

Teaching notes

The aim of this resource is to introduce the origins of the Vietnam war before the American intervention.

There are three main parts.

- 1) Content with comprehension and source tasks.
- 2) A map work task. Students shade in blank versions of this map. You may wish to project (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_Indochina#mediaviewer/File:French_Indochina_subdivisions.svg) or draw your own version to help them identify the different regions. The third question asks students to draw on the 17th parallel which is shown on this version for your reference.
- 3) A timeline task where students use the information from the text to complete a timeline, also adding events from the rest of the world. This is intended to help students see the global context of events in Vietnam. In particular, discussion could draw out the US fear of the spread of communism from Europe into the Far East.

Map of the subdivision of the French Indochina



Adapted from a version by BearsMalaysia (Own work) [CC-BY-SA-3.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>)], via Wikimedia Commons

Useful Links

- 'Dien Bien Phu: Did the US offer France an A-bomb?'
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-27243803>
- 'The Siege of Dien Bien Phu' a BBC World Service broadcast available on the iPlayer:
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01y0sc7>
- 'Dien Bien Phu'
http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/dien_bien_phu.htm

French Indochina

In 1939 five French colonies and protectorates made up French Indochina. These had been run for the benefit of France since 1887. The indigenous population were treated as second class citizens and prevented from joining trade unions or political parties. Against these rules, a remarkable nationalist leader, Ho Chi Minh, emerged and founded the Indochinese Communist Party in 1930.

Japanese Occupation 1940-1945

In September 1940 the region was conquered by the Japanese. They united Annam, Cochinchina and Tonkin into one region (Vietnam) and treated the people savagely. As a result a strong anti Japanese resistance movement (the Vietminh) came together under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh and engaged in guerrilla warfare against the occupying army.

War with the French 1945-1954

The Japanese surrendered to the USA on 15 August 1945. Immediately, Ho Chi Minh declared Vietnamese independence and united all the nationalist groups in his government. However, the French had other ideas and in December attempted to return Vietnam to colonial rule. In 1947 the French declared Bao Dai, former Emperor of Annam and one time political adviser to Ho, to be President. They hoped to win the Vietnamese away from supporting Ho. However, Bao was also Vietnamese nationalist, and he refused to carry out French policy.

Nine years of war followed between the Vietminh and the French. Ho was supported by China (which in 1949 became a communist state under the leadership of Mao Zedong). The French in turn got substantial aid from the USA who saw the Vietminh as puppets of Mao and the Chinese communists. America poured \$500 million a year into the French war effort. Despite this the French struggled. They were able to capture towns and hold them by leaving large occupying forces, but they failed to conquer the countryside and mountains where the Vietminh were aided by sympathetic peasants. By 1953 The French had lost 12,000 soldiers, 12,000 members of their Foreign Legion and 14,000 Indochinese soldiers. The war was costing 600 billion francs a year - more than the value of all the French investments in Vietnam.

Dien Bien Phu

General Navarre (the new French commander) decided to change tactics and attempt to force the Vietminh under the command of Vo Nguyen Giap into a pitched battle. In November 1953 French paratroopers set up a fortified garrison in the valley of Dien Bien Phu. This was deep inside Vietminh territory. Navarre supplied his garrison by air from Hanoi using an old Japanese landing strip. Meanwhile General Giap's forces captured the surrounding hills and were supplied by tens of thousands of labourers, many of them women and children, carrying material hundreds of miles through the jungle.

The battle started in March 1954. Vietminh guerilla forces captured French outposts. The French airforce failed to destroy Giap's positions. Within two days the French airstrip was no longer usable and the Vietminh were advancing. France appealed to the USA for help. However, the US refused to get directly involved without British support. Instead they agreed to a British proposal for a conference to discuss the Indochina problem.

Source A

'Would you like two atomic bombs?'

A senior French diplomat remembered US Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, asking the French Foreign Minister, Georges Bidault, in April 1954. Dulles was not, in fact, authorized to make this offer and may have been misunderstood.

Meanwhile the battle of Dien Bien Phu continued in terrible monsoon conditions. The losses on both sides were significant. The French lost 1,142 men, 1,606 'disappeared' and 4,500 wounded. Vietnamese casualty figures are estimated at around 22,000. After a siege lasting 56 days Dien Bien Phu fell to the Vietnamese on 7 May 1954.

Source B

'You have a row of dominoes set up, you knock over the first one, and what will happen to the last one is the certainty that it will go over very quickly ... So you could have a beginning of a disintegration that would have the most profound influences.'

President Eisenhower, speaking at a press conference in April 1954

Source C

'The Dien Bien Phu campaign was a huge victory. It was the first time a poor feudal nation had beaten a great colonial power that had a modern industry and a massive army. The victory meant a lot, not just to us, but to people all over the world.'

Vo Nguyen Giap, Vietminh commander, 1954

The Geneva Settlement

By coincidence the scheduled conference on Indochina started on 8 May 1954. The USA, Russia, France and Britain all attended.

- France agreed to withdraw from Indochina completely.
- Cambodia and Laos became independent.
- Vietnam was divided along the 17th parallel into a communist dominated North Vietnam and a 'free' South under Bao Dai.
- Free elections were to be held in 1956 (although the USA refused to sign this part of the agreement as they feared a communist victory).

Tasks

1. Write one sentence to define:
 - Indochina
 - Ho Chi Minh
 - Vietminh
 - Bao Dai
 - Vo Nguyen Giap
 - Dien Bien Phu
2. Review what was agreed at the Geneva Settlement. Write a paragraph to explain the consequences of the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu.

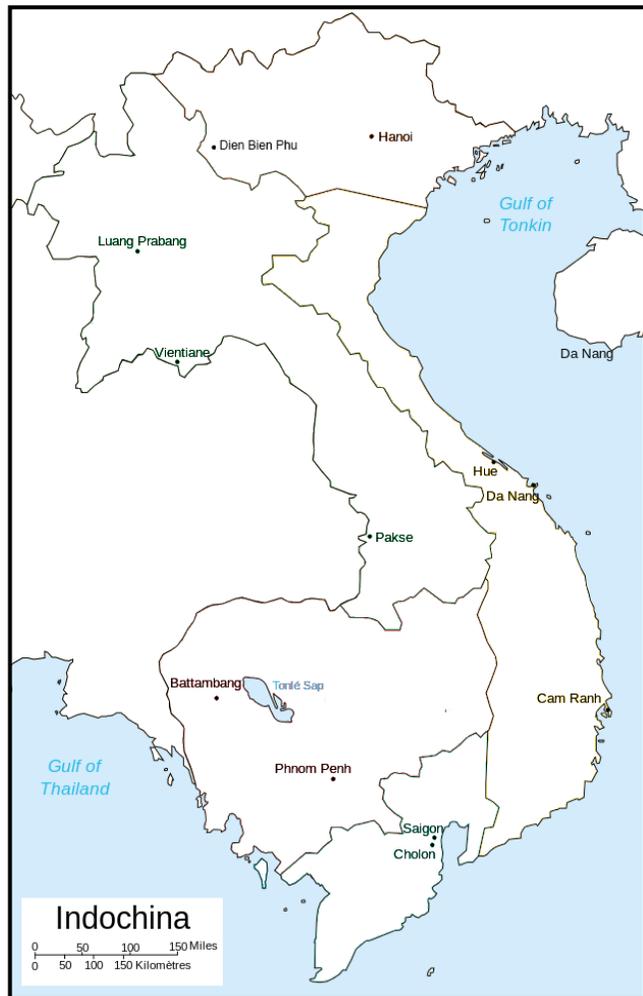
Source analysis

- i. What are the limitations of source A as evidence of the US policy in Vietnam in 1954?
- ii. Use source B to explain 'domino theory'.
- iii. How could Source C support the American fears of a domino effect?

Map work

1. On Map 1 colour and label the countries that made up French Indochina. Also label China and Thailand (but don't colour these in).
2. On Map 2 colour the countries that were unified by the Japanese wartime government to make up Vietnam.
3. On Map 2 Draw on the 17th parallel and label North and South Vietnam. Annotate your map to explain the significance of the parallel.

Map 1



Map 2



Timeline

- Use the information in the text to create a timeline of the origins of the Vietnam War.
- Next add the following events to the timeline to show the relationship between events in Vietnam and the rest of the world.

1950 The Korean War breaks out	1953 Cease-fire agreed in the Korean War	1945 End of Second World War	1953 Death of Stalin
1946 -1949 Chinese Civil War	1949 Mao Zedong declares the People's Republic of China	1946 Churchill makes 'Iron Curtain' speech	1947 Truman Doctrine announced
1947 People's Republic of Romania is declared	1948 Communist Party took control in Czechoslovakia	1948-9 The Berlin Blockade	1949 First Soviet atomic test

Vietnam

Far East

Europe

1939

1940

1941

1942

1943

1944

1945

1946

1947

1948

1949

1950

1951

1952

1953

1954