What International Support Did the US Receive During Vietnam?

The policies and decisions on engaging in foreign conflict that are set by our nation’s leaders have far-reaching impacts.

The reasons foreign nations supported or refused to support the U.S.-led war effort in Vietnam reflect ongoing debates about the roles and goals of nations participating in foreign conflict.

This lesson plan will involve a review of various nations’ foreign policies with respect to Vietnam and the greater Southeast Asia region in the 1950’s-70’s, to build an understanding of the extent of international support of US efforts in Vietnam. Students will analyze foreign leaders’ hesitations on involvement, and consider the composition of international coalitions in more recent wars.
The United Nations

In 1945, the United Nations (UN) was formed as an international body to promote cooperation among nations. In 1950, the UN voted to establish a US-led command to support the Republic of Korea’s fight against the North Korean People’s Army. 15 nations joined this US-led command by providing combat forces in the fight.

Ask students to research:
1) What role the UN played in the Korean War
2) What nations joined the coalition, and what their motivations might have been

Who Joins a Coalition?

Begin by asking students: Why might other countries have chosen to support or not to support the United States in Vietnam?

During US involvement in Vietnam, a few nations chose to support US efforts and many others chose to refrain from entering the conflict, either militarily or politically, for a variety of reasons.

(Review of French history in Vietnam, if needed): From the mid 1800’s to World War II, France occupied Vietnam (as well as Cambodia and Laos) as a colonial state. During World War II, the Japanese marginalized the French and occupied Vietnam. In 1945, Viet Minh (Vietnam Independence League) leader Ho Chi Minh organized a revolution against the France as it sought to reestablish colonial rule with the defeat of the Japanese. This precipitated what is generally known as the First Indochina War, which continued from 1946 until 1954, when the French were defeated by the Viet Minh at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu. The subsequent signing of the Geneva Accords divided Vietnam at the 17th parallel, with the Viet Minh administering...
Among the greatest commitments made was that of South Korea, which sent over 300,000 combat troops to fight in South Vietnam (see slide 2 for Korean troops in Vietnam). Slide 3 shows a 1961 meeting in Washington between President Kennedy and South Korean president Park Chung-hee, an authoritarian leader who had recently seized power in a coup-d’etat. The US had established a strong relationship with Park Chung-hee, and the desire to maintain the strength of that relationship was a motivating factor in providing both political and material support to the US in Vietnam. In 1965, South Korea sent battalions to Vietnam after President Johnson agreed to several conditions including increased American economic aid to South Korea, replacement of South Korean military equipment, and defraying of expenses. South Korea had 4407 combat deaths in Vietnam.

Australia was another nation that chose to send combat troops into South Vietnam in 1965 to assist the US-led effort (see slide 4). In 1964, in the face of little support from traditional Western allies, the State Department under President Lyndon Johnson led a “More Flags” campaign in an attempt to rally international support for the cause of saving South Vietnam. While some nations, like Australia, responded positively with both political support against the expansion of communism and military support by sending a total of over 60,000 combat troops (from 1962 to 1973), many others, including all of America’s closest allies in Western Europe, expressed concern and hesitation about getting involved in the conflict. Australia had 521 combat deaths in Vietnam.

Great Britain, for example, expressed concern at various points regarding both political and military involvement in Vietnam. Ask students to read the excerpt of Robert Thompson’s 1964 memo included on slide 6. What are some of his stated concerns regarding getting involved in Vietnam? Despite pleas from the US government, including a possible exchange of financial support for the pound sterling for British combat troops, Britain chose to refrain from involvement in Vietnam, with doubt that US objectives in Vietnam could be met, particularly not with military escalation.
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Zealand, Thailand, and Philippines flags. These by forces allied with South Vietnam—on it you

On slide 1, you see a safe conduct pass issued according to popular vote.

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South Vietnam. While some nations, like Australia, responded positively with both political

“More Flags” campaign in an attempt to rally international support for the cause of saving

Pearson, who served as the prime minister of Canada from 1963 to 1968. In the midst of US escalation in Vietnam, Canada stood alongside Great Britain as a nation hesitant to enter the coalition against North Vietnam. In 1965, Pearson visited the US and delivered a speech at Temple University in which he said regarding the conflict in Vietnam: “A settlement is hard to envisage in the heat of battle, but it is now imperative to seek one.” Like Great Britain, the Canadian government was skeptical of US foreign policy in Vietnam and sought to push the US toward negotiations rather than military escalation. Among the top concerns were the ability of the US to achieve its objectives in Vietnam and disagreement regarding the strategic importance of Vietnam.

France was another Western nation (and member of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization) that refrained from joining the US coalition in Vietnam, for various reasons. On slide 8, you see a 1963 meeting between President Johnson and the French president Charles de Gaulle. Having fought and lost a war in Vietnam nearly ten years earlier, the French government had no intention of repeating past mistakes, and de Gaulle, like the leaders of Britain and Canada, urged neutralization as soon as possible.

Since Vietnam, US-led military conflicts have had varying degrees of coalition support, with a variety of reasons for or against participation. Ask students to look at the map on slide 9, which shows the coalition support the US received during the 1990 Gulf War. How many countries are in color? Which countries sent the greatest numbers of troops? Why do you think the US received strong global support for that particular war?

In contrast, ask students to observe the map on slide 10, which lists the countries that supported the 2003-2011 US war in Iraq. How many different flags are seen on the map? How does that number compare with the number from the previous map? Why do you think the US received less global support for the Iraq war?

Finally, coalition building is occurring today, as the US escalates military efforts against ISIS/Da’esh in Iraq and Syria. Watch the September 2014 news clip included on slide 11 on the state of the US coalition against ISIS. Ask students: According to the clip, how many countries are in the coalition thus far? Does the clip indicate any reasons or motivations for the support of those countries?

Because it is always a significant decision to commit forces to conflict, it is important to understand and evaluate the reasons why the United States has succeeded or failed in generating support for its military interventions in the past.

**POST-VISIT ACTIVITY**

**World Views of ISIS**

Break students up into groups and assign a different country to each group from the following list:

1) Saudi Arabia  
2) Russia  
3) Germany  
4) Japan

Have each group research its given country’s public statements regarding ISIS/Da’esh (see news sites such as BBC, CNN, country-specific news coverage if English publications exist, etc.) and create an argument for or against participation in the US-led coalition, taking into consideration:

- Relationship with Iraq, Syria, or other bordering nations
- Policymaking with respect to terrorism
- Recent foreign policy in general  
- Public opinion in-country

**Further Suggested Reading**

Australia and the Vietnam War.  
Peter Edwards.  

International Perspectives on the Vietnam War.  
Lloyd C. Gardner and Ted Gittinger, eds.  

War of Necessity, War of Choice: A Memoir of Two Iraq Wars.  
Richard Haass.  

George Herring.  

Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam.  
Fredrik Logevall.  
Common Core Standards

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.7**
Integrate quantitative or technical analysis (e.g., charts, research data) with qualitative analysis in print or digital text.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.9**
Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2**
Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2**
Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7**
Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Standards

**D1.4.9-12**
Explain how supporting questions contribute to an inquiry and how, through engaging source work, new compelling and supporting questions emerge.

**D1.5.9-12**
Determine the kinds of sources that will be helpful in answering compelling and supporting questions, taking into consideration multiple viewpoints represented in the sources, the types of sources available, and the potential use of sources.

**D2.Civ.9.9-12**
Use appropriate deliberative processes in multiple settings.

**D2.His.1.9-12**
Evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances of time and place as well as broader historical contexts.

**D2.His.16.9-12**
Integrate evidence from multiple relevant historical sources and interpretations into a reasoned argument about the past.

**D4.7.9-12**
Assess options for individual and collective action to address local, regional, and global problems by engaging in self-reflection, strategy identification, and complex causal reasoning.

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