**COMMITTEE: HISTORICAL**

Topic: DNC 1968

Chairs: Lyon Teesdale & Matt Deutsch

**Rationale**

War in the 20th century has placed the world and America in unprecedented contexts. While America was primarily invested in her domestic affairs in the previous century, the Modern World has required America to take center-stage and cement itself as a world power. With Europe reeling from three decades of conflict, the United States has become the primary power in the Western World. Aiding this rise was the birth of the American arms industry, which has coincided with this change in America’s worldwide standing to give an unprecedented amount of influence in both economic and political spheres. In his farewell address at the beginning of this decade, Former President Dwight D. Eisenhower warned about the potential consequences of this, remarking that “In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.[[1]](#footnote-1)” Those words have hung over us as we have progressed through this last decade, as the civilizational conflict between America and the Soviet Union (and the fight to contain the spread of Communism to the rest of the world) has continued to grow and manifest in all kinds of new directions.

Surely, the most relevant of these examples to the American people are the situations in Cuba and Vietnam. Our success in the 1960 and 1964 Presidential Elections meant that a Democratic president has overseen both situations. The situation with Cuba reached a fever pitch earlier on in the Decade under President Kennedy. His steady hand was able to guide us through and while relations today are certainly still tense, we have much less reason for fear of active conflict on American soil. Kennedy’s success and popularity in the wake of this, saw out popularity skyrocket, and even after the tragedy of his assassination in 1963, the DNC was able to secure a blowout victory to secure Lyndon Johnson a full term at the presidency. Unfortunately, the situation in Vietnam has resolved itself less quickly, and a geo-political quagmire has begun to emerge in the region, with President Johnson taking much of the blame. Simultaneously to this, the Civil Rights Acts passed in 1964 and 1965 caused Southern Democrats to splinter, fracturing the New Deal Coalition that the Democratic Party has relied on to win elections for the past 35 years. This split was only further solidified earlier this year with the passing of another Civil Rights Act in the wake of the death of Rev. Martin Luther King.

With the party in a disadvantaged position due to this and the growing unpopularity of the War in Vietnam (especially among students), it became apparent to President Johnson that the party’s chances would be better off without him as the candidate. Thus, the power vacuum has left the DNC in an uncertain position in heading into Chicago, as the core pieces that have built the Democratic coalition for years are splintering and leaving the party at a crossroads. A few candidates have emerged, with the primary focus being their position on the Vietnam War. This congregation will determine the party platform and candidate for 1968, but its ripple effects may have consequences on the trajectory of the party and American politics for generations.

**Background of the Topic**

The Conflict in Vietnam traces itself back for more than two decades. In the broad trend of European Powers losing their grip on their colonial possessions in the wake of the Second World War, Vietnam was one of the first countries to see an anti-colonial insurgency, with the Nationalist Leader of the Viet Minh, Ho Chi Minh, declaring independence from France on September 2nd. 1945.[[2]](#footnote-2) In truth, the country had been fighting for its independence for years prior, but it had become a battleground between Japanese and Allied forces during World War II. This left the nationalist movement as a bit of a third wheel until the Japanese Surrender. Upon declaring independence, the provisionary republic had expressed a desire for good relations with the US, and had even quoted the Declaration of Independence in their own founding document.[[3]](#footnote-3) However, fears remained that a fully independent Vietnam under the Viet Minh would fall under Communist influence.

The other provisional state that emerged in Vietnam was headed by the former Emperor of Vietnam, Bao Dai and General Nguyen Van Xuan. Bao Dai had been the emperor prior to the War when the region was a French protectorate, and with his support Van Xuan was able to establish the State of Vietnam as an alternative regime to the Viet Minh. They were able to take control of the Southern part of Vietnam. Yet, it was incredibly obvious that this regime was not on steady ground, as they were largely propped up by the French to retain control and influence in the region. In fact, it was so obvious that they were a French Puppet that local authorities universally ignored them, choosing to either align with the Viet Minh or take orders directly from the French as opposed to this new “Independent” Vietnamese State.

This placed the US between a rock and a hard place, as French support would alienate Southeast Asian people and States from Western Influence, but full support for independence could lead to a Communist State. US policy was to aim to carve out a third way, supporting increased Vietnamese sovereignty that would remain in “voluntary association with the French state.[[4]](#footnote-4)” In accordance with this, The US refused to supply the French with arms to support this intervention and largely stood outside as a neutral party. However, within a few years the Geopolitical situation had shifted, solidifying the Cold War battlelines. French inclusion in NATO, a Communist takeover in China and the Soviet Union announcing that they had nuclear capabilities all meant that the US entered the 1950s with significantly more reason to be invested in Vietnam. The US opted to support the French-backed State of Vietnam explicitly against the Viet Minh, who gained support from the Soviet Union as well as newly Communist China. With the battle lines drawn, the conflict became much more of a proxy war than an Independence struggle.

In 1954, the Battle of Dien Bien Phu resulted in French Defeat. Exhausted by fighting and internal instability, France agreed to come to the negotiation table. The Geneva Accords ultimately resulted in the Partition of Vietnam into North and South, with the Viet Minh taking control of the North and the Bao Dai regime retaining control of the south. This was meant to be a temporary solution before a national referendum could be held within a few years to determine the country's unified long-term fate. Unfortunately, this did not go according to plan, as a year later, the Bao Dai regime was overthrown in a coup by Ngo Dinh Diem, a Nationalist, Catholic anti-Communist who refused to follow the Geneva Accords.[[5]](#footnote-5) Nevertheless, Ngo was still a bulwark against Communism, so the US initially opted to retain their support. In fact, with France out of the picture, they even expanded it, selling arms and helping train their military, the Army of the Republic of Vietnam[[6]](#footnote-6) (ARVN). However, Ngo’s brutal repression of the Buddhist Majority, Communists, and other political opponents made him tremendously unpopular among his own people, pushing those groups to mobilize. The Communists in South Vietnam, under the name Viet Cong and backed by North Vietnam, launched a guerilla warfare campaign that helped undermine the Ngo regime. At the same time, the Buddhist Majority had grown increasingly discontent, leading to mass demonstrations. Both left the Ngo regime in a weakened position. However, this did little to dissuade the United States’ support under Eisenhower.

These issues would persist into the Kennedy Administration, but the failure of the Bay of Pigs meant that Kennedy was fearful of “losing” another country to the communists, leading US support of the Ngo regime to continue, and even expand all the way up to 9,000 people. The Direm regime by this point was on an awkward but seemingly stable ground. That was, until the self-immolation of Buddhist Monk Thich Quang Duc, igniting the Buddhist rebellion. With two major fronts of opposition and Ngo growing increasingly unreliable as an ally, the US (covertly) opted to shift its policy, offering tacit support for a coup lead by the AVRN, this left Ngo dead and South Vietnam with a new leader in November 1963.

Sadly, President Kennedy died within the same month, leaving Lyndon B Johnson to take the helm. The situation in Vietnam had grown even more uncertain, as the country lacked a stable leader to take over for Ngo throughout much of 1964. Sensing this, North Vietnam made an offensive push to reunite the two countries. In a part of this military action, the Northern Vietnamese military attacked two US Naval ships in the Gulf of Tonkin. This was the first time the Vietnam conflict entered American popular consciousness, as before this point the ongoing events in Vietnam were not widely covered nor discussed. Soon after, President Johnson passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, authorizing a massive increase of involvement in the region. It passed in the Senate with only two votes opposing it, Wayne Morse (D-OR) and Ernest Gruening (D-AK). It passed without opposition in the House. For the United States, this was the true beginning of the Vietnam War.

By 1965, Johnson had authorized the dispatch of over 100,000 troops immediately and 100,000 more the following year. During this time, South Vietnam had stabilized with regards to leadership, with General Nguyen Van Thieu taking the reins. Even so, it was clear by this point that South Vietnam would not hold without American Support. However, this support, even with the major increase in manpower, proved to be much easier said than done, as the US was unprepared for the Viet Cong’s guerilla tactics. Viet Cong soldiers would frequently blend in with the local environment and ambush American forces, making it increasingly difficult to identify the enemy and counteract them. American forces were pushed to use mass bombing and other approaches as conventional war was clearly not working. The United States dropped more bombs in 1966 alone than they did on Japan throughout the entirety of World War II.[[7]](#footnote-7) It became increasingly clear by 1967 that the Viet Cong and North Vietnam would not be an easy foe to put away, it was a stalemate

This brings us to today, where things still rest at a standstill. Early in 1968, Communist forces launched an offensive aiming to finally take control of south Vietnam, but The United States resisted strongly, stopping them in their tracks. Nevertheless, the increased destruction is clearly taking its toll on the American military, and the images Americans at home are seeing of the war has made them increasingly restless over whether this war is worth staying in.

**Contemporary Evidence of the Topic:**

Though the War and American involvement traces its roots back to the immediate aftermath of World War II, the Vietnam War has only been in American public consciousness since 1964. At that time, the War was widely supported, as were most foreign policy measures to counteract communism. Yet, in this current year, 1968, public opinion on the War has fallen drastically. Month after month of seeing the horrors of war on television has taken its toll, and Americans are growing increasingly disillusioned with a conflict that very few actually know why we were there at all. Eisenhower’s warning about the military-industrial complex seems more foreboding.

This disillusionment is particularly present on College Campuses. Many of their fellow Americans their age has been drafted and forced to serve in this war, and with the hope and optimism that surrounded the early part of this decade seen in the Civil Rights Movement, the youth are increasingly politically involved. The ways they get involved are often unorthodox, as best seen in the Youth International Party. These “Yippies” utilize absurd political theater and provocative statements to rile up the older generations and stick a thorn in their side. Groups like this are explicitly anti-establishment, and they have grown in massive numbers as the Vietnam War has dragged on, helping create a notable rift between the older New Deal Liberals that this party built its consensus on, and the young generation that seek to completely shake up the system with their first target as the Democratic Party.

Some Democrats have tried to mend this gap, opposing the war while still largely maintaining a commitment to the established norms of politics. Perhaps the best at this was Bobby Kennedy, but he was assassinated earlier this year shortly after winning the California Primary. Others have tried to remain committed to the fight against communism. These rifts have defined this party in the tumultuous year so far, and with President Johnson out of the running, all the tensions of this party will come to a head in Chicago. In response to this tension Mayor Daley has significantly cranked up his rhetoric on law and order, attempting to discourage the irreverent youth from causing Civil Unrest. The party’s options for candidates will fall along these fault lines. Today, the primary candidates are Vice President Humphrey, Sen. George McGovern, and Sen. Eugene McCarthy. Thanks to the delegate system, it is ultimately up to us at the DNC to decide who our candidate should be. The future is in our hands.

**References and Research Resources**

Articles Referenced in the Background Guide

[https://www.britannica.com/event/Vietnam-War](https://www.britannica.com/event/Vietnam-War/Firepower-comes-to-naught)

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ngo-Dinh-Diem>

<https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/History/Vietnam/Vietnam_1947-1954.pdf> <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/president-dwight-d-eisenhowers-farewell-address>

<https://www.britannica.com/event/Indochina-wars#ref764002>

Other Potentially useful links

<https://www.ushistory.org/us/55.asp>

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/447561#metadata_info_tab_contents>

<https://news.gallup.com/poll/18097/iraq-versus-vietnam-comparison-public-opinion.aspx>

<https://www.britannica.com/event/United-States-presidential-election-of-1968/Conventions>

<https://www.britannica.com/event/Chicago-Seven-law-case>

<https://press.uchicago.edu/Misc/Chicago/238012.html>

**Dossier: (For registration please write down one of these individuals per delegate(s))**

* Sec. of State Dean Rusk
* Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley
* Philadelphia Mayor James Hugh Joseph Tate
* President of the US Conference of Mayors Joseph M. Barr
* National security Advisor Walt Whitman Rostow
* Sen. Abe Ribcoff
* Speaker of the House John McCormack
* Activist, leader of the “Yippies” Abbie Hoffman
* Activist, Lead Organizer of MOBE Rennie Davis
* Activist Jerry Rubin
* Sec. of Defense Clark Clifford
* Minister Channing E Phillips
* Senator Edmund Muskie
* Novelist Norman Mailer
* Senator Ernest Greunig
* Senator Wayne Morse
* Senator Edward “Ted” Kennedy
* United States Representative to the UN George Ball
* Senator Daniel Inouye
* Former Sec. of Commerce W. Averell Harriman
* Gov. John Connally (TX)
* Rep. Donald M. Fraser
* Former Sec. of Defense Robert McNamara
* PIAB Chair Max Taylor
* Advisor Larry O Brien
* Advisor Mac Bundy
* Outgoing President Lyndon B. Johnson

**Note to the Delegates**

Esteemed delegates, we are honored to have the opportunity to moderate a conference on such a unique flashpoint in American History. Each year in history has its consequences, but no other year has nearly the weight that 1968 does on modern American History. There are certainly some historical anachronisms that will occur in the structure and approach of this committee, but I found it necessary to do so to give you all the best MUN experience possible. Ideally, this conference and this topic is meant to help you better understand the American Cold War experience. Through MUN, we hope to explore the back rooms that the Cold War was fought over in and use this simulation to explore questions about American Foreign Policies and the many paths it could have gone down. I hope you enjoy this conference and this committee! If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out!

Best,

Lyon Teesdale

Chair, DNC 1968

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1. <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/president-dwight-d-eisenhowers-farewell-address> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Indochina-wars#ref764002> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/History/Vietnam/Vietnam_1947-1954.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Qtd in Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ngo-Dinh-Diem> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Vietnam-War/The-conflict-deepens> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Vietnam-War/Firepower-comes-to-naught> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)