

**questions and answers
about
the vietnam war**

berkeley-oakland women for peace

the french period

Q. WHEN DID THE WAR IN VIETNAM BEGIN?

A. The first war was between Vietnam and France. The Vietnamese declared their independence from France and held elections in 1945. The French then invaded Vietnam but were defeated after 8 years of war, at Dien Bien Phu, in 1954.

Q. HOW WAS THE U.S. INVOLVED AT THIS STAGE?

A. The U.S. financed 3/4 of the French military effort, sent advisors to help the French, and tried to prevent the holding of the Geneva Conference. When the Geneva Agreements were signed in 1954, however, the U.S. promised to respect them.

Q. WHY WAS VIETNAM DIVIDED INTO TWO PARTS BY THE GENEVA AGREEMENTS?

A. Vietnam was divided temporarily at the 17th parallel to give time to move Vietnamese troops to the north and French to the south, on the express condition that elections to reunify the country would be held in 1956.

the 1956 elections

Q. WHY WASN'T VIETNAM REUNIFIED IN 1956?

A. The U.S.-supported government of Ngo Dinh Diem, established in the south when the French left, refused to hold elections.

Q. WHY DID DIEM REFUSE TO HOLD THE ELECTIONS?

A. Because he would have lost. President Eisenhower said, "I have never talked or corresponded with a person knowledgeable in Indochinese affairs who did not agree that had elections been held...possibly 80% of the people would have voted for communist Ho Chi Minh." (Mandate for Change, Dwight Eisenhower, p. 372) "Diem saved his people from this agonizing prospect (that Ho Chi Minh would win) simply by refusing to permit the plebescite...." (Life, 5/13/57)

the resumption of fighting

Q. WHO STARTED THE PRESENT FIGHTING AND WHY?

A. In response to Diem's refusal to hold elections, his determination that the country remain divided, and his terroristic methods, some of the people in south Vietnam formed a movement of national liberation.

Q. WASN'T THIS INSTIGATED BY THE COMMUNISTS IN NORTH VIETNAM?

A. A French specialist on Vietnamese history, Philippe Devillers, wrote, "The insurrection existed before the Communists decided to take part, and they were simply forced to join in. And even among the Communists the initiative did not originate in Hanoi, but from the grassroots where the people were literally driven to take up arms in self-defense (from the terror of the Diem regime)." (China Quarterly, Jan.-March, 1962)

how did the u.s. get involved?

Q. DIDN'T WE ENTER THE WAR ONLY AT THE REQUEST OF THE LEGITIMATE GOVERNMENT OF SOUTH VIETNAM, OUR ALLY?

A. The U.S. set up and financially supported Diem's regime and its successor dictatorships, which have never been popularly elected. "...what we now have in Saigon is neither 'legitimate' nor a 'government'...." (James Reston, New York Times, 5/18/66)

who's fighting in vietnam?

Q. HOW MANY RED CHINESE TROOPS ARE FIGHTING IN SOUTH VIETNAM?

A. None. Our government has never claimed that any Red Chinese are in south Vietnam.

Q. TO WHAT EXTENT ARE THERE NORTH VIETNAMESE FIGHTING IN SOUTH VIETNAM?

A. There are Vietnamese who originally came from the north fighting on both sides. The majority of officials of the pro-U.S. Saigon government, including Ky, are from north Vietnam. Of the 250,000 fighting on the side of the "Viet Cong" a year ago, only 25,000 were regular troops from north Vietnam (New York Times, 3/66). Since the U.S. began bombing north Vietnam 18 months ago, NLF and north Vietnamese troops have increased to 297,000 (S.F. Chronicle, 8/6/67).

Q. HOW MANY TROOPS DOES THE U.S. HAVE IN VIETNAM?

A. Over one-half million after Gen. Westmoreland's July, 1967, request is met.

Q. DO ANY OTHER COUNTRIES HAVE SOLDIERS IN SOUTH VIETNAM?

A. Yes. Australia 6,000; New Zealand 200; South Korea 45,000; Philippines 2,200. (S. F. Chronicle, 7/23/67)

why are we fighting in south vietnam?

- Q. ISN'T LBJ'S GOAL TO ESTABLISH A DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT RUN BY THE VIETNAMESE THEMSELVES?
- A. The U.S. set up the present dictatorship under Ky. Ky fought against Vietnamese independence and in support of the French in the earlier war.
- Q. BUT WEREN'T ELECTIONS HELD IN SOUTH VIETNAM A YEAR AGO?
- A. Yes, but only candidates supporting Ky's government were allowed to run and only people not suspected of disagreeing with Ky were allowed to vote.
- Q. HAVE THE VIETNAMESE PEOPLE SUPPORTED THE U.S.-BACKED GOVERNMENT OF GENERAL KY?
- A. "Even Premier Ky told this reporter today that the Communists were closer to the peoples' yearnings for social justice and an independent life than his own government." (James Reston, New York Times, 9/1/65). Ky did not have sufficient support within his own party to run again.
- Q. AREN'T THE MAJORITY OF VIETNAMESE IN FAVOR OF OUR BEING THERE?
- A. All indications are that they are not. Massive demonstrations by students, labor unions and Buddhists have demanded that the U.S. leave Vietnam. (More than 90% of the Vietnamese are Buddhist.)
- Q. SOME HAVE CHARGED THAT U.S. INVOLVEMENT IN THE WAR IS UNJUST AND ILLEGAL. WHY?
- A. -- Because the U.S. intervened in a civil war, supported Diem in his refusal to hold elections in 1956, and helped establish and finance a series of dictatorships, thus repudiating the Geneva Agreements.
- Because the U.S. violated the U.N. Charter (Chapter I, Article 2 "...All members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state....").
- Because the U.S. violated Article I, Section 8 of the U.S. Constitution which permits Congress alone to declare war. War has not been declared, but to declare war now would not legitimize it, since it violates the other legal agreements above.

negotiations

Q. HASN'T LBJ ATTEMPTED TO NEGOTIATE AN END TO THE BLOODSHED -- AND THE COMMUNISTS REFUSED TO NEGOTIATE?

A. On November 16, 1965, the New York Times printed the following: "The State Dept. confirmed today that a year ago the United States had rejected an offer by North Vietnam to have representatives of the two nations meet in Rangoon, Burma, to discuss terms for ending the hostilities."

In fact, there have been at least 15 initiatives for negotiation, some from north Vietnam and some by neutral mediators, from Fall, 1963, through March, 1967, all of which the U.S. government has rejected out of hand. (Documentation available at WfP office, below.)

Q. WHAT STANDS IN THE WAY OF NEGOTIATING AN END TO THE WAR?

A. Hanoi and the NLF are united in the one demand: that the bombing of north Vietnam be stopped before talks can begin. They insist on recognition of the NLF as a separate entity in the peace talks, and staged withdrawal of U.S. forces. The U.S. has never agreed to recognize the NLF as a representative south Vietnamese political and military force. To do so would be to acknowledge they are fighting in a civil war, and that a role is due them in the future government.

the bombing

Q. ISN'T IT TRUE THAT WE BOMB ONLY MILITARY INSTALLATIONS?

A. "Pilots are given a square marked on a map and told to hit every hamlet within that area." (S.F. Chronicle, 3/4/65) This "strategic bombing..." kills "significant numbers of innocent civilians...every day in South Vietnam" (New York Times, 9/5/65), "ten civilians for every VC" according to Special Forces officers (Newsweek, 3/14/66).

In his articles from north Vietnam (New York Times, December 1966) Harrison Salisbury reported, after seeing the victims, that the U.S. had used cluster bombs made specifically to kill and terrify people.

the homefront

Q. WHAT IS THE WAR COSTING, AND WHAT IS ITS EFFECT AT HOME?

A. \$24 billion a year currently, or \$400 annually for a family of four. While our cities decay, benefit programs are slashed, and there is rioting in the streets. Food prices rise, taxes go up, inflation eats at our purchasing power. The Great Society is dead. Young Americans fight and die, but we are all degraded by the spectacle of a powerful nation imposing its will on a nation of peasants.

Q. ARE MOST GI'S IN VIETNAM VOLUNTEERS OR DRAFTEES?

A. The majority are draftees who did not choose to go there. The draft hits poor people harder than others. Negroes make up only 10% of the population, but total 14% of the soldiers in Vietnam and 22% of the casualties.

Q. WHO ARE THE ANTI-WAR PROTESTORS?

A. All kinds of people: mothers, Negroes, draft-age men, students, writers, professors, clergymen, civil rights workers, union members, lawyers, doctors, even retired generals. Almost daily new groups oppose the war, and demonstrations are increasingly more massive.

World figures critical of U.S. involvement in the war include Pope Paul VI, Secretary-General U Thant, Arnold Toynbee, Walter Lippmann, Martin Luther King, Charles DeGaulle, Senators Morse, Kennedy, Hatfield, Aiken, Fulbright, Gruening, and many others.

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