

DBQ: Why the United States Lost the Vietnam War

Using your textbook as a reference please write a three page essay regarding the United States loss of the Vietnam War. Use the following accounts to provide insight into the loss of the war. You should include direct quotes from this assignment and should be three pages in length.

Document A

Source: Ho Chi Minh, leader of North Vietnam, before the Franco-Vietminh War, late 1940s

You can kill ten of my men for every one I kill of yours. But even at those odds, you will lose and I will win.

Document B

Source: Ho Chi Minh upon declaring Vietnamese independence (later rescinded by the French), 1945

We hold the truth that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, among them are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Document C

Source: Ngo Din Diem, leader of South Vietnam, before deposing the French supported Vietnamese Emperor, Bao Dai

A sacred respect is due the person of the sovereign.... He is the mediator between the people and heaven as he celebrates the national cult.

Document D

Source: Robert McNamara, American Secretary of Defence, 1962

Every quantitative measure we have shows we're winning the war.

Document E

Source: George Ball, Undersecretary of State, "Cutting our Losses in South Viet-Nam" Department of State, S/S Files: Lot 70 D 48, Memos to the President on VN Feb. 1965-Apr. 1966. Top Secret.

<http://oll.temple.edu/hist249/course/Documents/cutting_our_losses_in_south_viet.htm>

In a secret paper sent to Johnson's foreign policy advisors, Undersecretary of State George Ball concluded his analysis of US options in Vietnam as follows:

The position taken in this memorandum does not suggest that the United States should abdicate leadership in the cold war. But any prudent military commander carefully selects

the terrain on which to stand and fight, and no great captain has ever been blamed for a successful tactical withdrawal.

From our point of view, the terrain in South Viet-Nam could not be worse. Jungles and rice paddies are not designed for modern arms and, from a military point of view, this is clearly what General de Gaulle described to me as a "rotten country".

Politically, South Viet-Nam is a lost cause. The country is bled white from twenty years of war and the people are sick of it. The Viet Cong--as is shown by the Rand Corporation Motivation and Morale Study--are deeply committed.

Hanoi has a Government and a purpose and a discipline. The "government" in Saigon is a travesty. In a very real sense, South Viet-Nam is a country with an army and no government.

In my view, a deep commitment of United States forces in a land war in South Viet-Nam would be a catastrophic error. If ever there was an occasion for a tactical withdrawal, this is it.

Document F

Source: Lyndon Johnson

I don't want loyalty. I want *loyalty*. I want him to kiss my ass in Macys window at high noon and tell me it smells like roses. I want his pecker in my pocket.

Document G

Source: American army officer, General Long

We had to burn the village in order to save it.

Document H

Source: McGeorge Bundy, Kennedy's National Security Advisor, in a 1965 memo summarizing the arguments of those in the Johnson administration who opposed the war

For 10 years every step we have taken has been based on a previous failure. All we have done has failed and caused us to take another step which failed. As we get further into the bag, we get deeply bruised. Also we have made excessive claims we haven't been able to realize...

We are about to fight a war we can't fight and win, the country we are trying to help is quitting. The failure on our own to fully realize what guerrilla war is like. We are sending conventional troops to do an unconventional job. How long -- how much. Can we take casualties over five years -- aren't we talking about a military solution when the solution is political. Why can't we interdict better -- why are our bombings so fruitless -- why can't

we blockade the coast -- why can't we improve our intelligence -- why can't we find the VC?"

Document I

Source: Walt Rostow, presidential advisor and State Department Policy Planner, 1967

No, you dont understand, victory is very near. Ill show you the charts. The charts are very good.

Document J

Source: 1968 photograph by Eddie Adams of General Nguyen Loan, chief of Vietnamese national police shooting a Vietcong captive



Document K

Source: Walter Cronkite, CBS News, upon hearing of the Tet Offensive, Feb 1, 1968

What the hell is going on? I thought we were winning the war.

Document L

President Richard Nixon, Oct. 1969

I'm not going to be the first American president to lose a war.

Document M

Source: Admiral Thomas Moorer, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in Vietnam: A History, by Stanley Karnow,
<http://www.teachvietnam.org/teachers/guide/html/module_6_appendix.htm>

We should have fought in the north, where everyone was the enemy, where you didnt have to worry whether or not you were shooting friendly civilians. In the south we had to cope with women concealing grenades in their brassiers, or in their babys diapers. I

remember two of our marines being killed by a youngster who they were teaching to play volleyball. But Lyndon Johnson didnt want to overthrow the North Vietnamese government. Well, the only reason to go to war is to overthrow a government you dont like.

Document N

Source: Konrad Kellen, the RAND Corporation

Stephen T. Hosmer, Konrad Kellen and Brian M. Jenkins, The Fall of South Vietnam: Statements by Vietnamese Military and Civilian Leaders, New York: Crane, Russak, 1980

Short of being physically destroyed... [the Communists of Vietnam] collapse, surrender, or disintegration was, to put it bizzarely, simply not within their capabilities.

Document O

Source: William Ehrhart, a former marine

Whenever you turned around, youd be taking it in the solar plexus. Then the enemy would disappear, and youd end up taking out your frustrations on the civilians. The way we operated, any Vietnamese seen running away from Americans was a Vietcong suspect, and we could shoot. It was standard operating procedure. One day I shot a woman in a rice field because she was running ö just running away from the Americans. And I killed her. Fifty-five or sixty years old, unarmed, and at the time I didnt even think twice about it.

Document P

Source: North Vietnamese Colonel Bui Tin, upon accepting the surrender of the government of South Vietnam, 1975

All Vietnamese are the victors and only the American imperialists have been vanquished. If you love the nation and the people [of Vietnam], consider today a happy day.

Document Q

Source: Marshall McLuhan, 1975

Television brought the brutality of war into the comfort of the living room. Vietnam was lost in the living rooms of America--not on the battlefields of Vietnam.