Summary

- The VC used guerrilla tactics and they blended in with the normal population.
- The VC had a lot of support and the tactics of the US and ARVN troops resulted in even more support for the VC.
- US and ARVN troops ran ineffective search and destroy missions to root out the VC.
- Between 1964 and 1970, the USA sprayed about 24% of South Vietnam with harmful herbicides.
- The Tet Offensive of 1968 was a push by the communists for a revolution that would overthrow the South Vietnamese government. It failed and tens of thousands of communist fighters died.
- However, the US military had to accept that the end of the war was not close and that the communists had made significant progress before they were driven back.
- The Tet Offensive led to greater opposition to the war in the USA, from politicians and the general public. It was the main reason Johnson did not stand for re-election as president.

Checkpoint

Strengthen

- S1 Choose what you think is the most important reason for the USA deciding to expand their military involvement and send troops into Vietnam. Explain your choice in a sentence.
- S2 List the effects that search and destroy missions had on villagers in those areas.
- S3 Think of four ways in which US tactics were likely to alienate the South Vietnamese.
- S4 List three reasons why the Tet Offensive came as a shock to the US public.

Challenge

- C1 Give one military, one cultural, and one political reason to explain why US and ARVN troops became increasingly unpopular from 1965.
- C2 Why do you think the VC were able to survive in South Vietnam so successfully? How confident do you feel about your answers to these questions? If you are not sure that you answered them well, reread the chapter, making notes as you go, then try them again.

Learning outcomes

- Understand the Nixon Doctrine and the key features of Vietnamisation.
- Understand the attacks on Cambodia, Laos and the bombing of North Vietnam.
- Understand the reasons for the failure of Vietnamisation.

Vietnam played a big part in the election of the next president, President Nixon. He promised to get the USA out of the war. Like earlier presidents, he did not want to leave the war if South Vietnam then became communist. However, he saw the growing opposition to US troops fighting in Vietnam. Nixon knew that people were angry that Johnson lied about the war. He promised to tell the truth and explain his policies to the public.

Nixon worked on several different approaches to the Vietnam War.

- **Official peace talks**: Five days after he became president, Nixon sent delegates to Paris to negotiate for peace with representatives from North and South Vietnam and the Vietcong. However, it became clear as delegates argued over seating arrangements, that the talks would be long and difficult.
- **Secret peace talks**: In August 1969, Henry Kissinger of the USA began secret talks with Le Duc Tho of North Vietnam. Nixon did not tell the South Vietnamese or the American public about these talks.
- **Troop withdrawals**: In June 1969, Nixon lowered the maximum number of troops in Vietnam by 25,000. The USA began to withdraw troops on 14 July 1969.
- **ARVN training**: The military in Vietnam, now led by General Abrams, were told to focus on training ARVN (South Vietnamese) officers and troops.
- **Secret bombing of Cambodia**: On 15 March 1969, Nixon ordered the secret bombing of the parts of the Ho Chi Minh Trail that ran through Cambodia. Military orders and reports lied about bombing raids, because Nixon knew this expanding of the war would be very unpopular.

**The Nixon Doctrine**

On 25 July 1969, Nixon gave a speech outlining what came to be known as the Nixon Doctrine. It laid down what the role of the USA should be in Southeast Asian politics in the future. He said:

- the USA would honour any treaty commitments it had made.
- the USA would help any ally against a nuclear threat.
- the USA would provide aid and training against non-nuclear threats, but not troops; the country under threat had to provide its own ground troops.

**Source A**

A photograph showing the first troops leaving Vietnam under Nixon's withdrawal programme. It was taken on 14 July 1969.
Vietnamisation

'Vietnamisation' was the word used for the application of the Nixon Doctrine to Vietnam. The USA was to withdraw troops, but without looking like they had been defeated and without South Vietnam becoming communist. Vietnamisation shifted the responsibility for fighting, and so the casualties, to the ARVN. It was similar to US policy before Johnson sent in troops. Johnson had always wanted to return to a situation where the USA provided money and advice, but not troops.

Key features of Vietnamisation

- US troops were to withdraw.
- The ARVN was to provide its own officers.
- US was still to provide training and equipment.
- The US withdrawal would be done 'with honour' – not leaving South Vietnam at the mercy of North Vietnam and the VC.
- South Vietnam would remain a separate country and not become communist.

Partial success

Vietnamisation succeeded in its most basic aim – there were fewer US troops in Vietnam and fewer US deaths (see the table on the left). However, many people did not see this as a success. Some felt US troops were being withdrawn too soon. Some US military advisers wanted to send in more troops after the Tet Offensive – they predicted a real chance of beating the North Vietnamese and the VC. On the other hand, manyponents of the war saw the US withdrawal as too slow.

Reactions to Vietnamisation

Most US citizens welcomed the fact that US troops would start to be withdrawn, while US generals and the South Vietnamese worried that the ARVN were not ready to fight alone. The communists saw Vietnamisation as a chance to gain the upper hand in the war.

**Source B**

From a speech made by President Nixon on 3 November 1969 in this speech, he urged support for his policy and said that the 'silent majority' of Americans supported him. In July, on my visit to Vietnam, I changed General Abrams' orders so that they were consistent with the objectives of our new [Vietnamisation] policies. Under the new orders, the primary mission of our troops is to enable the South Vietnamese forces to assume the full responsibility for the security of South Vietnam.

Our air operations have been reduced by over 80 percent.

... By December 15, over 60,000 men will have been withdrawn from South Vietnam including 20 percent of all of our combat forces.

The South Vietnamese have continued to gain in strength. As a result, they have been able to take over combat responsibilities from our American troops.

**Source C**

A cartoon published in 1972 with the caption: 'Now, as I was saying four years ago.' It shows Nixon campaigning for reelection. In 1968, Nixon had claimed he had a plan to end the war. This plan became Vietnamisation.

**Interpretation 1**


During the war, many American officials viewed Vietnamization positively. On April 17, 1971, Nixon declared, 'Vietnamization has succeeded.' The military shared this positive position. In a 1974 survey of all generals in the United States Army who had served in Vietnam, 58 percent agreed that the Vietnamization program was soundly conceived (well thought out), and 36 percent conditionally (partially) agreed. Only 6 percent disagreed. In the same study, 73 percent of the generals stated that Vietnamization was so effective that it should have been implemented earlier.

**Exam-style question, Section B**

How far do you agree with Interpretation 1 about the success of Vietnamisation?

Explain your answer, using Interpretations 1 and 2 and your knowledge of the historical context.

16 marks

**Exam tip**

You must make sure you refer to both interpretations in your answer or you will lose marks.
Nixon expands the war

Cambodia, 1970

Since 1969, the USA had been secretly bombing the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Cambodia. Its ruler, Prince Sihanouk, was neutral in the Vietnam War. He let the Trail operate, but also let US and ARVN troops attack it.

In March 1970, pro-American General Lon Nol took over in Cambodia and told the North Vietnamese to leave. The North Vietnamese joined forces with Cambodian communist guerrillas (the Khmer Rouge) and supported Sihanouk by attacking the Nol government. US generals urged Nixon to invade Cambodia to support Nol and save Cambodia from communism. He agreed. About 50,000 ARVN and 30,000 US troops invaded. However, Nixon knew invading Cambodia would create public outrage in the USA – that was why he had kept the bombing secret. He said US troops could only go 19 miles across the border and had to be out by 30 June. He also went on television to explain why troops were going into Cambodia.

The results of the invasion
- There was huge public outcry in the USA. There were many protests, especially on university campuses.
- Congress was furious and cancelled the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution (see page 91). They also called for less funding for war and faster troop withdrawals from Vietnam.

Laos, 1971

Like South Vietnam, there were several groups struggling for power in Laos, including a number of communist groups. North Vietnam and the USSR supported the communists, while the USA ‘advised’ their opponents. As North Vietnam used the Laotian Ho Chi Minh Trail more, the South Vietnamese government pushed for an attack on Laos. Although argument, the USA agreed to provide air support for an ARVN invasion of about 21,000 troops.

The North Vietnamese heard of the planned invasion. They could not lose bases and the Trail in Laos, so decided to fight a battle for the first time since the Tet Offensive. They gathered about 36,000 troops and tanks. The ARVN took the city of Tchepone, with US air support, but then communist troops attacked. The fighting was bloody and the ARVN fled, leaving weapons and equipment behind. Despite US air cover, they had high casualties. The invasion raised serious doubts about Vietnamisation. The Trail and North Vietnamese bases remained secure, but there was still a struggle for political power in Laos.

The Easter Offensive 1972

Operations in both Cambodia and Laos had ended with no decisive victory. The USA continued to withdraw troops, despite the ARVN’s failure in Laos. The peace negotiations, secret and public, dragged on, but showed little signs of reaching an agreement. The Vietnam negotiations, encouraged by Laos, planned a huge attack on South Vietnam directly attacking ARVN troops. On 30 March, nearly 120,000 North Vietnamese troops crossed the border into South Vietnam and attacked in three different places. VC and other guerrilla groups joined in. Shortly before the attack, the USA had said an invasion was not a serious possibility. The attack was a surprise and was very successful at first, but the ARVN, with US air support, eventually pushed the North Vietnamese back.

Source D

From Nixon’s speech to the American people on 30 April 1970 about the invasion of Cambodia.
A majority of the American people, a majority of you listening to me, are for the withdrawal of our forces from Vietnam. The action I have taken tonight is indispensable for the continuing success of that withdrawal program.
A majority of the American people want to end this war rather than have it drag on interminably. The action I have taken tonight will serve that purpose.
A majority of the American people want to keep the casualties of our brave men in Vietnam at an absolute minimum. The action I take tonight is essential if we are to accomplish that goal.

Bomiting North Vietnam, 1972

In response to the Easter Offensive, the USA launched Operation Linebacker on 6 April 1972. This involved heavy bombing of North Vietnam. Unlike Rolling Thunder, Linebacker did not set any restrictions on targets. Both Hanoi and Haiphong were bombed. Nixon also ordered mines to be dropped in Haiphong harbour and blockades to keep ships from China and the USSR from reaching North Vietnam. Linebacker:
- almost wiped out the North Vietnamese war industry
- severely disrupted supplies from the USSR and China
- destroyed radio stations and other communication networks
- led to China and the USSR urging the North Vietnamese to reach a peace settlement.

Activity
Debate the pros and cons of bombing North Vietnam after the Easter Offensive. Consider the effect of Operation Linebacker in your debate.
Why did Vietnamisation fail?

In the end, Vietnamisation failed. The North Vietnamese eventually took Saigon and Vietnam was united under a communist government. Why did Vietnamisation fail?

US troops

Knowing they would soon be going home, US troops no longer saw themselves as fighting to win. They had criticised ARVN troops for avoiding battles with the VC – now they did the same thing themselves. Some officers who tried to force troops to go into action were ‘fragged’ – killed by their own men. Cases of fragging rose from 96 in 1969 to 209 in 1970. Cases of drug use rose, too. Marijuana use was high, but in 1971, heroin use grew out of control. The army said about 35,000 soldiers were heroin addicts.

Training and equipment

- The US supplied training and equipment. However, over time, Congress restricted funding.
- Because of the need for South Vietnamese officers, training was often hurried. The aim was to have South Vietnamese training the troops. However, the newly-trained officers were needed in the war, not in training. In 1971, about 75% of officers had less than a year’s experience.
- US equipment had manuals in English. Many ARVN could not read English. English lessons were set up, but the troop shortages meant few had time for them.

Economic and political problems in South Vietnam

The USA withdrew troops despite knowing that the ARVN could not protect South Vietnam. The departure of US personnel also set off an economic crisis and 300,000 South Vietnamese lost their jobs. Many billions of dollars of US aid also stopped.

The government in Saigon fell because it was weak, politically and militarily. Politically, its members competed for power rather than running the country. It was also corrupt and lacked support among the South Vietnamese. Many South Vietnamese hated the government because they saw it as a puppet government for the US. However, even those South Vietnamese who did not hate the USA found little worth supporting in the government. Militarily, the ARVN could not hold out against the North Vietnamese, despite efforts to increase its size and efficiency.

The ARVN

The ARVN became more effective and began to provide its own officers. However, it had problems.

- It did not have enough soldiers, despite conscription*. In 1971, over half of South Vietnamese men aged 15 to 49 were in the ARVN.
- Desertion* was common. In 1969, 123,000 men deserted, and this rose to 150,500 men in 1971. About 24,000 of the deserters in 1971 left to help on their local farmland and came back after the rice harvest. The rest did not.
- Many officers were reluctant to lead their troops into battle. Some officers did not want to admit their troops were struggling in combat, so they did not call for more military support until it was too late.
- There was a lot of corruption in the ARVN. For example, appointments of high-ranking officers were appointed for political reasons, not skill.
- Corruption made it hard to know troop numbers. Some officers falsified the number of men under their command (as it affected their pay). Others took bribes to record soldiers as present when they were not.
- Significant amounts of military supplies, such as petrol, were stolen and sold off.

Key terms

Conscription* Compulsory military service.

Desertion* Leaving the army without permission.

Extend your knowledge

Avoiding battle

In June 1971, retired Colonel Robert D. Heinl wrote an article for Armed Forces Journal about the problems in the US military in Vietnam. He said drug-taking was shockingly common, as was avoiding combat and fragging. He suggested that this was partly because many drafted soldiers were young, undereducated and unwilling soldiers. This article came just a few months after Nixon told a group of newly-graduated officers they would have to realise that the soldiers under their command were not necessarily going to be disciplined, patriotic and ready to fight.

What effect do you think this type of reaction would have on the soldiers left in Vietnam?

Source F

From a 2003 interview with Judith Coburn, a reporter in Vietnam. Here, she is talking about the ARVN.

The early seventies was also the period of “Vietnamisation” when American troops were being withdrawn and the South Vietnamese Army was supposedly doing a larger and larger share of the fighting. You hear some Americans say that all the South Vietnamese troops were cowards and all the officers were corrupt. I don’t subscribe to that. There were some very competent South Vietnamese officers and some serious fighting units, but for the most part it is true that the Vietnamese Army was a paper tiger. They were not loyal to the government which they knew was corrupt and installed by the U.S. – and most ARVN grunts (ordinary soldiers) were there simply because they got drafted and would go to prison if they didn’t fight.
Leaving Vietnam
From June 1972, North Vietnam and the USA were under increasing pressure to make peace. The American public and North Vietnam's communist allies were all pushing for this. Only South Vietnam, feeling increasing left out of the negotiations and abandoned by the USA, refused to sign the peace agreement of October 1972 (see Chapter 4). Nixon brought in huge amounts of military equipment and supplies, and promised continued support for South Vietnam. On 27 January 1973, the Paris Agreement was signed by the USA, North Vietnam, South Vietnam and the Provisional Revolutionary Government (created by communists in South Vietnam). It set up a ceasefire and a timetable for peaceful reunification of Vietnam. Very few people believed that it would do anything other than provide a ceasefire while the Americans withdrew.

The South Vietnamese government refused to negotiate with the communists in the months that followed the Paris Peace Agreement. Eventually, in March 1975, the North Vietnamese Army swept through South Vietnam. Congress refused to provide more aid to the South. The last Americans in Saigon left in a hasty scramble, and their final departure was anything but 'honourable'. With the fall of Saigon, Vietnam became a united, communist, country.

Summary
- Nixon was elected as president largely because of his promise to get US troops out of Vietnam.
- His 'Nixon Doctrine' was to help countries in Southeast Asia fight communism, but not to commit troops.
- He started withdrawing troops in 1969, shifting responsibility for fighting to the ARVN, in a process called Vietnamisation.
- Nixon also negotiated for peace and conducted secret bombing raids hoping to end the war.
- Events in Cambodia and Laos led to Nixon extending the war into those countries.
- The Easter Offensive led to Nixon launching Operation Linebacker, the unrestricted bombing of North Vietnam.

Checkpoint
Strengthen
S1 Sum up in a paragraph why Vietnamisation failed.
S2 In a sentence, explain why the bombing of Cambodia produced such an extreme reaction in the USA.

Challenge
C1 Explain the significance of the Nixon Doctrine on US policy towards Vietnam.
C2 Explain why Nixon ordered the bombing of North Vietnam in 1972.

Recall quiz
1 Who fought at Dien Bien Phu?
2 What was Eisenhower's domino theory?
3 What was a strategic hamlet?
4 What happened as a result of the Gulf of Tonkin Incident?
5 Who were the VC and what tactics did they use?
6 What was Operation Rolling Thunder?
7 Which president first sent ground troops to Vietnam?
8 When was the Tet Offensive?
9 What was Vietnamisation?
10 Which neighbours of Vietnam were bombed in 1970 and 1971?

Recap: US involvement in the Vietnam War 1954–75

In the exam you will be asked how useful contemporary sources are for an enquiry. Copy and complete the table below. Support what you say with your own knowledge if it helps you to make your point.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources</th>
<th>Enquiry</th>
<th>Ways they are useful</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B and C on page 83</td>
<td>Eisenhower's views on supporting the South Vietnamese government</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C on page 92 and E on page 93</td>
<td>The significance of the Gulf of Tonkin Incident</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A and C on page 97</td>
<td>The advantages the VC had over US troops</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F on page 101 and G on page 102</td>
<td>The effects of search and destroy tactics</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

In the exam you will be asked about how historians' interpretations can differ. To find out why interpretations give different impressions you need to ask:
- Are they thinking about the same aspect of the topic?
- Might they have used different sources (look carefully at both sources on your paper, as well as the interpretations: the sources will have been carefully chosen to help you)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interpretations</th>
<th>Enquiry</th>
<th>How they differ</th>
<th>Why they might differ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 and 2 on page 87</td>
<td>The effect of the strategic hamlets policy</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3 and 4 page 105</td>
<td>The outcome of the Tet Offensive</td>
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