

# Vietnam War

Author: [Sam Mittelsteadt](#)

Date: January 18, 2025



## The Dan Smoot Report On How To End The War

by Dan Smoot

Reprinted with permission from The Review of the News, March 10, 1971

The best way to get the Vietnam War in focus and to decide what we ought to do now is to review the steps which got us into the mess.

On August 8, 1945, six days before the United States forced Japanese surrender, the Soviet Union declared war on Japan. On August 9, three Soviet armies moved into Manchuria. Before pulling out (less than a year later), the Soviets had set up a Communist puppet state in North Korea, and had armed Chinese Communists with Japanese and American equipment.

From their Manchurian base, Chinese Communists intensified their war against Chiang Kai-shek. Chiang resisted American demands that he negotiate with Communists, until George Marshall (then U.S. Secretary of State) forced his compliance. The result was Communist conquest of China in 1949.

On June 24, 1950, Communists attacked South Korea. President Truman sent American troops, proposing to drive Communists out and to unify Korea (north and south) under the anti-Communist government of Syngman Rhee. Washington and U.N. officialdom would not, however, let Americans and South Koreans win. In July, 1953—after 54,246 Americans had died—President Eisenhower accepted a Korean armistice on terms dictated by Communists.

Trying to restore shattered American prestige, the Eisenhower Administration declared that we had stopped Communism in Korea, and that Communists realized they could conquer no more territory in Asia. The Administration expressed firm determination to protect French Indochina from Communists.

There had been sporadic, indecisive guerrilla warfare between French and Communist forces for years but the Korean War gave an incalculable boost to the morale, prestige, and military strength of Communists in Asia. After the Korean armistice, therefore, conditions changed explosively. Communists converted scattered guerrilla action into total war against the French. On May 7, 1954, Communists captured Dien Bien Phu, the last French stronghold in northern Vietnam. Communists had done what we had pledged never to let them do.

In the late summer of 1954, an international conference at Geneva divided the old French Union into four nations: neutral Cambodia, neutral Laos, neutral South Vietnam, and Communist North Vietnam.

An International Control Commission—composed of representatives from Canada, India, and Communist Poland—was given the job of supervising the truce agreements. Communists had guerrilla bands throughout the area. They had been given all of North Vietnam, with the understanding that they disperse their rebel groups in Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam, and respect the neutrality of those three independent nations. They never did disperse their guerrilla bands, but used them to harass the three nations. The International Control Commission ignored, or tacitly approved, Communist violations.

In September, 1954, the Eisenhower Administration took the lead in setting up the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (S.E.A.T.O.), which was created, under the canopy of the United Nations, by a treaty of eight nations: the United States, Great Britain, France, Australia, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Thailand. Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam were not parties to the S.E.A.T.O. Treaty; but they were part of the treaty area which the eight S.E.A.T.O. nations pledged themselves to protect against Communist aggression.

On February 1, 1955, the U.S. Senate ratified the Treaty. Not long thereafter, President Eisenhower decided that our next “stand against Communism,” in compliance with our obligations under the S.E.A.T.O. Treaty, would be in Laos—a landlocked, primitive, jungle kingdom of about 2 million people. The Laotian economy went on the American taxpayers’ dole. We trained, equipped, clothed, housed, fed, and paid the salaries of the Laotian army

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and police forces, and we directly financed more than eighty percent of the total civilian budget of Laos. (1)

In December, 1960, our side at last seemed to be winning. A strong anti-Communist (Prince Boun Oum) was the premier of a new Government; and Communist forces were driven from Vientiane (capital of the nation), which they had controlled for months. The Soviets quickly suggested an international conference to settle the trouble in Laos. (2) They wanted to switch the war from battlefield to conference table —where anti-Communists could be forced to form a coalition government with Communists.

The United States rejected the Soviet proposal in December, 1960; but on March 23, 1961, President Kennedy reversed the American position. (3) In 1961 and 1962, W. Averell Harriman (our special emissary to Laos) did what George Marshall had done in China fifteen years before – forced the anti-Communist government to surrender control to a Communist-dominated coalition. (4)

The Kennedy Administration then announced (in early 1962) that the determined stand against Asian Communists (in compliance with our obligations under the S.E.A.T.O. Treaty) would be made in South Vietnam.

In October, 1963, Robert S. McNamara, Secretary of Defense, said our war against Communism in South Vietnam was going so well that 1,000 American military personnel could be removed within a month, most remaining Americans within two years. (5)

On November 1, 1963, South Vietnam’s Premier Ngo dinh Diem apparently at the instigation of our own government (6) —was overthrown and murdered; and a tide of victory started running for the Communists.

On February 7, 1965, President Johnson ordered limited bombing of selected targets in North Vietnam, previously a privileged sanctuary. This was hailed by many as a bold, aggressive step; but Johnson prevented the bombing from being decisive by prohibiting attacks on important cities, harbors, major industrial plants, and vital military installations.

On April 7, 1965, President Johnson took another bold step. He announced that if the Communists would quit fighting in Vietnam, the United States would give a billion dollars to rehabilitate and rebuild all of Vietnam, Communist North Vietnam as well as South Vietnam. The Communist dictator of North Vietnam sneered at the offer.

Beginning May 13, 1965, the United States halted bombing in North Vietnam for five days. Beginning December 24, 1965, the U.S. halted bombing for thirty-seven days. Both halts were said to be intended to get Ho chi Minh to negotiate. He used the bombing pauses to resupply and reinforce his troops in South Vietnam and to launch new attacks.

On November 29, 1965, Robert S. McNamara said, in a press statement at Saigon: “We have stopped losing the war.” (7)

Six days later, General John P. McConnell said something that made sense. General McConnell (then Air Force Chief of Staff) said the United States had the military capability of destroying North Vietnam and forcing its surrender “virtually overnight.” (8)

But President Johnson (like President Kennedy, and later President Nixon) had rejected victory as an objective in Vietnam. He kept pleading with Communists to negotiate, renewing his offer of a billion-dollar bribe.

In an effort to induce the North Vietnamese Communists to negotiate early in 1968, President Johnson ordered United States planes to stay away from the Hanoi-Haiphong area. The Communists used this respite to complete preparations for their Tet offensive. When that offensive ended, Communists were threatening all major cities in South Vietnam; they controlled more of the countryside than we did; and their military manpower was growing by leaps and bounds.

On February 2, 1968, Johnson said “we would be endangering the lives of our men” to halt or suspend the limited bombing in Vietnam until the enemy was willing to take reciprocal action and talk peace in good faith.

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The President repeated those sentiments in a speech on March 16, 1968. Then, on March 31, he unilaterally halted bombing (of seventy-eight percent of North Vietnamese territory, containing ninety percent of the population), and begged the Communists to join him in negotiations for peace.

For more than a month, the Communists rejected every American suggestion of a place to meet. They suggested cities in Communist countries, knowing we would refuse, then ridiculed President Johnson for having stated many times that he would “go anywhere, any time” to talk peace with them.

While our troop levels were frozen (at about 550,000 men) and North Vietnam was protected from American attack by President Johnson’s orders, the Communists poured more men and weapons into South Vietnam, intensifying their attacks against cities and civilians, and against U.S. military forces.

Having stipulated that they would discuss nothing but concessions to be made by the United States, the Communists finally selected Paris as the place for peace talks. The talks began on May 10, 1968, the Communists behaving like conquerors, demanding surrender. Since that day, nothing has been decided at Paris except the shape of the table.

Before the peace talks began, American battle deaths were averaging 184 a week. Immediately after they began, our battle deaths were 562 a week. By the end of May, 1968, American battle casualties in Vietnam (since January 1, 1961) totaled 177,716 – 24,744 killed; 152,972 wounded. (9)

Though our bombing of North Vietnamese targets prior to March 31, 1968, had failed (because limited to relatively insignificant targets) to knock out the Communist enemy, it had hampered him. Within two months after Johnson halted the bombing, American military officials were giving these details on how the cessation of bombing had helped the Communists:

The port of Haiphong was no longer glutted with supplies stacked on wharves and streets because they could not be transported over bridges and highways. Ships from Communist countries—as well as ships from nations which are supposed to be American allies—were unloading cargoes quickly at Haiphong. Roads and bridges had been repaired; new docking facilities had been built; a huge Soviet dredge was working openly and safely to keep the port cleared of silting; railroads ran right up to the dock for direct loading from ships.

Railroad tracks, bridges, and roads above the Twentieth Parallel, immune from American bombing, had been repaired since March 31; and they were constantly jammed with rolling stock from Communist China, taking supplies to Hanoi and Haiphong.

With rail and water transportation restored as a result of the stopping of American bombing, the Communists had deployed some 5,000 trucks to the southern panhandle of North Vietnam, thus, in effect, moving the main center of their supply network closer to the infiltration routes in South Vietnam. (10)

By the middle of June, 1968, a huge airbase just above the Nineteenth Parallel (immune from American attacks) had been restored and enlarged as an operational base and refueling stop for all types of Soviet-made military aircraft—from helicopters to MIG fighters. (11)

Since that time President Nixon, continuing the Johnson policy, has convinced a substantial portion of the public that we cannot win in Vietnam and that any kind of arrangement he can make for withdrawal will be acceptable.

But there is a way out. Congressman John G. Schmitz (R.-California) has reintroduced a House Joint Resolution which the last Congress failed to enact. The Resolution calls for a declaration of war against North Vietnam if, within thirty days, North Vietnam does not release all American prisoners of war and begin a large-scale withdrawal of forces from Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam. Congressman Schmitz says:

“The key to Communist victory has always been to protract the conflict, while the key to allied success has always been to end it quickly and decisively. The . . . option of victory is still easily possible with the material we have on hand in Southeast Asia. Under the current guidelines, limiting significant U.S. and allied military activity to allied territory, the government of North Vietnam has no reason whatsoever either to stop the war or to release the American prisoners whom they hold ....

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"It is time to stop simply talking about possible peace, and move to eliminate the North Vietnamese capability to go on making war." (12)

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Footnotes: (1) U.S. Aid Operations In Laos, Seventh Report by the Committee on Government Operations, U.S. House of Representatives, June 15, 1959. (2) New York Times, December 24, 1960, Page 3. (3) Washington Post, March 24, 1961, Page 12. (4) New York Times, March 26, 1962, Page 8. (5) Dallas Morning News, October 3, 1963, Page IA. (6) Dan Smoot Report 1964 Bound Volume, Pp., 129-136. (7) New York Times, November 30, 1965, Pp. 1,3. (8) Dallas Times Herald, December 6, 1965, Page 10A. (9) Dallas Times Herald, June 14, 1968, Page 4A. (10) U.S. News & World Report, June 10, 1968, Page s2. (11) Dallas Morning News, June 24, 1968, Page 30. (12) Weekly News Report, Congressman John G. Schmitz, February 10, 1971.