ABSTRACT

KOREAN WAR AND VIETNAM WAR STRATEGIES: A COMPARISON

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This paper argues that had the United States military with the backing of the United Nations invaded North Vietnam without driving too close to China’s border with Vietnam, its chances of winning the Vietnam War may have been dramatically improved. The study focuses on lessons that United States military should have learned from the Korean War and examines whether or not those applicable lessons were applied in the Vietnam War. The study focuses on the United States military’s proximity to the Chinese border in both conflicts and the strategic effect of having the United Nations’ support in both conflicts.
KOREAN WAR AND VIETNAM WAR STRATEGIES: A COMPARISON

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Introduction

The United States military could have learned better from its strategic successes and failures in the Korean War and thereby improved chances for winning the Vietnam War. In the Korean War, the invasion of North Korea and South Korea’s securing the support of the United Nations were successful strategies that would have served the United States well in devising military strategies for the Vietnam War. The subsequent overreaching that likewise brought the United States and South Korea into close proximity to China brought the Chinese army into direct confrontation with the unprepared Americans and their allies. The strategic lesson that should have been learned there was to respect the proximity to China’s border. Ultimately, had the United States military with the backing of the United Nations invaded North Vietnam without driving too close to China’s border with Vietnam, its chances of winning the Vietnam War may have been dramatically improved.

This issue is important because many Americans today still are trying to understand the lessons of the Vietnam War. They seek numerous answers about a military conflict that took place during some of the United States’ most turbulent years in the twentieth century. Significant questions emerge: should the United States have gotten involved? What should the United States have done differently? How did the United States lose a war to the North Vietnamese and South Vietnamese guerrillas? Such questions warrant answers.

This study looks at the Vietnam War with an emphasis on military operations. Previous historians, such as Ernest May, have taken a similar approach in comparing both major conflicts. This study emphasizes analyzing the impact that territorial boundaries with China, United Nations support, and a willingness to invade the enemies’ homeland had on both conflicts. There are other critical factors common to both military conflicts that merit a detailed analysis. Such factors include the effect that public support at home in the United States had on military operations and troop morale, the military technology gap between the United States military and the North Korean, Chinese, and North Vietnamese militaries, especially in air and sea warfare superiority.

Approaching major combat operations from a military perspective is only one of many approaches in a historian’s toolkit. Diplomacy, economics, and religion are examples of important structures that played an important part in shaping the United States’ military strategic planning and merit a focused analysis. Absent from this discussion but no less important in affecting the outcome of the Korean and Vietnam Wars are the diplomatic strategies employed by the Americans and communists. What economic warfare did the United States and the communists wage against each other? The Cold War between the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics provides a framework by which to look at the Korean War and Vietnam War as proxy wars between the two superpowers. The Soviet Union’s nuclear weapon parity with the United States was an enormous factor in the United States military deciding to refrain from using nuclear weapons against the North Koreans and North Vietnamese. In addition to considering such factors as the morality of using nuclear weapons, the United
States feared nuclear weapon retaliation from the Soviet Union against itself and its allies if they dropped atomic weapons on any of the Soviet’s allies. Taking the broader Cold War context into consideration, the United States significantly limited its involvement in both the Korean and Vietnam Wars due to its need to keep military forces in reserve to be ready to fight in other world regions.

This study focuses on the Korean and Vietnam Wars from the United States’ perspective. In considering approaches to the Korean and Vietnam Wars, the historian must decide upon whether to tell the story more locally from a specific participant country’s view, more globally within the international context, or somewhere between the two. For a broader understanding of these conflicts and the military strategies, one needs to analyze both wars from the perspective of the North Koreans and North Vietnamese as well as the Chinese and the Soviets. Another valuable voice to consider is that of key soldiers involved in both the Korean and Vietnam Wars who may have been battalion commanders in the Korean War, for example, and went on to high level positions in the military during the Vietnam War. Their experiences in the Korean War shaped their approach to combat operations and strategic decision-making in the Vietnam War. In an effort to sharpen its focus this study concentrates primarily on the memoirs of key American decision makers during the Korean and Vietnam Wars such as presidents and commanding generals. It supplements those memoirs primarily with arguments from American historians who have written on these conflicts. These sources provide useful insight into the development of American military strategies.

This study compares the Korean and Vietnam Wars for several reasons. First, both wars were the largest American combat operations during the Cold War. Second, both wars were limited wars (from the United States’ perspective) fought against armies that by most military standards should have been inferior in their capabilities to the United States. Third and lastly, both wars were the United States’ direct military attempts to contain the spread of communism. These similar conditions made these conflicts worthy of comparison.

This paper begins by providing brief narratives that present some of the essential facts of both the Korean and Vietnam Wars to provide the reader with background on these conflicts. After laying the framework of evidence, it draws comparisons and advances conclusions from that evidence.

Success and failure need to be carefully defined in order to clearly make an argument. Military success and failure in war need to be defined for this paper, as not all sides agree to the same terms of victory and defeat. In World War II, the United States military achieved the unconditional surrender of the enemy, which included the complete control of the enemy’s military, territory, government, and all other resources. The majority of historians agree that World War II was an enormous military victory for the United States based upon those terms and others. If the United States military’s actions in the Korean War are measured against its successes in World War II, the United States military failed to achieve the unconditional surrender of North Korea. Short of achieving the unconditional surrender of North Korea, the United States military did succeed in
repelling the North Korean army’s invasion of South Korea and thus preserved the sovereignty of the Republic of Korea (South Korea) and its territorial boundaries. The fact that South Korea today is a strong, independent country in which many of its people enjoy a relatively comfortable standard of living is evidence that the preservation of the Republic of Korea by the United States and its allies at the end of the Korean War was nonetheless an enormous success.

Those historians who do not agree with this definition of success for the United States and its allies in the Korean War point out that the United States failed to unite North and South Korea under the South’s flag and that at the time that the two sides signed the ceasefire, the North Korean and Chinese armies were fully functional, able to continue hostilities, and were relatively equal in its capabilities when compared to the United States. From Chinese historians’ perspective, the Korean War was a successful defense of North Korea against the invading American armies. The same could be said of North Korean historians, although they may have a harder time rationalizing their invasion of the South in June 1950 as successful.

“Success” and “failure” and “victory” and “defeat” are helpful descriptive terms for historians to use in explaining the results of an armed conflict. They are important terms by which to measure military conflicts to determine what strategies worked and what strategies did not, for example. Defining success and failure in the Vietnam War, Vietnam was a military strategic defeat in that the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong armies were left standing on the battlefield with their ability to effectively continue combat operations against the remaining South Vietnamese forces undiminished. Defining success and failure in light of the Cold War, the Korean War was a success for the United States in terms that communism was held in check. The Vietnam War was a failure by the United States in that communism spread to South Vietnam.

Korean War Background

The roots of the Korean War lay with events at the end of World War II. Koreans found themselves freed from Japanese domination. They looked for fulfillment of the promise of President Franklin Roosevelt of the United States, Prime Minister Winston Churchill of Great Britain, and Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek of China in the 1943 Cairo Declaration that Korea should become free and independent “in due course.”

The American decision to land troops to play a part in the occupation of Korea came only at the very end of the war. The Japanese colony had been excluded from the 1943-45 negotiations about occupation zones between the United States, Great Britain, and China.

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and China. Late on the night of August 10, 1945, barely twenty-four hours after dropping an atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Nagasaki, the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee reached a hasty, unilateral decision that the United States should participate in the occupation of Korea. The Soviet Union had already entered the war in Asia, and the United States wanted to ensure that the USSR did not dominate the region. Those drafting the orders for the committee observed that the 38th parallel ran across the middle of the country. South of this line lay the capital, the best of agriculture and light industry, and more than half the population. This might be a good demarcation line, with the United States taking surrender in the South and the USSR in the North. Some members of the committee pointed out that if the Russians chose to reject this proposal, the Red Army could overrun all Korea.

To the relief of the committee in Washington, the Russians readily accepted the 38th parallel as the limit of their advance. Almost a month before the first Americans could be landed in South Korea, the Red Army reached the new divide--and halted there. It is worth remarking that if Moscow had declined the American plan and occupied all Korea, it is unlikely that the Americans could or would have forced a major diplomatic issue. To neither side, at this period, did the peninsula seem to possess any inherent value, except as a testing ground of mutual intentions.

Syngman Rhee became a key figure in the South. He was born in 1876, the son of a genealogical scholar. He studied in the United States from 1904 for several years after, earning an M.A. at Harvard and a Ph.D. at Princeton--the first Korean to receive an American doctorate. After a brief return to his homeland in 1910, Rhee once more settled in America. He remained there for the next thirty-five years, lobbying relentlessly for American support of Korean independence, financed by the contributions of Korean patriots. If he was despised by some of his fellow countrymen for his egoism, ceaseless self-promotion, and absence from the armed struggle that engaged other courageous nationalists, his extraordinary determination and patriotism could not be denied.

On December 27, 1945, the Three-Power Foreign Ministers’ Conference ended in Moscow with an important agreement. The Russians accepted an American proposal for Korea: the nation was to become the object of a Four-Power “International Trusteeship” for five years, paving the way to independence as a unified state. The Four-Power Trusteeship consisted of the United States, the Soviet Union, Great Britain, and China. The Four-Power Trusteeship represented a concession by Moscow, cramping

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4 Dean Acheson, Present at the Creation, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1969), 34.
5 Truman, Years of Trial and Hope, 317.
6 Ibid, 317.
7 Stueck, The Road to Conflict, 6.
8 Truman, Years of Trial and Hope, 317.
10 Goulden, Korea, 8-9.
11 Ibid, 10.
12 Truman, Years of Trial and Hope, 319.
13 Ridgway, The Korean War, 7.
immediate progress toward a Communist state in Korea. The Russians probably anticipated that the Korean communists were sufficiently strong to ensure their own ultimate triumph under any arrangement. But the Moscow Accords also reflected the low priority that Stalin gave to Korea. He was willing to appease Western fears in the Far East, no doubt in the expectation that in return Washington would less vigorously oppose Soviet policies in Europe.

On February 14, the Representative Democratic Council held its first meeting in Seoul’s Capitol Building. Of its twenty-eight members, twenty-four came from rightist political parties. Syngman Rhee declared, “Hereafter, the Council will represent the Korean people in its dealings with General [John L.] Hodge and the Military Government.” Limited as were the powers of the Council, it provided the Americans with a core of acceptable Korean leaders to match the Russian-sponsored Communist leadership now established in the North under Kim Il Sung.

Between 1945 and 1947 the foreign political patrons of North and South Korea became permanently committed to their respective protégés. In September 1947, despite Russian objections, the United States referred the future of Korea to the United Nations. Moscow made a proposal to Washington remarkably similar to that which General Hodge had advanced almost two years earlier: both great powers should simultaneously withdraw their forces, leaving the Koreans to resolve their own destinies. The Russians were plainly confident—with good reason—that left to their own devices, the forces of the Left in both Koreas would prevail. The Americans, making the same calculation, rejected the Russian plan. On November 14 their own proposal was accepted by the General Assembly: there was to be United Nations supervision of elections to a Korean government, followed by Korean independence and the withdrawal of all foreign forces. The Eastern bloc abstained from the vote on the American plan, which was carried by 46 votes to 0.

The United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea met for the first time in Seoul on January 12, 1948. The Russians and North Koreans utterly rejected United Nations participation in deciding the future of Korea. Thus it was apparent from the outset that any decision the Commission reached would be implemented only south of the 38th Parallel. Syngman Rhee was strongly in favor of immediate elections for as much of Korea as was willing to hold them. But every Korean opposition party argued against holding a vote in the face of the Communist boycott. Not only would this make genuinely free elections impossible---it would doom for years, if not forever, the national unity so many Koreans still cherished. It would be a formal recognition of the divided status of Korea.

14 Hastings, The Korean War, 37.
15 Ibid, 38.
16 Stueck, The Road to Conflict, 6.
17 Truman, Years of Trial and Hope, 324.
18 Ibid, 324.
19 Hastings, The Korean War, 41.
20 Truman, Years of Trial and Hope, 327.
Outbreak of War

The devastating North Korean artillery and mortar barrage opened at 4 A.M. on the morning of June 25, 1950.\(^{21}\) In Washington, it was early afternoon on Saturday, June 24. The Communist attack, masked by a skillful deception plan in the preceding weeks, achieved complete and tactical surprise. The Korean People's Army possessed seven combat-ready divisions, an armored brigade equipped with Russian T-34 tanks, three newly activated divisions, and ample supporting artillery.\(^{22}\) Since the army of Kim Il Sung was established in February 1948, it had been formed into an intensely motivated, well-equipped fighting force of 135,000 men.\(^{23}\) The United States had deliberately denied Syngman Rhee's 95,000 strong army of armor, antitank weapons, and artillery heavier than 105 mm.\(^{24}\) In the summer of 1950 more than a third of the Republic of Korea (ROK) Army's vehicles were immobilized in want of repair. There was just six days' ammunition reserve in the country. Only around a third of Rhee's army was deployed in the line confronting the Communist assault on June 25.\(^{25}\)

Syngman Rhee, in Seoul while the Communists attacked, called his country's ambassadors in the United States.\(^{26}\) "The Communists have invaded," he said calmly. "Our soldiers are fighting courageously, but they lack weapons. Please ask the government of the United States to hasten the delivery of arms to us."\(^{27}\) At 1 A.M. on Sunday morning they were back in Assistant Secretary of State Dean Rusk's office at the State Department. "This is plainly a serious matter," said Rusk. "This is a matter that should concern the United Nations."\(^{28}\) America's ambassador to the United Nations (UN) was away in Vermont for the weekend, but his deputy had been contacted. The UN Secretary-General, Trygve Lie, had been requested to summon a meeting of the Security Council.\(^{29}\)

The United Nations Security Council met at Lake Success that Sunday afternoon.\(^{30}\) Some members protested the short notice, which had prevented them from receiving instructions from their governments. The Yugoslavs demanded that if the South Koreans were to be heard by the Council, no resolution should be passed until the North Koreans had also attended to put their case. They were outvoted. On January 13 the Soviet delegate, Yakov Malik, had walked out of the Security Council in protest against the UN's refusal to seat Communist China in place of the Nationalists. On June 25, he was still absent. In these extraordinary circumstances, at 6 P.M., a UN resolution

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27 Ibid, 55.
28 Ibid, 55.
29 Ibid, 55.
30 Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, 404.
condemning the North Korean attack, and calling for the withdrawal of Kim II Sung's forces south of the 38th parallel, passed by a 9-0 vote.31

The UN resolution about Korea was a landmark event, probably never to be repeated in the history of this or any other world body. It was a fluke of history made possible by the unique accident of the Russian boycott.32 In the absence of the Soviets, the United Nations in 1950 was still overwhelmingly the instrument of the Western democracies and their clients.33 In that last period before the rush of colonies to independence multiplied the UN's size and its dissensions, it possessed only fifty-eight members.34

On July 10, American General Douglas MacArthur was formally appointed Commander in Chief of the United Nations Command.35 The United States rejected the UN Secretary-General's proposal that the war should be directed by the "Committee on Co-Ordination for the Assistance of Korea," as the British, French, and Norwegians seemed to favor. Since the United States was bearing the overwhelming burden of war—and directly contributing to most of its cost—Washington insisted upon direct military control and got its way with its allies.

Korean War Strategies

In dealing with the North Korean invasion, the United States military had to quickly develop several overall strategies to guide its actions. The United States military planners borrowed heavily from their previous strategic experiences in the European and Pacific theatres of World War II.36 With a common need to defeat the Axis powers, the United States and the Soviet Union had allied their forces. After meeting in Berlin in 1945, mistrust between the two superpowers led to outright fear and paranoia which fueled an arms race pitting both countries in the Cold War. The overall primary objective of the United States in the Korean War was to stop the spread of communism and maintain the sovereignty and integrity of the free world.37 The "fall" of China into the hands of the communists in 1949 provided the clearest and most recent example of communism's ability to spread across cultures and over the world.38 To achieve this overarching goal in Korea in 1950, the United States had to repel the North Koreans and maintain the sovereignty and integrity of South Korea.39 With the advent of nuclear weapons at the end of World War II and Japan's hastened capitulation as a result of

31 Ibid, 405.
32 Ibid, 404-405.
33 Hastings, The Korean War, 56.
34 Ibid, 56.
36 Ibid, 334.
37 Acheson, Present at the Creation, 375.
38 MacArthur, Reminiscences, 320.
39 Ibid, 334.
having two such nuclear weapons dropped on its territory, no country could dare oppose the United States in a military conflict.

Until the Soviets developed their own operational nuclear weapons in 1949, the United States held an atomic monopoly. With the backing of a nuclear-armed Soviet Union, the North Koreans strode boldly into South Korea. The United States and its allies responded militarily to the communist invasion but without a distinct nuclear advantage over the communists. One of the Allied coalition forces' goals was to not broaden the war onto the battlefields of China or the Soviet Union or to make it a nuclear war and thereby expend more American and free world resources, lives, or political capital. While maintaining the scope of the fighting in Korea, the United States sought to gain and sustain international support from the United Nations for the effort to defend and maintain South Korea against the North Koreans. In addition to being able to call upon a larger pool of military assets, gaining support from the United Nations would add the ever necessary legitimacy to the American effort.

These were the broad, overall military goals of the United States and its allies in the Korean War. Before the United States could realize these aims, it had to deal with the immediate threat of the advancing North Korean troops in South Korea. As the United States plunged into the conflict, the initial objective was to slow the advance of the North Korean forces until more troops, more supplies, and more weaponry arrived to better combat the enemy. After slowing the advance of the oncoming North Koreans, the Americans' next objective was to halt the North Korean offensive, followed by seizing the initiative and driving the invaders back to the 38th parallel—a return to the pre-war dividing line. American objectives included seizing all of North Korea and accepting the unconditional surrender of the North Koreans, thereby reuniting Korea under the non-communist rule of South Korea.

MacArthur and his war counsel drew up several initial military strategies to combat the immediate need of slowing the North Korean advance. South Korean forces had neither the military resources nor the proper military training to withstand a full-scale North Korean invasion. Thus the North Koreans quickly turned their invasion into a rout. MacArthur ordered the immediate deployment of American ground troops to establish initial contact with the advancing North Korean columns to assess their strength and to slow their advance. Though the initial American troops were not well trained or equipped, MacArthur argued against delaying their deployment in favor of waiting until

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42 Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope*, 338.
43 Ibid, 347.
44 Ibid, 347.
46 Ibid, 334.
his troops were adequately trained and equipped. MacArthur argued that the North Koreans would not halt their advance and respectfully await the arrival of well-trained and supplied American forces, so United States forces had to be deployed immediately to try to slow the enemy attack. The time gained by these hastily deployed troops would allow coalition ground, air, and naval forces to train and mass to eventually repel the North Korean invaders. While training and massing the necessary troops to fight the North Koreans, MacArthur called upon American industries to once again produce the necessary tanks, planes, and guns that he could distribute and use. Superior weaponry and logistics gave the Americans and their allies a distinct advantage over the North Koreans that allowed them to close the gap with any North Korean advantages of surprise, better trained troops, and superior numbers of them.

MacArthur decided immediately to refrain from using nuclear weapons in the Korean peninsula. He feared that this would broaden the war by bringing in the Soviet Union, which he expected to retaliate in kind with its newly developed nuclear weapons. In addition to possessing superior weaponry, coalition forces owned the distinct advantage of unchallenged use of the surrounding waters of the North and South Korea. American naval forces could freely move troops and supplies to forces on land and launch amphibious assaults on undefended communist troops.

MacArthur and his advisors quickly realized that American forces would have to maintain a foothold on the Korean peninsula around the city of Pusan on the southeastern corner of the peninsula. It would be infinitely more difficult to fight the war were American forces completely pushed off the peninsula while the enemy strengthened his hold on South Korea. Without a foothold, American forces could not stage troops, weapons, or supplies to fight the enemy on his own terrain.

The six-week series of actions that came to be known as the battle of the Pusan Perimeter began on the night of July 31, when the last of the United States' Eighth Army, commanded by General Walton Walker, retreated across the Naktong eastward. "There will be no more retreating army readjustment of lines or whatever you call it," the Eighth Army's commander declared in a ringing order of the day. "There are no lines behind which we can retreat. This is not going to be a Dunkirk or Bataan. A retreat to Pusan would result in one of the greatest butcheries in history."

In August 1950, the men on the Pusan Perimeter saw themselves as a beleaguered army, clinging to the United Nations' last toehold in Korea amid the onslaught of massed ranks of Communist fanatics. The ferocity and suicidal recklessness of the attacks of Kim Il Sung's units, night after night through those weeks, gave the defenders the impression of an Asian horde with limitless reserves of armor, ammunition, and trained

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48 Ibid, 335.
49 Ibid, 335.
50 Ibid, 337.
51 Ibid, 346.
53 Ridgway, The Korean War, 29.
The battle for the Pusan Perimeter was marked by an almost daily succession of crises for the Eighth Army, in which disaster was averted by the narrowest of margins. Kim Il Sung and his commanders fully grasped the urgency of smashing through to Pusan before the UN buildup made their task impossible.

From the early stages of the war, as the Eighth Army struggled to maintain fighting room in the southeast of Korea, MacArthur's thoughts turned toward a landing at Inchon, a small village on the western coast of the Korean peninsula just a few miles away from Seoul. Inchon was the only plausible target for an amphibious envelopment. Kunsan was so close to the besieged Pusan Perimeter that to make a landing there would be meaningless. Cinnampo, Pyonyang's port, was too far north. Yet Inchon's thirty-two-foot tidal range was one of the greatest in the world. Only on three possible dates—September 15 and 17 and October 11—would the tides be high enough to give the big landing craft three brief hours inshore before the coast became once more an impassible quagmire of mud.

MacArthur pulled off the feat. After the successful landing at Inchon on September 15 and the ensuing drive east towards Seoul, on September 16 American General Walton Walker's Eighth Army launched the long-awaited breakout of the Pusan Perimeter. North Korean units began to melt away, thousands of fugitives throwing away weapons, equipment, and clothing. On the twenty-sixth at Osan, men of the 1st Cavalry driving north from the Perimeter met the 7th Infantry pushing south from Inchon. Republic of Korea units advanced up the east coast from Pusan, meeting negligible resistance. Everywhere, the North Koreans were retreating en masse, surrendering in hundreds, or taking to the mountains to maintain guerrilla war.

On September 30, 1950, Republic of Korea troops advanced north of the 38th parallel. American units waited impatiently for the signal to follow them, to complete the task upon which they were embarked and go home before winter. The UN General Assembly passed a resolution on October 7, 1950, calling for "all appropriate steps . . . to ensure conditions of stability throughout Korea" and the formation of a unified government elected under UN supervision. Its purpose was to provide justification to the international community for military operations in North Korea, while preserving

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54 Ibid, 28.
58 Ibid, 349.
59 Ibid, 348.
61 Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope*, 359-360.
64 Ibid, 345.
65 Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope*, 362.
some vagueness about what form these operations would take.\textsuperscript{66} American troops reached Taegwandong, thirty kilometers from the Yalu River by October 25, 1950.\textsuperscript{67}

On November 1, 1950, China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) responded by crossing the Yalu River into Northern Korea from their Chinese homeland with four armies consisting of 30,000 soldiers each.\textsuperscript{68} This quickly led into a rout of all United Nations' forces back to the 38th Parallel. More than three weeks before the main Chinese attack was delivered, Beijing had delivered a warning to the United States.\textsuperscript{69} MacArthur declined to heed this message. He persisted in his conviction that his armies could drive with impunity to the Yalu.\textsuperscript{70}

The decision to advance north across the 38th Parallel was a classic example of military opportunity becoming the engine of action at the expense of political desirability.\textsuperscript{71} No rigorous debate was carried to a conclusion about United Nations' or United States' objectives in occupying the North. The very great political and diplomatic hazards were submerged by the prospect of outright military victory. At the root of American action lay contempt for the capabilities of Mao Zedong's nation and armed forces. Americans perceived Chinese Communists as a sinister ideological force in Asia, but not a formidable military one. Far greater courage and determination would have been required from the Truman Administration for a decision to halt the Eighth Army at the 38th Parallel than was demanded for acquiescence in MacArthur's drive to victory.

By April 1951, Chinese and United States forces settled roughly along the 38th Parallel and entered a long, drawn out phase of static, trench warfare.\textsuperscript{72} Through the last two years of the war, for all the periodic surges of tactical activity, the ferocious struggles that cost thousands of men on both sides their lives in pursuit of hill numbers or map references, the strategic situation in Korea remained unchanged.\textsuperscript{73}

On July 12, 1953, the United States and the Republic of Korea announced their agreement on truce terms with the North Koreans.\textsuperscript{74} The terms of the armistice provided for the boundaries between North and South Korea, the exchange of prisoners, and the cessation of all military hostilities.\textsuperscript{75} A demilitarized zone along the boundary between the two countries established a buffer whereby no military units or offensive or defensive weaponry or equipment could be entrenched.\textsuperscript{76} United Nations and North Korean

\textsuperscript{66} Hastings, \textit{The Korean War}, 121.
\textsuperscript{67} Xiaobing Li, Allan R. Millett, and Bin Yu, \textit{Mao's Generals Remember Korea}, (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 2001), 43.
\textsuperscript{68} Ridgway, \textit{The Korean War}, 52.
\textsuperscript{69} Li, Millett, and Yu, \textit{Mao's Generals Remember Korea}, 41.
\textsuperscript{70} MacArthur, \textit{Reminiscences}, 358.
\textsuperscript{71} Hastings, \textit{The Korean War}, 127.
\textsuperscript{72} Ridgway, \textit{The Korean War}, 117.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid, 183-184.
\textsuperscript{76} Ridgway, \textit{The Korean War}, 225.
prisoners were exchanged on July 27, 1953.\textsuperscript{77} The guns from both sides fell silent that same day.\textsuperscript{78}

Vietnam War Background

The other major Cold War conflict also took place in Asia, this time in Vietnam. In August 1945, most Vietnamese believed their country was at last independent of all foreign rule and at peace.\textsuperscript{79} For over eighty years, the French had been determined to remove the very name Vietnam from use, ruling it as three separate districts: Tonkin, Annam, and Cochin, China. For that entire period, the Vietnamese had struggled against French rule in what was a profitable colony in sporadic uprisings that sometimes achieved the intensity of full-scale guerrilla warfare.\textsuperscript{80} Resistance to French rule in turn drew upon centuries of struggle against Vietnam's most persistent threat, China.

French surrender to Germany in June 1940 had doubled the number of Vietnam's colonial masters. The new Vichy government acquiesced in the demands of German's ally Japan, which seized control of Vietnam's economic resources while leaving daily administration in the hands of the French. In a five-year period in Vietnam, Japanese policies devastated the economy, creating a famine in the North that killed between 1.5 and 2 million people.\textsuperscript{81}

By 1944, as the war against Germany in Europe merged with the war in the Pacific against Japan, Vietnamese nationalists became, in a formal sense, allies of the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union in a joint struggle against the Axis powers and such collaborationist regimes as Vichy France. The most effective nationalist group, by all accounts, was the League for the Independence of Vietnam (Vietnam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi), Viet Minh for short, established in May 1941 and led by Ho Chi Minh (whose name at birth was Nguyen Tat Thanh).\textsuperscript{82} A founding member of both the French and the Indochinese Communist parties, Ho had lived most of his life outside Vietnam, organizing, mobilizing, agitating, his steady goal the independence of Vietnam.

On August 15, 1945, news of the Japanese surrender reached Vietnam, along with word that Chinese and British troops would soon arrive in Vietnam to supervise the surrender. A few days later, having made certain the Japanese would not interfere, the Viet Minh called for mass rallies in Hanoi and later in Hue and Saigon. Thousands of peasants poured into the cities from the countryside, demonstrating their support for the Viet Minh in huge rallies. On August 30, Emperor Bao Dai, who had served the French and then the Japanese and would live to serve the French once again, presented the imperial seal and sword, symbols of Vietnamese sovereignty, to representatives of the

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid, 225.  
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid, 225.  
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid, 2.  
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid, 2.  
Viet Minh and voluntarily abdicated the throne, perhaps his first and last act of genuine nationalism. And on September 2, 1945, in the square in Hanoi where his body now rests, Ho faced a crowd of half a million people and proclaimed Vietnam's independence.

By October 1945, it was clear that the only people ready to recognize the freedom and independence of Vietnam were the Vietnamese themselves. In late September 1945, the British, charged with administering the Japanese surrender south of the 16th parallel, paused in the disarmament of the Japanese, rearmed the French prisoners of war and participated in a coup against the Viet Minh Executive Committee that had been administering Saigon in the name of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

American policy was expressed in an October 5 telegram from Dean Acheson, then Acting Secretary of State, to the American chargé d'affaires in China: "US has not thought of opposing the reestablishment of French control in Indochina and no official statement by US Government has questioned even by implication French sovereignty over Indochina." On October 17, Ho Chi Minh appealed to Truman, as he had to Wilson twenty-nine years earlier, to support Vietnamese independence; once again he was met with silence.

In the winter of 1946, French inability to deal with a defiant colony was only one of a host of problems facing Acheson. In Korea, a major uprising in the American-military zone had been crushed, but unrest continued; the outcome of the emerging civil war in China was uncertain at best and there was considerable pressure on Washington to take a more active role; the European economic situation remained bleak; there were serious crises in Greece, Iran, and Turkey. Abbot Low Moffat, head of the Division of Southeast Asia, arrived in Hanoi early in December 1946 carrying clear instructions: in all dealings he was to remember that Ho Chi Minh was an unrepentant Communist and the State Department would hardly look with favor on the establishment of a Communist-dominated Vietnam.

Had the French been content simply to grant Vietnam independence under the guise of the Viet Minh, it is unlikely the United States would have objected. But France defined its well-being in terms of repossessing its lost colony, not only as a balm to its wounded national vanity, but because of a fear that an independent Vietnam would threaten French interests in the economically far more significant colonies of Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia. The United States decided that it had no choice but to support the French.

In April 1950, a report to the National Security Council by the secretaries of state and defense, best known by its serial number NSC-68, outlined the position of the United

83 Ibid, 320.
84 Ibid, 322-323.
85 Young, The Vietnam War, 12.
86 Ibid, 12.
States in the world and instructed the president on how to safeguard it. NSC-68 stated: "The issues that face us are momentous, involving the fulfillment or destruction not only of this Republic but of civilization itself." In the past, no one country had been able to achieve world hegemony. Now, in the face of the defeat of Germany and Japan and the waning of the European empires, one state had emerged to claim that hegemony. Through violent and non-violent means alike, a nuclear-armed Soviet Union intended to "bring the free world under its dominion."

To meet the Soviet threat, NSC 68 called for a policy of aggressive containment, in which the United States seeks by all means short of war (1) to block further expansion of Soviet power, (2) expose the falsities of Soviet pretensions, (3) induce a retraction of the Kremlin's control and influence, and (4) in general, so foster the seeds of destruction within the Soviet system that the Kremlin is brought at least to the point of modifying its behavior to conform to generally accepted international standards.

One expects a successful war for independence to end with the lowering of the colonial flag, the departure of troops, and the investiture of a proud new national government with its own flag. But a world frozen in Cold War was not one in which colonies might fight against the colonial power and win an uncomplicated independence.

The Viet Minh fought the French to a standstill on March 13, 1954, at a northern village in Vietnam near the Laos border called Dien Bien Phu. The French fortified the village with twelve battalions, six fighter-bombers, and ten tanks. They believed the site was impregnable. The significance of Dien Bien Phu was that it marked the last remaining significant French military force in the Vietnam theatre. If the Viet Minh could defeat the French there, then the French were likely to concede defeat in Vietnam and relinquish claims to rule.

Viet Minh General Vo Nguyen Giap organized civilians and guerrillas to manually transport large quantities of artillery supplied by the communist Chinese to Dien Bien Phu. In all, four Viet Minh Divisions laid siege to the French forces at Dien Bien Phu, completely surrounding and cutting off the French. French and American forces airdropped supplies to the beleaguered defenders to no avail. The French surrendered at Dien Bien Phu on March 7, 1954, effectively ending their reign of Vietnam.

Elsewhere in 1954, an international conference took place at Geneva. One of the agenda items to be settled was the fate of Vietnam. The conference ended not in a united, independent Vietnam but in one divided, not with peace but with renewed war. The

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87 Ibid, 25.
Geneva Conference reflected neither the aspirations of the Vietnamese nor the military and political victory of the Viet Minh, but rather the hard realities of Cold War power.

The conference itself was the result of the French insistence that Indochina be put on the agenda of a Five-Power Conference consisting of France, the United States, Great Britain, China, and the Soviet Union, that was scheduled to meet in Geneva in April 1954 to discuss problems relating to Berlin and Korea. On May 8, 1954, the day after the fall of Dien Bien Phu, representatives of the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China, the United States, France, Great Britain, Laos, Cambodia, the State of Vietnam (South Vietnam), and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam) turned to the subject of Indochina.

On July 20, 1954, the Geneva Conference ended in two separate, but connected, agreements. First there was a cease-fire signed by representatives of the two combatants: Ta Quang Buu, vice minister of National Defense for the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, and Brigadier General Henri Eltiel for the French Union Forces in Indochina. Under its terms, troops of the People's Army of Vietnam (the Viet Minh) would regroup north of the 17th parallel, while French Union forces would withdraw to the south. Pending general elections for reunification, civil administration in each regrouping zone shall be in the hands of the party whose forces were to be regrouped there. Most important, Articles 16, 17, 18, and 19 barred the remilitarization of the conflict. There were to be no troop reinforcements, no augmentation of weapons, no military bases, and no foreign military alliances on the part of the administration of either zone. An International Control Commission comprised of Canada, Indian, and Polish representatives would supervise the terms of the armistice and investigate any complaints.

The cease-fire dealt with the military situation. A final declaration endorsed by all participants save the United States addressed Vietnam's political future. This declaration took note of the several particulars of the cease-fire barring any increase in troop level, armament, foreign military aid, or alliance. It also stipulated that the 17th parallel was not to be construed in any way as a political or territorial boundary, and that free general elections by secret ballot were to be held in July 1956 under the supervision of the International Control Commission. Representatives of each zone would meet on July 20, 1956, to prepare for the elections.

The expectation of all the Geneva participants was that France would remain in Vietnam to oversee the settlement. In the meantime Vietnam consisted of two military zones, administered by two civilian governments—the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the North, the State of Vietnam in the South. Military recoupment was to be completed within three hundred days of the signing, during which time civilians could move freely north or south of the parallel. Elections in 1956 would determine which government might legitimately claim to represent the whole country.

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Ho Chi Minh led the communist government north of the 17th parallel.\textsuperscript{90} Ngo Dinh Diem, brought back from exile in America, controlled the anti-communist government in South Vietnam.\textsuperscript{91} Many in Washington believed that Diem would not be able to maintain control in the face of the guerrilla war in the South led by the National Liberation Front, also known as the Viet Cong, that sought to unite the South with the North under control of the communists.

The free elections stipulated by the Geneva Accords were never held in South Vietnam.\textsuperscript{92} Diem's government and President Eisenhower's administration believed that Diem and his government would not receive the required number of votes to win.\textsuperscript{93} The United States argued that since it had not actually signed the Geneva Accords of 1954, it was not bound by its mandates.\textsuperscript{94} America's support of the suppression of free elections in 1956 in South Vietnam illustrated that the United States was more committed to fighting communism than supporting democracy. In the face of communist take-over, freedoms and liberties would be sacrificed until the threat passed and the situation was better suited for democracy to thrive.

When President John F. Kennedy took office in 1961, Vietnam was a relatively stable part of the world and was not as pressing a global issue as the new communist government in Cuba under Fidel Castro.\textsuperscript{95} President Kennedy sent General Maxwell Taylor to South Vietnam to assess the situation and make a recommendation on further American foreign policy towards supporting Diem's government.\textsuperscript{96} Taylor recommended that the United States step up its commitment to the South Vietnamese in their fight against the communist guerrillas since stopping the spread of communism was of primary national interest.\textsuperscript{97} Specific recommendations from General Taylor included increasing economic aid, sending military equipment such as helicopters, and stationing American military advisors to help train the South Vietnamese army in better strategies and tactics.

Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara supported Taylor's recommendations to support Vietnam, and forwarded their approval of Taylor's plan to President John F. Kennedy. Kennedy was fearful of making an open-ended commitment to South Vietnam.\textsuperscript{98} The Joint Chiefs of Staff, a military advisory counsel to the Secretary of Defense and the President of the United States, reported to Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara in early 1962 that they supported an increased level of commitment to South Vietnamese independence in the form of military supplies

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid, 88.
\textsuperscript{92} Young, \textit{The Vietnam War}, 53.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid, 54.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid, 53.
\textsuperscript{95} May, \textit{Lessons of the Past}, 89.
\textsuperscript{97} Ibid, 243.
and advisors. President Kennedy agreed that it was in the United States' national interest to contain communism in Vietnam and accepted the majority of General Taylor's proposals. Kennedy made sure that American military advisors would not participate in any direct combat operations with the Viet Cong or North Vietnamese. Kennedy's decision to commit additional American resources in 1962 would be continued through his successor Lyndon B. Johnson's administration.

By 1963, the local population's support for Diem's government had significantly eroded. Diem's government and military leadership had failed to make gains against the Viet Cong guerrillas' strength. Diem's Catholicism led him to enact harsh religious persecution against the South Vietnamese Buddhist population creating more civil unrest. The United States learned of a planned coup to overthrow Diem by several South Vietnamese generals around September 1963. Key American officials debated about whether a change of government would improve efforts against the Viet Cong. Kennedy ultimately decided that the United States would take no action in support of or against any attempted coups against Diem. On November 2, 1963, he received the report that Diem had been assassinated and the generals had taken over.

The United States experienced its own change in leadership several weeks later. President John F. Kennedy was assassinated on Nov 22, 1963, while making a visit to Dallas, Texas. In succession, Kennedy's vice president Lyndon B. Johnson assumed the office of the Presidency. President Johnson's administration's policy set out to continue Kennedy's plan towards Vietnam.

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In January 1964, a military coup led by General Nguyen Khanh replaced the military junta that had overthrown Diem. By 1964, the United States Navy conducted a series of naval surveillance operations, code named DE SOTO, introduced in 1962 to gather information as well as to give a "show of force" in support of South Vietnamese commando raids against North Vietnamese coastal targets. In mid-July, the destroyer USS Maddox was ordered to the Gulf of Tonkin on a DE SOTO mission. Then, on July 30 South Vietnamese commandos accompanied by American advisers conducted

99 Ibid, 41.
101 Ibid, 83.
102 McNamara, In Retrospect, 82.
103 Ibid, 83.
105 Ibid, 19.
106 Ibid, 64.
107 Young, The Vietnam War, 117.
108 Johnson, The Vantage Point, 113.
heavy raids against two islands in the Gulf of Tonkin.\textsuperscript{109} The next day the \textit{Maddox} reached the Gulf.\textsuperscript{110}

On August 2, 1964, as the destroyer cruised close to offshore islands that were again under attack by South Vietnamese commandos, the \textit{Maddox} was pursued into the middle of the Gulf by three North Vietnamese patrol boats which kept charging at the ship in a "V" formation and then rapidly veering off.\textsuperscript{111} In response, the \textit{Maddox} opened fire with its five-inch guns.\textsuperscript{112} The patrol boats fired several torpedoes at the \textit{Maddox} which all missed.\textsuperscript{113} The Vietnamese patrol boats, damaged by the guns of the \textit{Maddox}, turned back toward port, briefly pursued by jets from the aircraft carrier \textit{Ticonderoga}.\textsuperscript{114} This "battle" would be called the Gulf of Tonkin Incident and is the point many historians consider the beginning of a significant new phase of United States commitment to South Vietnam.

Washington received the report of the naval exchange with alarm and anger. Johnson personally ordered a second destroyer, the \textit{Turner Joy}, into the Gulf.\textsuperscript{115} He also used the "hot line" to Moscow for the first time, informing the Kremlin that the presence of two United States destroyers in international waters off the coast of North Vietnam was no cause for alarm. The Joint Chiefs of Staff responded. The President placed American combat troops on alert. Admiral U.S. Grant Sharp, Jr., Commander-in-Chief Pacific Command, ordered a second aircraft carrier and instructed the destroyers already in the Gulf to "assert the right of freedom of the seas."\textsuperscript{116}

President Lyndon Johnson called together congressional leaders of both parties to inform them of the event. He told them of an unprovoked attack against American ships in international waters and asked for their support for a resolution that would sanction the retaliatory attack already under way.\textsuperscript{117}

On August 5, 1964, Congress considered the Southeast Asia Resolution, commonly called the "Gulf of Tonkin Resolution."\textsuperscript{118} After two days of debate it passed the Senate by a vote of 88-2 and the House by a resounding 416-0.\textsuperscript{119} It was a resolution to deliberately allow the United States a broad hand in protecting peace and security in Southeast Asia. A second section asserted that "peace and security in southeast Asia" was vital to American national security and therefore the president, acting in accord with the Charter of the United Nations and as a member of the South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), would "take all necessary steps, including the use of armed

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid, 113.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid, 113.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid, 112.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid, 112.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid, 112.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid, 112.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid, 114.
\textsuperscript{116} Young, \textit{The Vietnam War}, 117.
\textsuperscript{117} Johnson, \textit{The Vantage Point}, 116.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid, 118.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid, 118.
force," to assist member states of SEATO "in defense of [their] freedom." Finally, the resolution would expire when the president determined "peace and security had returned to the area." It could also be terminated by a subsequent congressional resolution.  

On March 8, 1965, 3,500 Marines landed at Da Nang. In May the first United States Army units arrived.  With air attacks against both North and South Vietnam being launched from bases in the South, airfields were a logical target for forces from the National Liberation Front, the Communist guerrillas fighting against the South Vietnamese, and no one placed much confidence in the protection from the forces of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam). The United States ambassador to the Republic of Vietnam, Maxwell Taylor, cabled the State Department on February 22, 1965, voicing his concerns about the deployment of Marines in Da Nang to protect the airfield there. It would be, he said:

> a step in reversing long-standing policy of avoiding commitment of ground combat forces in [South Vietnam]. Once this policy is breached it will be very difficult to hold the line. . . . Once it becomes evident that we are willing to assume such new responsibilities, one may be sure the [Government of Vietnam] will seek to unload other ground force tasks upon us. Increased numbers of ground forces in [South Vietnam] will increase points of friction with local population. . . .

As for the use of Marines in mobile operations rather than static defense, [The] [w]hite-faced soldier, armed, equipped, and trained as he is not suitable guerrilla fighter for Asian forests and jungles. [The] French tried. . . and failed; I doubt that US forces could do much better. . . . Finally, there would be [the] ever present question of how foreign soldier[s] would distinguish between a [Viet Cong] and a friendly Vietnamese farmer. When I view this array of difficulties, I am convinced that we should adhere to our past policy of keeping ground forces out of direct counter-insurgency role.

Between 1965 and 1967, the United States military strategy in Vietnam had two major facets. The first involved strategic bombing of North Vietnam, and the second involved killing more Viet Cong and North Vietnamese regulars fighting in South Vietnam than could be replaced by new communist troops. President Johnson used the bombings and bombing pauses to pressure the North Vietnamese to conduct peace talks and bring the war to an end as quickly as possible.

But the war failed to end, and in early 1969, a counterattack occurred. In the opening hours of the Tet Offensive, Viet Cong troops attacked thirteen of the sixteen provincial capitals of the Mekong delta of Southern Vietnam and many of the district capitals.

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120 Ibid, 119.
122 Ibid, 123.
123 Young, *The Vietnam War*, 139.
124 McNamara, *In Retrospect*, 237.
capitals.  

Part of the shock of Tet was the contrast between recent official American military optimism that the war was drawing to a close and the public's perception of the disparity between that optimism and the reality illuminated by the Tet attacks. The Viet Cong led the brunt of the communist Vietnamese attacks. In the majority of battles of the Tet Offensive throughout South Vietnam, the Viet Cong suffered crippling casualties. South Vietnamese and American casualties were proportionately less.

The Tet Offensive was a military failure for the communist Vietnamese. The main goal of the Tet Offensive was to incite a general uprising of the South Vietnamese population by demonstrating a powerful show of communist force. No general uprising occurred as a result of the Tet Offensive. The casualties sustained by the Viet Cong took a tremendous toll on the Viet Cong's ability to conduct guerrilla raids on South Vietnamese and American forces for the remainder of the Vietnam War.

The Tet Offensive was still one of the communist Vietnamese's greatest victories, because it severely affected the United States government's will to wage war in Vietnam. Prior to the offensive, the Commanding General of the United States Military Assist Command Vietnam (MACV), General William Westmoreland, had stated that the war was winding down and that the United States could "see light at the end of the tunnel." Upon hearing news reports of massed communist attacks throughout Vietnam, the existing American public support for the war eroded further. In March 1968, upon hearing of General Westmoreland's request for 200,000 more American combat troops in Vietnam while 500,000 servicemen and women were already fighting in Vietnam, the American public not only felt deceived but believed that the situation in Vietnam was unwinnable or that the cost in American lives was too high. The Tet Offensive marked one of the most significant turning points in the Vietnam War.

Between 1968 and 1972, strategic bombing and bombing halts continued to be used to induce the North Vietnamese to engage in significant peace talks. American combat patrols continued throughout the South Vietnamese countryside to find and eliminate the Viet Cong presence. The Viet Cong and North Vietnamese continued to erode the South Vietnamese government's power and make the casualty toll on American forces higher and less bearable to Americans at home. Significant changes occurred in key positions on both sides of the conflict. Richard Nixon won the 1968 election. Along with President Nixon, his National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger began American troop withdrawals in 1969. Ho Chi Minh died in 1969, and First Secretary Le Duan succeeded as the head of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

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126 Ibid, 271.
127 Ibid, 280.
On January 23, 1973, the United States signed the nine-point proposal from the North Vietnamese delegates that called for a cease-fire to allow for the withdrawal of United States forces from Vietnam. In Vietnam itself, The North Vietnamese fulfilled those elements of the cease-fire agreement which involved the health and well-being of the American armed forces prisoners. The release of the remaining American prisoners of war coincided with the departure of the last combat soldier, and both sides made arrangements for search teams to continue to look for those still missing in action. On the sixtieth day after the truce, the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) officially closed down, declaring its mission accomplished. When the last American soldiers had left Camp Alpha, the processing barracks at Tan Son Nhut air base in Saigon, it was systematically dismantled by Vietnamese soldiers and civilians. The last American troops in Vietnam left on March 29, 1973.

From 1973 to 1975 the South Vietnamese continued to fight the war without United States combat troops, using only weapons and supplies. On April 30, 1975, the South Vietnamese government ordered a general cease-fire to all remaining loyal troops as North Vietnamese regulars occupied the southern capital city of Saigon. The Vietnam War was over.

American Vietnam War Strategies

The initial United States military strategy from 1959-1964 was to provide military advisors to train the South Vietnamese military in its war against the communist forces of the North Vietnamese and insurgents in the South, the Viet Cong. A major lesson learned from the previous conflict, the Korean War, was to fight a limited war that would not provoke larger and more powerful communist countries from getting directly involved. The United States, throughout the Vietnam War up until its withdrawal in 1973, limited its actions against the Vietnamese communists in order to not provoke neighboring China or the Soviet Union from getting more involved. From 1959 to 1964, American military advisors and United States Army regular and special forces were deployed to South Vietnam and attached to South Vietnamese military units. Their mission was to train the fledgling South Vietnamese in effective combat techniques.

The United States wanted a South Vietnamese victory over the communists with minimal United States involvement. Presidents Harry S Truman, John F. Kennedy, and Lyndon B. Johnson wanted to avoid another war and to focus American resources elsewhere. The United States government and military knew that it was highly unlikely for China or the Soviet Union to get directly involved if the United States limited its role to advising and allowed the South Vietnamese to fight their own battles. The United States understood that a military victory would be more likely were American troops deployed to Vietnam. It believed that such action would not be necessary.

130 McNamara, In Retrospect, 40.
The Gulf of Tonkin incident in June 1964 changed the United States' military strategy in Vietnam. The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution passed by Congress allowed President Johnson to commit military forces "to protect the interests of the United States." Whereas prior to the Tonkin episode American soldiers could not directly engage in combat, after the Marines landed at Da Nang in March 1965, the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution authorized American soldiers to directly engage with enemy forces. This marked a significant shift in American military strategy in Vietnam.

Not long after the Marines landed to defend the air base at Da Nang from local Viet Cong attacks, the commanding general of Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) General Westmoreland shifted American forces' posture in Vietnam from defensive to offensive.

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Throughout the Vietnam War, the United States imposed several strategic limitations on its military forces to minimize the risk of broadening the war. The United States did not want to repeat having the Chinese directly enter the war militarily. The most significant limitation was the refusal to send ground troops into North Vietnam or to send any American forces including air and ground forces into neighboring Laos or Cambodia.131 The military value of sending ground troops into North Vietnam to destroy troop and supply staging areas, occupy and deny use of strategic areas, and force the communist Vietnamese to assume a defensive posture and fight on ground of the Americans choosing would have been enormous.

The United States military did not leave North Vietnam unmolested. While American ground troops were not authorized to cross the 17th parallel dividing North and South Vietnam, the United States placed relatively few restrictions on sending bombers over North Vietnam with the goal to demolish North Vietnamese military supplies and weaponry before it could be used in South Vietnam.132 The American strategy regarding the air war over North Vietnam was to inflict the maximum amount of damage and casualties on the North Vietnamese necessary to make them lose their will to fight.133 The objective was to kill enough soldiers, destroy enough rice, which was the main staple of all Vietnamese people's diets, and demolish enough bridges, railways, factories that the North Vietnamese could no longer wage war effectively against the South Vietnamese and its American ally. The United States’ fury that was held in check by withholding ground troops from North Vietnam spurted out in the air campaigns conducted from 1965 – 1973.134

Moving supplies during any military conflict is vital. One of the biggest challenges American and South Vietnamese forces faced throughout the Vietnam War

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131 Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 144.
133 Ibid, 239.
134 Ibid, 239.
was the North Vietnamese ability to supply their communist South Vietnamese allies, the Viet Cong, through Laos and Cambodia, a supply line dubbed the Ho Chi Minh trail after the North Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh. The United States' military strategy towards the Ho Chi Minh Trail centered on two facets. First was to destroy or prevent the supplies from North Vietnam aerially while they were still located in North Vietnam. Second was to position American and South Vietnamese forces along the South Vietnamese western border and so keep supplies from reaching the South.

### Strategic Considerations related to Geography

Korean War efforts hung over military planners making decisions about the Vietnam War. There were certain parallels, to be sure. North Korea and North Vietnam both shared a northern border with the People's Republic of China. This Chinese border was not far from the line separating North and South Korea and Vietnam. Having a border with China was strategically significant for a number of reasons. The Chinese could easily move supplies, weapons, and personnel into both territories. The Soviet Union supplied most of the weapons used by both North Korean and Vietnamese forces, and the direct border with China enabled a much easier supply of those weapons. The Soviets still shipped some supplies via the sea as the United States did not dare attack Soviet shipping lest the war broaden; however, the amount of supplies shipped across the Chinese border was significantly greater than the amount sent via sea.

The Yalu River was the border between China and North Korea. While the United States tried to aerially bomb some of the significant bridges along the Yalu River, the Chinese's ability to supply across the Yalu River to North Korea was not significantly impeded. There was no distinct geographic impediment such as a river or mountain range separating the border between China and North Vietnam. As in the Korean War, the Chinese were able to funnel military supplies with relative ease across the border.

No allied countries directly bordered South Korea or South Vietnam during each conflict. The United States and its allies had to ship all troops, supplies, and weaponry across significant bodies of water. While the United States had been able to effectively win World War II by fighting in two separate theatres across the world's two largest oceans, it was no advantage to have a supply train that extended thousands of miles over an entire ocean. In the Korean and Vietnam Wars, the United States relied heavily upon forces and supplies located in Japan, the Philippines, and Guam. Before such forces were located in those Far East locales, they still had to be shipped via sea or air from the United States, presenting large logistic challenges to the Americans. While North Korea

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136 Ibid, 390.
137 Goulden, *Korea*, 42.
139 Stueck, *The Road to Conflict*, 238.
140 Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 150.
and North Vietnam could not challenge the United States' use of the seas, the extreme distance proved to be enough of a challenge to American logistical efforts.

A significant geographic difference between the Korean War and the Vietnam War was that Korea was a peninsula and Vietnam only had an eastern coastline. In the Vietnam War, the North Vietnamese were able to transport troops and supplies through neighboring Laos and Cambodia into South Vietnam. The North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops could safely retreat into Laos and Cambodia and avoid capture or destruction by American forces and return to South Vietnamese battlefields via different routes where American defenses were not as strong. North Korean troops fighting in South Korea could only be reinforced from supply lines extending across the North and South Korean border and the only retreat was back north. The United States Navy controlled the Yellow Sea on South Korea's western border and the Sea of Japan on South Korea's eastern border. The United States Navy controlled the neighboring bodies of water in both the Korean and Vietnam Wars, yet with friendly neighboring countries such as Laos and Cambodia, the North Vietnamese did not suffer as much from their lack of naval supremacy against the Americans.

Political similarities and dissimilarities

Both North Korea and North Vietnam had communist governments. Both countries had the support of the leading communist country, the Soviet Union, as well as the emerging communist and world superpower, the People's Republic of China. The United States' main reason for getting involved in both the Korean and Vietnam War was a reaction to North Korea's and North Vietnam's communist governments, their close ties to the Soviet Union and China, and their desire to spread communism to both their southern counterparts. Both North Korea and North Vietnam's leaders had fought or trained with the leading communist powers. Kim Il Sung, North Korea's leader during the Korean War, had been trained within the Soviet Union during Korea's occupation by the Japanese prior to World War II and fought with the communist Chinese during their civil war as had many other Korean communists who returned to North Korea once Mao Zedong and the rest of the Chinese communists declared victory over the Nationalist Chinese in 1949. North Vietnam's leader Ho Chi Minh had studied in Europe and Moscow, learning and experiencing communism first hand before returning home to fight for independence against the French who had control of Vietnam after World War II. While not puppets of the Soviet Union or China, both North Korea and North Vietnam sought approval for diplomatic and military actions from the Soviets and Chinese when fighting against the United States.

141 Ibid, 50.
142 Ibid, 106.
143 Ibid, 107.
145 Ibid, 111.
Besides the United States, the Soviet Union was the only other country in possession of nuclear weapons. Without a nuclear ally, North Korea and North Vietnam could not have stood against the political and military pressure the United States could exert. As far as North Korea and North Vietnam knew, the only thing keeping the United States from using nuclear weapons against them was the fear of Soviet reprisal should the United States attack an ally of the Soviet Union.

Under the Soviet nuclear umbrella, both North Korea and North Vietnam sought to unify their divided countries under communist rule. Whether by popular vote or military force, the North Koreans and North Vietnamese believed passionately that communism served the greatest good for their countries and that any other political or economic system was intolerable to their countrymen and women. Both North Koreans and North Vietnamese saw themselves as Koreans and Vietnamese first. Their communist background, or residence north of an artificial line dividing their country, was ancillary to their nationalism. The North Koreans and North Vietnamese were patriots as well as communists. They loved their countries and felt that they knew the best way to lead them out of foreign control and away from political, social, and economic disorder.

The United States did not always stand in opposition to the North Koreans and North Vietnamese communists. During World War II, the North Korean and North Vietnamese communists and the United States had a greater common enemy in the Imperial Japanese Army that occupied both Korea and Vietnam. The communists and the Americans put aside their political differences and worked together to defeat the Japanese. Both North and South Koreans and Vietnamese felt betrayed after World War II when their former ally, the United States, did not support unification in the one case, independence in the other. The North and South Koreans felt that the Soviet Union and the United States betrayed both of them respectively in agreeing to divide the country at the 38th parallel, even if they originally designed the boundary to be temporary.  

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While both North Korea and North Vietnam maintained relatively cordial relationships with the Soviets during their respective conflicts, the two communist countries did not share similar relations with China. Many North Koreans had fought with the communist Chinese during their civil war in the first half of the 20th century and thus developed close ties to their Chinese brothers and sisters. The ten Chinese divisions that poured across the Yalu River in late 1950 sought as much to support the North Koreans as to push the Americans and their allies away from the Chinese border.

At the same time that the United States was becoming more involved in the Vietnam War in the early 1960s, diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China significantly deteriorated to the point where China and its brand of communism acted completely independently from Soviet and Warsaw Pact

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146 Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope*, 318.
countries' interests. Unlike the North Korean communists, who closely relied on Soviet and Chinese aid in the early 1950s, North Vietnamese communists were friendlier towards the Soviets during their conflict with the Americans. Ho Chi Minh had lived and studied in Moscow prior to returning after World War II to fight with against the French. While in Moscow, Ho Chi Minh became closely aligned with Lenin's version of communism and brought many of his ideas and teachings back to Vietnam. When Soviet and Chinese relations broke down in the early 1960s, Ho Chi Minh kept the North Vietnamese communist party in line with Soviet doctrine. Political alignment with the Soviets was not just an ideological move; it was a strategic move as well. The Soviets had the nuclear stockpiles and the superior resources in money, food, and military equipment to supply the North Vietnamese's civil war. Ho Chi Minh was able to carefully balance diplomatic relations with both the Soviet Union and the Chinese during the Vietnam War, garnering aid from both powers.

The North Vietnamese were unlike many contemporary communist countries in that they also sought friendly diplomatic relations with the United States. Ho Chi Minh did not see being communist and being friends with the capitalist, democratic United States as being mutually exclusive. Ho Chi Minh admired Thomas Jefferson and cited the United States Constitution many times in speeches in which he extolled the virtues of liberty and freedom for all Vietnamese people as well as independence from foreign tyrants. The United States rebuffed Ho Chi Minh's request for support and for recognition of the independent country of Vietnam after World War II, but the United States was more interested in supporting its fellow North Atlantic Treaty Organization member France than in helping a remote southeastern Asian communist leader.

Both the South Koreans and South Vietnamese during their respective conflicts had staunch anti-communist, unofficial dictatorships, under Syngman Rhee for South Korea and Ngo Dinh Diem and several other military juntas and strongmen in South Vietnam. Neither South Korea nor South Vietnam was democratic. The United States allied itself with both countries because being anti-communist was more important than being pro-democratic in policymakers’ eyes. Defeating communism was more important to the United States than spreading democracy. Once the United States and the Free World achieved their primary objective of successfully containing communism, they could focus on spreading democracy.

South Korean and South Vietnamese leaders were sharply different from one another. While in the United States, Syngman Rhee served as an unofficial spokesman

149 Young, The Vietnam War, 57.
150 Duiker, Ho Chi Minh, 88.
151 Ibid, 414.
152 Young, The Vietnam War, 38.
153 Ibid, 11.
154 Truman, Years of Trial and Hope, 328.
for Korea, as he spoke out against Japanese occupation and brutality.\textsuperscript{155} He was a Korean nationalist and a patriot. He had a vision of a united Korea free of foreign rule. At the conclusion of World War II, the United States looked favorably upon his ascension to the South Korean leadership.\textsuperscript{156} From his time in the United States, American politicians were familiar with his fiercely anti-communist stance which was needed when Kim Il Sung installed a communist government in North Korea.

South Vietnam's leader during the Vietnam War was Ngo Dinh Diem, who came from a wealthy Vietnamese family. He shared a common faith with many Americans in that he was Roman Catholic.\textsuperscript{157} To the United States, Ngo Dinh Diem was first and foremost a staunch anti-communist and as such his government received the full support from the United States in fighting the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese.

Unlike South Korea, which maintained a relatively stable government during the Korean War, South Vietnam suffered from multiple, haphazard government changes throughout its conflict. A military coup was responsible for assassinating Ngo Dinh Diem in 1963.\textsuperscript{158} Diem's government turned out to be the most stable when compared to the South Vietnamese governments that followed until Saigon's collapse in 1975. Until 1975 every new government remained anti-communist and thus continued to receive United States support. In many instances in which there was a government change, the United States knew beforehand and either allowed it to happen or had an active role in supporting the new regime.\textsuperscript{159} The lack of a stable government made strategic planning during the war difficult. South Vietnamese troop morale suffered as a result of the constant government instability especially in light of the steady hand by which Ho Chi Minh and his successors governed North Vietnam.\textsuperscript{160} The government instability made it difficult for United States generals to coordinate military operations with the South Vietnamese divisions, as different generals believed in different strategic approaches.

Ultimately, the United States faced a more challenging political situation in the Vietnam War than in the Korean War due to the political turmoil from which the South Vietnamese government suffered after Diem's assassination.\textsuperscript{161} Syngman Rhee led South Korea throughout the Korean War, and while he fired, removed, and otherwise changed many cabinet members throughout the Korean War, his steady hand remained on the helm. While South Korean and South Vietnamese leadership and military support did not significantly positively contribute to their own war efforts when compared to quantity and quality of the American war effort, the lack of South Vietnamese political stability hurt South Vietnam's and the United States' war efforts.

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\textsuperscript{155} Ridgway, \textit{The Korean War}, 6.
\textsuperscript{156} Truman, \textit{Years of Trial and Hope}, 328.
\textsuperscript{157} McNamara, \textit{In Retrospect}, 41.
\textsuperscript{158} Ibid, 83.
\textsuperscript{159} McNamara, \textit{In Retrospect}, 80.
\textsuperscript{160} Duiker, \textit{Ho Chi Minh}, 563.
\textsuperscript{161} McNamara, \textit{In Retrospect}, 84.
The prevailing military strategy throughout the Cold War and in both the Korean War and the Vietnam War was Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) between the Soviet Union and the United States. While the United States had a considerable edge in terms of possessing more powerful and larger quantities of nuclear weapons during the Korean War compared to the Vietnam War, when that gap between the Soviets and Americans closed, the Americans always feared a Soviet nuclear reprisal should the United States use nuclear weapons on the battlefield. Mutual Assured Destruction was the doctrine by which the Soviet and Americans remained at peace and never launched their nuclear weapons at one another because to go to war with the other would too easily lead to nuclear war and due to the comparable size and capabilities of both powers' nuclear arsenal, both countries, as well as most of their allies, would be completely annihilated. No side would win in a war between the Soviets and the Americans, and the world would be left to face a bleak future.

President Truman had a difficult decision to make after the Chinese invaded. While General MacArthur advised President Truman to use nuclear weapons once ten Chinese divisions crossed the Yalu in the winter of 1950, nuclear weapons were never used nor were they, with the exception of General MacArthur's few remaining months in command in Korea, seriously considered to be used in either conflict. Both the North Koreans and North Vietnamese enjoyed the support of the Soviet Union's nuclear stockpile, thus negating the United States' nuclear advantage.

Both North Korea and North Vietnam benefited from Soviet and Chinese military training and supplies. Without AK-47s, neither North Korea nor North Vietnam would have been able to fight their wars against their southern counterparts. North Korea and North Vietnam did not have the industrial capabilities before or during their respective civil wars to develop or build significant quantities of military equipment in order to wage a war. Most military supplies in both conflicts came directly from either the Soviet Union or the People's Republic of China.

While both North Korea and North Vietnam had relatively similar military equipment in both conflicts, the two communist militaries varied in employing the weaponry. North Korea's battle strategy was to engage American forces in conventional, pitched battles by division, brigade, or battalion in which each combatant wore easily identifiable uniforms. The North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong's battle strategy was designed to wage an unconventional, guerrilla war in South Vietnam, blending in with the local population, making it extremely difficult for the United States to identify "the enemy" as well as anticipate locations of attacks. 

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165 Ibid, 154.
United Nations and International Support during Both Wars

The United States had the support of the United Nations during the Korean War.\(^{166}\) The United States did not enjoy such support during the Vietnam War. The UN was founded in 1945 at the conclusion of the Second World War to serve as an international forum through which countries might resolve their differences diplomatically instead of on the battlefield. Unlike the North Atlantic Treaty Organization or the Warsaw Pact, the UN allowed all members of the international community to join and have a voice. United Nations "support" meant that the General Assembly voted in favor of a particular military action with the Security Council's approval. "Voting in favor" in the United Nations meant a two-thirds majority vote on issues such as major military actions and passes a Security Council vote. Each country has one vote regardless of population size, geography, or any other demographic.

During the Korean War and most of the Vietnam War up until 1971, the Security Council consisted of fifteen countries, with five countries having permanent seats: the United States, the Soviet Union, France, Great Britain, and the Republic of China (Taiwan). In 1971 the General Assembly voted to replace the Republic of China (Taiwan) with the People's Republic of China. The Security Council's importance is that each permanent member has the power to veto any resolution and effectively thwart an action of the General Assembly.

United Nations support for any country in its war aims gives international legitimacy to that country. International legitimacy allows a country to take bolder moves in conducting a war. International support reduces potential enemies and consequences for carrying out certain strategies against a foe.

The United States did care about international and United Nations support during the Korean and Vietnam Wars.\(^{167}\) The United States adhered to the international Law of War and the Geneva Convention, another set of rules governing the conduct of war agreed upon by most countries in the world. In addition to the Geneva Convention's laws governing the conduct of war, the United States also has tried to seek United Nations approval for most military actions since the United Nations creation.\(^{168}\) The United Nations has historically not had a strong military presence outside of the United States armed forces.\(^{169}\)

The United States did not need United Nations support for its military prowess in terms of manpower, supplies, strategies, or leadership in either the Korean War or the Vietnam War. America's enormous industrial production power, the fact that United States industry did not suffer from the ravages of war, and the United States government's willingness to build a military complex capable of fighting two major world campaigns,

\(^{166}\) Truman, Years of Trial and Hope, 334.
\(^{167}\) Ibid, 334; Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, 114.
\(^{168}\) Truman, Years of Trial and Hope, 334.
\(^{169}\) Ibid, 334.
simultaneously, contributed to the United States emerging from World War II as a world military superpower. Despite the rapid disarmament at the conclusion of World War II, the United States military made the nation one of the premiere world superpowers.\textsuperscript{170} Even with the disarmament following Germany's and Japan's surrender, the United States still possessed the manpower and industrial base to draw upon in order to quickly mobilize a larger fighting force if the need arose.\textsuperscript{171}

In the Korean War, while a total of thirty-four countries sent forces to support South Korea, United States forces comprised 90\% of United Nations forces and equipment, and the United Nations accepted an American general, General Douglas MacArthur, to be placed in charge of all United Nations forces.\textsuperscript{172} The United States supplied the majority of the weapons, the armor, the artillery, the airplanes, the ships, the food, the medical supplies, and virtually all other forms of military equipment.

The most important contribution of United Nations support of South Korea's cause in the Korean War was that it gave the United States the green light to cross the 38th parallel and invade North Korea. Without United Nations approval, the United States would have been far less likely to have risked all out war with the newly-formed People's Republic of China and the Soviets. The People's Republic of China was trying to gain international recognition as a new country. With the notable absence of the Soviet Union from the General Assembly meeting in which the resolution was passed to authorize the organization and fielding of a military force under the United Nations flag, the United Nations resolution to support South Korea military to repulse the North Korean attack begun on June 25, 1950 passed by a wide margin. Had the Soviet Union been present, it would have certainly exercised its veto and prevented the resolution from passing.

The Question of Invasion

Perhaps no other decision short of using nuclear weapons affected the outcome of the Vietnam War more than the decision of the United States not to invade North Vietnam with American ground forces. Such troops included infantry with supporting armor, artillery, logistic, and supply auxiliary units. Not invading the enemy's home country with ground forces in the Vietnam War was a strategic departure from previous foreign wars involving the United States.

In World War II and the Korean War, the United States sent ground and air forces into the enemy’s home territory. In World War II, the United States invaded Italy and Germany with ground forces. While ground forces were never sent ashore on the Japanese home islands, the United States had war plans to invade with ground troops if the atomic bomb had not forced the Japanese to surrender unconditionally. Invading Italy

\textsuperscript{170} MacArthur, \textit{Reminiscences}, 327.
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid, 327.
\textsuperscript{172} Ibid, 337.
in World War II with ground forces, along with supporting air units, allowed the United States to capture and destroy Italy's agriculturally, industrially, economically, and militarily vital cities and countryside ultimately extinguishing their ability to wage war. Invading Germany in World War II with ground forces, along with supporting air units, accomplished the same successful outcome. The United States never considered not taking the fight with ground forces to the enemy's homeland. To do so would have allowed the enemy to operate vital industries that contributed to the war effort, thus enabling the opposing forces to continue to effectively wage war.

Invading a country's homeland with ground forces gives the attacker the potential to capture the enemy's military and political leaders. Severing the origin of strategic thought and key decision making significantly reduces the enemy's ability to wage war. Without invading a country's homeland, those military and political leaders can continue to provide key guidance to its military forces.

Allowing the key military and political leaders to live provides a ray of hope and can sustain troops' morale in battle such that they will fight more fiercely and boldly, and are less likely to surrender in the same circumstances if they knew or believed that their strategic and tactical leaders were captured or killed. The German army surrendered shortly after learning of Adolph Hitler's death. The Americans and allied forces brought about Hitler's death by surrounding Germany's capital, in which Hitler commanded Nazi Germany. The impending humiliation of defeat and capture led Hitler to commit suicide, thus eliminating the military, political, and cultural leader of the German army and people. Had the Allies not invaded Germany, Hitler would have continued to lead the German army and people, and the war would have ground on much longer.

In the Korean War, the United States invaded North Korea with ground forces shortly after the successful amphibious assault at Inchon. This invasion led to temporarily capturing the North Korean capital, Pyongyang, the rout of the North Korean armed forces, the displacement of the North Korean government into China, and the capturing almost the entire country of North Korea until the Chinese crossed the Yalu River in November 1950 into North Korea.

China's invasion into North Korea and direct military involvement in the ground war in the Korean conflict nearly caused the United States to lose the war. Many military thinkers believed that crossing into North Korea, ignoring China's threats, and eventually reaching the Chinese border was a valuable lesson learned that should be applied to the Vietnam War. This particular lesson directly contributed to the United States' decision to withhold all ground forces from invading North Vietnam during the Vietnam War.

There is little doubt that it was an enormous mistake for United States military forces to approach the Chinese border in such close proximity, in fact, taking positions right along the Yalu's eastern banks. What remains open for discussion is the question of how far, after crossing the 38th parallel into North Korea, United States ground forces could penetrate the North Korean motherland without causing the Chinese to enter the war. China was the common ally of both North Korea and North Vietnam. The same
reasons for pulling China into a war in the Korean War were similar to those reasons to potentially pull them into the war during the Vietnam War, especially since China's leader, Mao Zedong led China for all of the Korean and Vietnam Wars respectively.

Had the United States and its Allies not invaded North Korea with ground forces in October 1950 or at any other point throughout the war, the North Koreans would have been able to regroup from the disastrous Inchon landing and with time to reorganize and resupply could have continued to wage war for several more years. More research needs to be done to determine the most likely military outcomes should this have happened. It is possible that had the United States halted its initial advance after Inchon at the 38th parallel, the outcome of the war would still very much be the same as what happened in reality, a stalemate along the 38th parallel and the eventual de facto permanent separation between North and South Korea. It is also possible that the North Koreans could have pushed past the American defenses along the 38th parallel and continued to drive the Americans and their allies off the Korean peninsula altogether.

Following the Inchon landing, the United States was right to cross the 38th parallel. With the North Korean army in full retreat and the Chinese border so far away, the United States had the opportunity to destroy the North Korean army, and its capital, bring North Korea to the bargaining table, and reunite North and South Korea. The United States could have accomplished this without advancing directly to the Chinese border. The United States military had greater mobility with large numbers of jeeps, trucks, tanks, and other motorized artillery as well as air assets capable of moving mass amounts of equipment and supplies. The North Koreans lost mechanized armor and transport vehicles during the initial invasion and subsequent retreat from the Pusan Perimeter. The North Koreans at this point relied on their feet to speed them north ahead of their Allied pursuers. The mountainous North Korean terrain and the North Korean army's familiarity with how to navigate such treacherous features prevented the mechanized Allied ground forces from completely overtaking the North Korean army during the drive to the Yalu.

The United States and its Allies did not need to completely overtake the North Korean army in order to achieve victory in the Korean War. Victory meant the preservation of South Korea, a cessation of hostilities by the North Koreans, and possibly the reunification of the two Koreas under the Republic of Korea's government. The United States had reduced the North Korean army to an ineffective, demoralized guerrilla force scattered into the mountains mid-way between the 38th parallel and the Yalu River. The United States had captured Pyongyang and forced the Democratic People's Republic of North Korea government to flee safely behind the Chinese border. More than half of North Korea had fallen into the Allies' control. The United States would have most likely won the Korean War and achieved all of its war aims had General MacArthur halted the Allied advance somewhere along the November 12, 1950 lines of advance where the closest Allied ground unit was no closer than fifty miles from the Yalu River.

Along those lines, China's entry into the war would have been extremely unlikely, Allied forces could have entrenched and fortified their position in the event of a
subsequent Chinese invasion, and could have demanded peace talks from a position of power. While criticizing the Allies Supreme Commander General Douglas MacArthur for continuing the Allied push to the Yalu River is more difficult, MacArthur should have realized China would not forever sit idly as the enemy brought his army to its borders. MacArthur should have better understood China's resolve and military capability from the communists' recent victory in the Chinese Civil War between the communists and the Kuomintang led by Chiang Kai-shek.

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American strategy in the Vietnam War rested on lessons learned in Korea. It forbade American troops from entering North Vietnam. American troops could not cross the 17th parallel on the ground or in the air, nor could they amphibiously attack along North Vietnam's coast. President Lyndon B. Johnson, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, and General William Westmoreland did not want to send American ground troops into the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. The United States did not send ground troops into the Democratic Republic of Vietnam because the United States did not want to risk invasion by the People's Republic of China and the United States was not willing to commit the amount of resources in terms of troops, equipment, and money to such an ambitious campaign with or without China's direct military involvement. Despite prohibiting American ground troops from entering North Vietnam, the United States carried out a liberal strategic air war in North Vietnam. The United States also mined the Democratic Republic of Vietnam's coast.

From the beginning of the Vietnam War, the United States had been reluctantly dragged deeper and deeper into an increasingly greater share of responsibility for South Vietnamese defenses against the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese. Throughout the Vietnam War, the Johnson and Nixon administrations sought to limit the fingerprint of the cost of the war in terms of manpower and government spending. Upon taking office, President Johnson envisioned his presidency as being remembered for his plan for the Great Society in which he could focus on passing legislation aimed at establishing domestic programs that would end poverty and racial inequality. Johnson recognized that the political capital required to wage a war, let alone an unpopular war, would significantly diminish the chances of his Great Society from coming to fruition.

When President Richard Nixon assumed the presidency in 1969, he inherited one of the most unpopular American wars in United States history. Current troops levels in Vietnam were unacceptable to the American public already, and further troop surges would have met with significant resistance by the American public. Nixon sought victory with minimal United States involvement.

Crossing into North Vietnam with ground forces would have required enormous increases in troop levels in Vietnam. Throughout the war, current troop levels were marginally adequate to maintain limited control of select parts of South Vietnam. To

173 McNamara, In Retrospect, 142; Ibid, 246; and Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, 196.
launch a new campaign into the heart of the enemy's home territory while maintaining the existing control in South Vietnam, Johnson or Nixon would have been faced with sending approximately 200,000 additional soldiers including supporting armor, artillery and other supplies according to military estimates.

During the Korean War, the People's Republic of China had warned the United States and its allies not to cross into the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and continued to warn the United States that it would get directly involved militarily should the United States come too close to the Chinese border with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The People's Republic of China attacked the United States with ten infantry divisions, totaling around 300,000 troops. In the 1960s and 1970s, during the Vietnam War, military intelligence reported that the People's Republic of China Army would have been able to commit another million troops along with three divisions of armor, two divisions of artillery, and five divisions of support and logistical elements. Mao Zedong was committed to protecting communist interests in southeastern Asia and was willing to commit Chinese troops into North Vietnam should the North Vietnamese prove incapable of denying the United States access to it.

The United States' military planners for the Vietnam War knew that one of the key lessons learned from the Korean War was getting too close to the Chinese border, thus prompting direct military action by the Chinese. They failed to realize that there was a middle ground between crossing into North Vietnam and the Chinese border with North Vietnam where the United States could have achieved a victory over North Vietnam. "Victory" over North Vietnam was defined as cutting off troop and supply movements from key staging areas in North Vietnam into Laos down to Cambodia and back into South Vietnam and occupying the North Vietnamese capital Hanoi to disrupt the political and military leadership of North Vietnam.

The United States armed forces' march to Hanoi would have forced the North Vietnamese into pitched battles. The United States military was decidedly superior to the North Vietnamese in pitched battles, as evidenced at Ia Drang in 1965.

Had the United States sent ground troops into the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, the United States would have been able to defeat the North Vietnamese without Chinese intervention. Before public opinion of the Vietnam War reached its near nadir following the Tet Offensive in early 1968, the United States might have been able to launch a campaign with public support.

What must be remembered in this hypothetical discourse about invading North Vietnam is that this war was fought against the backdrop of the Cold War with the Soviet Union. In the Cold War, the United States could not devote its full military strength to any one engagement lest it risk weakness in other vital areas around the globe. During the Vietnam War, the United States' primary focus in defending against the Soviets was Europe and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The United States could not commit all of its military forces to Vietnam due to the need to protect Europe from the threat of Soviet expansion.
Conclusion

It is vital to assess how the United States and its military has learned from past mistakes and used the lessons learned in subsequent conflicts. With new conflicts new unique challenges, problems, and lessons learned arise based on no previous model. The Vietnam War was not a carbon copy of the Korean War. The current wars that the United States faces in Iraq and Afghanistan are not carbon copies of the Vietnam War.

The location has shifted from the jungles and mountains of East Asia to the deserts and mountains of the Middle East and Afghanistan. Both the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan trail only the Vietnam War in duration. The setting has changed from the Cold War to the War on Terror. The overarching enemy has shifted from the monolithic communists to local groups of Muslim extremists and Arab nationalists. The United States' goal has shifted from containing the spread of communism to finding and destroying those groups responsible for the attack on the World Trade Center in New York City, NY, on September 11, 2001 and those groups who aided those terrorists.

The American role in the world remains relatively the same now as it did during the Korean and Vietnam Wars. The United States as of today is the dominant military superpower in the world. As such, the United States tries to maintain a measure of stability throughout the world by deploying its military to unstable regions of the globe. The guiding factor for the United States in determining what regions constitute threats to that global security is how American national interests are affected politically, diplomatically, economically, ideologically, and whether American lives are endangered.

It is useful to reflect on America's military shortcomings in the Vietnam War. Perhaps the primary question is: Did the United States fail in preserving South Vietnam as a result of a failure to identify and solve the problems in the Korean War and then apply those lessons? The United States did not fail in Vietnam as a result of failing to apply lessons learned from the Korean War. Thus the military failures in the Vietnam War were primarily due to new challenges which the United States military did not succeed in overcoming.

It is easy to say that the United States failed to learn its lessons from the Korean War since it failed to preserve South Vietnam as an independent nation as it was able to preserve South Korea. It is difficult to gauge to what degree certain lessons learned were properly applied and followed when the overall outcome of the Vietnam War resulted in failure.

The main strategic lessons derived from both the successes and failures learned from the Korean War that were applicable to the Vietnam War are as follows. First, the United States needed to send ground troops into the enemy's homeland. Strategic, tactical (non-nuclear) bombing was not enough to quickly destroy the enemy's ability to wage war. Ground forces were required to capture and hold enemy positions to ensure that they do not return to use by the enemy or are used for new production in other areas.
The United States successfully disrupted the North Koreans' ability to wage war, completely demoralized and disorganized the enemy, and had the government and its armed forces in full retreat after invading North Korea. Without invading North Korea with ground forces, the North Koreans would have been able to regroup. China and the Soviets would have re-supplied them. Then the North Koreans would have been able to wage war continuously from the safety of all lands north of the 38th parallel.

The United States needed to invade North Vietnam with ground forces if it expected to successfully preserve South Vietnam. The North Vietnamese's unrestricted ability to move troops and supplies along the Ho Chi Minh Trail through Laos and Cambodia into and out of South Vietnam at will severely prolonged the on-going guerrilla war in South Vietnam where American ground forces fought. The United States was restricted by international law from invading Laos and Cambodia, as both countries had declared themselves as neutral agents during the Vietnam War. They would neither aid nor hinder either country. The United States could not guard all of South Vietnam's western borders with Laos and Cambodia and protect the South Vietnamese hinterland to stop this flow of troops and supplies from North Vietnam.

The United States needed to cut off the jumping off point for those supplies and troops headed to South Vietnam via the Ho Chi Minh Trail by invading North Vietnam with ground troops and guarding the much smaller border between North Vietnam and Laos. By denying the North Vietnamese access to the Ho Chi Minh Trail, their only other option to resupply their forces in South Vietnam would have been directly across the 17th parallel, which was even more easily guarded by American forces as it was only seventeen miles across with the terrain relatively flat, solid ground with minimal jungle brush to mask troop movements. The North Vietnamese could not hope to re-supply their forces in South Vietnam via air or sea. The United States had complete domination of the air and sea.

The United States did not invade North Vietnam due to fear of the Chinese getting directly involved, as in the Korean War. Initially it would appear that the United States was properly applying a lesson learned from the Korean War: do not proceed close to the Chinese border lest one risks direct Chinese military involvement on the scale of hundreds of thousands of ground forces and thus tip the scales irrevocably in the communists favor. While it was a mistake in the Korean War to proceed up to the Chinese border and garner direct Chinese military involvement, it was not a mistake to invade North Korea at all. In the Vietnam War, the United States was too cautious with respect to the Chinese border to such a degree that it never crossed into North Vietnam with any ground forces.

Second, the United States ground forces needed to maintain a respectable distance from the Chinese border. This buffer zone was needed to reduce the perceived threat by the Chinese from American forces. The United States drove its military forces directly to the border between North Korea and China. China's warnings had too long gone unheeded. China's credibility was at stake. With the largest non-communist army in the world now standing at its doorstep, China's national security was at stake. The United
States had grown too confident in its own military's reknown as well as the perceived shield from having nuclear weapons. The United States learned the lesson in the Korean War that China had a breaking point with respect to its carrying out its threat to get involved directly militarily.

In the Vietnam War the United States applied this lesson too severely. The United States could have entered North Vietnam with ground forces to an extent just as it did with North Korea in the Korean War without incurring a Chinese invasion. As long as the United States did not get too close to the Chinese border with North Vietnam, the Chinese would not have been likely to involve themselves. As reluctant as the United States was to enter a war with China during the Vietnam War, China was just as cautious about entering a war with the United States. Neither the Americans nor the Chinese were eager to expend the lives, money, and other resources in Vietnam. Both countries wanted to focus their resources internally on domestic programs. Nor did either country consider Vietnam to be the primary international concern. China was much more concerned with re-gaining Taiwan, and the United States was much more concerned with keeping Europe out of the Soviet Union's hands.

The United States succeeded in not pushing the Chinese past their breaking point to get involved directly with military force. The United States failed, however, in properly pushing the boundaries of that breaking point with the Chinese in order to maximize military successes in the Vietnam War.

Epilogue

In every future military confrontation, the United States must look towards and learn from its previous military engagements and apply those lessons learned. For the Vietnam War, the United States looked to the Korean War and previous wars in developing its military strategies. Against the background of the Cold War, American war planners considered how the outcome of the Korean War aided in containing communism and whether American efforts were worth the incredible endeavor. Comparing the effects of specific elements such as geography, international support, and foreign alliances on military strategy provides a framework for future war planners to learn from the past.
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