Peace Accords in January 1973. The agreement called for a ceasefire and the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam. While U.S. troops did withdraw from Vietnam, peace was not achieved because fighting between North Vietnam and South Vietnam resumed shortly after.

9. The Fall of Saigon (April 29, 1975 – Ongoing)

By April 1975, North Vietnamese forces were closing in on Saigon, the capital of South Vietnam. On April 29, just one day before the freeze date of this committee, U.S. personnel and South Vietnamese allies were evacuated in a frantic airlift from the U.S. Embassy rooftop. This marked the collapse of South Vietnam and the symbolic end of the war. This chaotic withdrawal was a devastating proof of years of executive-led decisions made without proper legislative consent and public approval.



CONCLUSION

8.1 Reevaluating Executive Authority

The Vietnam War began as a result of the executive branch exercising broad and, at times, unchecked authority. It raised serious concerns about the balance of power between the President, Congress, and the Senate, and forced the nation to ask: when should ethics outweigh logic and strategy? Over time, U.S. military involvement in Vietnam escalated dramatically, often justified by measures like the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution—an example widely viewed as a misuse of presidential power.

As the war dragged on and public support dwindled, doubts grew about whether the President had been given too much control. In April 1975, as the U.S. prepared to evacuate the last personnel from Saigon, many lawmakers believed that terms like “national security” and “presidential urgency” had become tools to sidestep Congress’s constitutional role in declaring war.

This committee was formed to reconsider whether the actions taken by the executive branch during the Vietnam War were necessary or excessive. It offers Senators a platform to propose real-time solutions, evaluate their consequences, and reflect on whether these actions strengthened or undermined the system of checks and balances that defines American democracy.

This is not just a historical examination; it’s a lesson for the present and the future. Should one individual have the power to bring a nation to war? Or must this power always be shared across branches of government to ensure accountability?

The committee’s conclusions could reshape how the War Powers Act of 1973 is interpreted and whether stronger laws are needed to constrain presidential military authority. It is a critical moment to reconsider how war decisions are made and how the U.S. can maintain a balance between urgent action and democratic oversight.

8.2 Present Scenario (April 29, 1975)

The United States is facing a full-blown crisis. Operation Frequent Wind, the final emergency evacuation of Americans and South Vietnamese allies from Saigon, has begun. U.S. helicopters are lifting people to safety as North Vietnamese forces close in. The fall of Saigon is no longer a question of if, but when.



The streets are filled with panic. The South Vietnamese government is collapsing rapidly. At the U.S. embassy, chaos reigns as desperate civilians plead for help. American soldiers work nonstop to evacuate as many as they can before time runs out.

Back in Washington, leaders are faced with a critical dilemma. Should the U.S. re-engage militarily to support South Vietnam, risking further involvement and lives? Should it focus entirely on a quick, complete withdrawal? Or should it step back altogether, allowing the situation to unfold without intervention?

The choices are few, and none are simple. The political and human consequences of each decision are immense. Senators must act quickly, thinking not only of what has already happened but of what may come.

Every decision made today will impact the lives of millions and influence the course of U.S. foreign policy for years to come.

8.3 Expectations and Conclusions

We hope this study guide serves as a useful starting point for your preparation. However, it is not a substitute for individual research. A strong performance in committee requires you to thoroughly explore the historical context, relevant documents, and your portfolio's position on the agenda.

As this may be a new format for many, a firm grasp of the Rules of Procedure, committee documentation, and key historical developments is essential. Read the guide carefully and research from the perspective of your assigned senator, keeping in mind the constitutional powers, responsibilities, and limitations of the United States Senate in 1975.

All sources, articles, and references introduced through speeches or documents must fall within the freeze date of April 29, 1975. Any material beyond this point in history will not be accepted. Use of AI and plagiarized content is strictly prohibited.

The core of this committee lies in evaluating the extent and consequences of executive power during the Vietnam War. Your objective is not to assign blame to individuals, but to critically assess how the exercise of executive authority impacted the war and the nation.

As a historic committee, this simulation provides you with the unique opportunity to reconsider important decisions and reshape the course of U.S. governance. Take your role seriously, remain



in character, and give your very best. You as senators are not only reviewing history but also deciding how it should have been written.



KEY AREAS OF DISCUSSION

1. Should Congress reclaim or reinforce its authority to declare war?
2. Should the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution be repealed, revised, or condemned?
3. How should the War Powers Act (1973) be interpreted, amended, or enforced?
4. Should future military actions require mandatory Congressional approval within a specific timeframe?
5. What oversight mechanisms can prevent unauthorised military escalations (e.g. Cambodia bombings)?
6. Should intelligence and diplomatic actions (like secret missions or negotiations) require Senate oversight?
7. How can transparency between the executive and the public be ensured during wartime?
8. What role should Congress play in the ongoing evacuation and post-war commitments in Vietnam?
9. How should future presidents be held accountable for misleading or bypassing Congress?



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