

HIS311- Feb 4, 2016

# Indochinese Shadows



# AGENDA



Three main focus

1. Contextualizing Vietnam War
2. Canadian-American relations during the Vietnam War
3. Anti-Americanism: Public Opinion & Canadian foreign policy

# TRAGEDY of the Vietnam War

“We find genuine tragedy...only in that destruction which does not prematurely cut short development and success, but which, instead, grows out of success itself. Breakdown and failure reveal the true nature of things.”  
- Karl Jaspers



# Contextualizing Vietnam

- One of the longest and most tragic interventions in the history of U.S. foreign relations
- “trapped by success” // issue of credibility
- Over 58,000 killed, 75,000 severely disabled, 23,000 completely disabled, of those killed 61% were younger than 21.
- Vietnam Veterans represented 9.7% of their generation
- One of the heaviest aerial bombings of our human history
- Over \$300 million in physical destruction alone

# Understanding the “Quagmire”

- Vietnam War: 20+ years of engagement from the U.S. perspective & a thousand years of struggle from the Vietnamese perspective
- Immensely complex
- Battle of “credibility” in the Cold War
- The effect of the Vietnam War in American psyche, finances, various political administrations...
- Where does Canada fit in all of this?

# Time travel to: Indochina

- Indochina: Cambodia, Vietnam & Laos
- “The jewel” of French colonial empire (1880s-WWII)
- A mixture of jurisdictions; some ruled by the French, some through local authorities
- Produced rubber = very lucrative business
- WWII disrupted everything; Ho Chi Minh gains power in North Vietnam from the Chinese in August 1945



# A closer look at the map

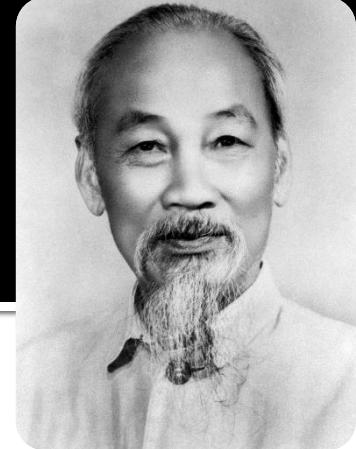


# More on Indochina



- Canada didn't have much interaction
- Foreign trade/travel not very encouraged
- Mix of Indian and Chinese influence
- The Vietnamese had a long history of resisting Chinese inclusion (an important ingredient of Vietnamese nationalism\*\*)
- French influence: Western-style education system, huge economic growth (export of tea, coffee, tobacco), food, Catholicism, etc.

# MEET: Ho Chi Minh \*EXAM



- **Ho Chi Minh 1890-1969**
- Founder of the Indochina Communist Party (1930); eclectic, pragmatic, mysterious...
- President of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam 1945-69)
- Leader of the Vietnamese nationalist movement for nearly 3 decades
- Widely travelled; Played a key role in the post-WWII anti-colonial movement in Asia
- One of the most influential communist leaders of the 20<sup>th</sup> century

# Ho Chi Minh & Cold War politics

## \*exam

- 1920s-30s: Ho Chi Minh = extremely effective
- During WWII: Japanese advance to Indochina
- After the surrender: Japanese hand over power in Hanoi to Ho Chi Minh, who travel under the name of Viet Minh
- Sept 1945~: Ho Chi Minh government in Hanoi
- Allies divide the Japanese empire into zones of occupation (Japanese surrender: Chinese in the North and the British in the South)
- In Paris: De Gaulle announces that France will re-occupy Indochina
- 1945-46: The French keep Viet Minh in Jungle
- 1950: Chinese Civil War comes to an end.  
=> Communists arrive in Indochina => support for Viet Minh

# Ho Chi Minh's Declaration of Independence Sept 1945 \*EXAM

- Largely affected by the American Declaration of Independence
- Ho remembers the experience of WWII
- Living under Vichy France occupation, subjected to Japanese rule...
- **Ho's not a bare foot man living in Jungle (highly sophisticated man)**
- Pivotal moment at the end of WWII >> Ho's a Communist but literally copies the US version>> calls himself the **"George Washington of Vietnam"**
- Downplays the notion of Vietnamese Communism (Generally seen as a nationalist movement)
- Chinese soldiers decide what happens to Vietnam >> allow for the French forces to come back
- The US is now the predominant power

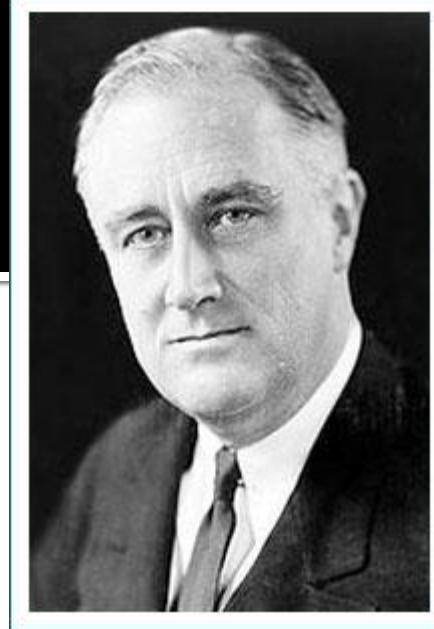


# Viet Minh

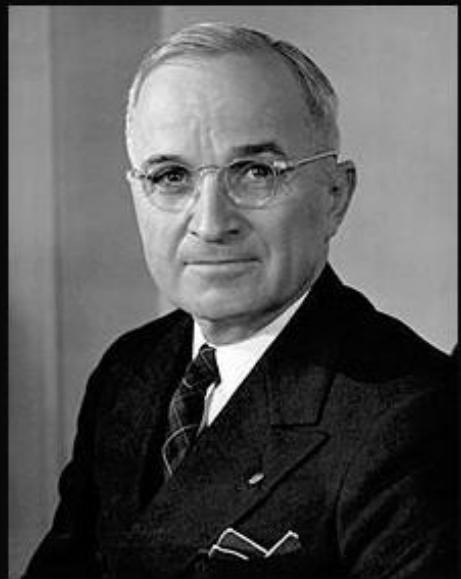


# F.D. Roosevelt – Jan 1944

“I have, over the years, believed that Indochina should not go back to France...It should be handled by an international trusteeship. France has had the country, 30 million inhabitants, for nearly one hundred years. And the people are worse off than they were at the beginning. Each case must stand on its own. But the case of Indochina is perfectly clear. France has milked it for one hundred years and the people of Indochina are entitled to something better than that.”



# Roosevelt's death -> Truman



Boys, if you ever pray, pray for me now. I don't know whether you fellows ever had a load of hay fall on you, but when they told me yesterday what had happened, I felt like the moon, the stars and all the planets had fallen on me. I've got the most terribly responsible job a man ever had.

(Harry S. Truman)

[izquotes.com](http://izquotes.com)

# Geopolitical context>> what is Truman facing? \*EXAM

- WWII coming to an end...not entirely clear about Japan (about the timeline)
- Millions of Soviets in Eastern Europe
- Divided countries like Germany
- Contested countries like Greece/Turkey >> not clear about spheres of influence
- Shattered economies >> Massive reconstruction of Western Europe \$\$\$
- Prospect of depression in the U.S.
- China is seriously in decline
- Unclear enemy of the Soviet Union!
- Revelation of spies in the United States
- Rise of nationalism/decolonization in Africa/Middle East
- ...and the atomic bomb!

# Truman 1945

- Indochina is nowhere to be found in this long list of priorities...
- France is an ally on the UN Security Council!
- Harry Truman does not share FDR's perspective
- Ho Chi Minh understands the realities of the situation  
>> international situation important for the future of Vietnam, decides to tolerate the return of the French
- Ho is less brilliant in terms of faith in the U.S.
- Until the 1960s, Ho maintains a romantic vision of the United States. Ho's letter in 1963: "Neither you nor I know the Americans well. What we do know is that they are more practical and clear-sighted than other capitalist countries."

# Fall of China & McCarthyism

- ❖ New sense of threat in the U.S. thinking
- ❖ Purge of China experts in the process
- ❖ America in “fast and furious” mode
- ❖ The Korean War: Communism is on the march!
- ❖ “we are at war” -> no room for negotiation!
- ❖ Ideas about monolithic communism (head in Moscow and stomach in Beijing) => completely false
- ❖ U.S. political/philosophical engagement >> support regimes around Southeast Asia (Military Assistance) for anti-communist regimes
- ❖ Thailand , Philippines, etc \$\$\$
- ❖ Americans don't necessarily have an answer for these complex situations...

# Dien Bien Phu



- 13 March – 7 May 1954
- The French rashly put some of their army within the range of Ho Chi Minh
- confrontation of the First Indochina War between the French Union's French Far East Expeditionary Corps and Viet Minh communist-nationalist revolutionaries.
- China's support + Soviet aid, well-trained, disciplined army
- The Americans helping the French...
- French defeated, surrendered on May 7<sup>th</sup> 1954
- Result of total under-estimation

# The Geneva Conference



- Co-chaired by Great Britain & USSR (1953)
- International conference to end the Korean War
- The Communist forces wanted an end to a conflict (costly!)
- Began on the same day as French defeat (May 7<sup>th</sup> 1954)
- Meeting: Dulles, Eden, Molotov, Chou Enlai, Pearson
- Canada is there because of the Korean War
- Canada wanted nothing to do with Vietnam (focused on Europe). John Holmes (Our rep. to UN) left very soon
- The U.S., France, the Soviets and the Communist Chinese agreed to ceasefires in Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia
- Ho Chi Minh and his team were granted control of the part of Vietnam north of the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel (Democratic Republic of Vietnam); agreed to withdraw forces from South Vietnam, Laos & Cambodia
- Final declaration: free elections for all of Vietnam by July '56

# Eden's Telegram to Pearson

- Canada is crucial to peace in Indochina
- Eden appeals to Pearson to take an active role
- Proposal: creation of the ICSC (**International Commission for Supervision and Control**)
- 3 member commission: magic number!
- The rationale: there will be decisions
- For Canada, inspiration comes from the IJC which supervises Canada-US water boundary; investigate, negotiate, reach a conclusion

# The International Commission on Supervision and Control \*EXAM

- U.S. & South Vietnam never signed the agreement
- Selecting reps for the International Commission for Supervision and Control (three in total: Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia)
- One communist, one Western, one neutral
- India: neutral & chair, Poland for communist, U.S. wanted Belgium for the West...but because it was a colonial power, India & China wanted Canada
- July 21, 1954: CANADA SELECTED!
- Canadians spoke French, but knew very little..

# How the ICSC would work.. \*EXAM

- Anyone who does not want to live under communism could go to South Vietnam
- North: communist; South: capitalist
- Supervise the departure of French from North Vietnam and Communists from South Vietnam
- Provide for free elections as of 1956
- A fair number of people moved N-S
- Embarrassing for Ho Chi Minh
- From the Canadian side: young French-Canadian diplomats are sent to Indochina (HOT climate)

# The French departure (54-56)

- Even though Canada was representing the West, Pearson wanted fairness
- The French left North Vietnam quickly, around 890,000 refugees moved out of the communist controlled area
- North Vietnamese did their best to stop migration and quickly isolated the Commissioners in the North
- South Vietnam: American-educated, Catholic, anti-Communist Ngo Dinh Diem in charge => wanted to take over the entire Vietnam (needed the help of Americans)

# Impact on Canada \*EXAM

## Generally negative experience 54-56

1. Extremely hot, very little to do. Canadian diplomats mostly in A/C bars
2. No Canadian wanted to be in Indochina (junior officers with very little/no experience)
3. Aggressive and uncooperative spirit of the communists made Canadian reps to become extremely anti-Communist

=> brought home stronger views on the Cold War (Reid's memo '55: Ho cannot be stopped)

# Canadian policy 56-60

- Canada's Vietnam Policy: Go with the Flow
- American policy wasn't very clear either
- Events in Vietnam were overshadowed by events in China, Cuba, Europe, elsewhere
- on the ground: steady rise in violence in South Vietnam; unsafe to travel
- By early 1960s, the Communist guerrillas called "Viet Cong" by their enemies, were able to defeat government troops/US helicopter attacks

# NO EXIT PLAN>>>

- Americans had some 12,000 military advisors in South Vietnam
- JFK concerned about public opinion
- Just like JFK, President Lyndon B. Johnson couldn't figure out how to get the US out of Vietnam
- By 1969: over 500,000 US troops in Vietnam
- Issue of **credibility in the Cold War**

# The Seaborn Missions \*EXAM

## Mission I: June 1964 & Mission II: August 1964

- Dean Rusk (US Secretary of State) to Ottawa (Apr)
- J. Blair Seaborn (Canada's Commissioner in Hanoi)
- Seaborn should find out if Ho Chi Minh felt confident in continued Chinese support, warn the North Vietnamese of the U.S. willingness to expand the war & offer concessions
- North Vietnamese PM Pham Van Dong: By all means, ready for American attack

# MEET Blair Seaborn

- <http://www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/canada-in-vietnam-diplomacy-or-complicity>



# Escalation in the 1960s

Feb 7<sup>th</sup> 1965: US begins  
**Operation Rolling Thunder**  
(a series of air attacks  
against North Vietnam)

Feb 13<sup>th</sup>: Indians and Poles  
special msg condemning US  
actions, Canada issues a  
minority report noting the  
violations of the Geneva  
agreement on both sides



# Canadian public opinion

- American troops enter Vietnam, criticisms in Canada against war efforts (broadcast on TV)
- Some 50,000 Americans (half of them women) migrate to Canada to avoid the draft and American politics in general
- 20,000-30,000 Canadians served in the US forces during this period
- July 1965 Gallup Poll: 44% Cdns approved of the situation in Vietnam, 33% disapproved
- Generally similar sentiments in CA/US

# Protests in the US



# Anti-war marches...



# Draft dodgers welcome...



# FOCUS: CA-US relations \*\*\*EXAM

- Canada and the U.S. generally agreed on opposing communism, fearing war, supporting NATO and blaming the Soviets
- Polls suggested: most Canadians regarded that communism posed a danger to the West, not sure how this should be handled
- Restless dragon of Canadian nationalism >> anti-Americanism? Dual sentiments about American leadership, culture, \$\$, etc.

# Pearson's Temple Speech \*\*EXAM

April 1965 @ Temple University, Philadelphia

Pearson urged the US to consider suspending air strikes against the North to encourage Hanoi to move towards negotiation

“There are many factors which I am not in a position to weight...But there does appear to be at least a possibility that a suspension of such air strikes against North Vietnam, at the right time, might provide the Hanoi authorities with the opportunity, if they wish to take it, to inject some flexibility into their policy without appearing to do so as the direct result of military pressure.” – Lester B. Pearson

# Quiet diplomacy? or complicity?

- “You pissed on my rug!” – President LBJ at Camp David, Maryland
- Quiet diplomacy? Or Quiet complicity?
- Arnold Heeney: “**Principles for Partnership**” (1964) commissioned by Pearson/LBJ

“It is in the abiding interest of both countries that, wherever possible, divergent views between two governments should be expressed and if possible resolved in private, through diplomatic channels.”

# “Give Peace a chance”



**John Lennon  
and Yoko Ono  
with PM  
Pierre  
Trudeau,  
December 22,  
1969**

# Give Peace a Chance



John Lennon & Yoko Ono recorded 'Give Peace a Chance' during a 'bed in' at Montreal's Queen Elizabeth Hotel in 1969

# Give Peace a Chance



# Ending Vietnam \*EXAM

- Anti-Americanism in Canada continued to expand throughout the late 1960s
- Trudeau not very interested in Vietnam
- At last, summer of 1972: Nixon got the American ground troops out
- **Paris Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring the Peace in Vietnam, 1973**
- Over 25,000 Vietnamese Refugees to Canada
- \$29 million aid from Canada to South Vietnam (under the Colombo Plan 1950-75)

# RECAP & EXAM PREP

- The tragedy of the Vietnam War & evolution of Canadian-American relations
- Cold War in Asia & the role of public opinion
- **KEY TERMS: Ho Chi Minh, Dien Bien Phu, ICSC, Geneva Conference, Blair Seaborn, Operation Rolling Thunder, the Temple Speech, Principles for Partnership, Quiet diplomacy, anti-Americanism, “Give peace a chance”**
- Q. Discuss the Canadian involvement in Indochina from the end of WWII until the early 1970s. To what extent were we affected by the American priorities in the Cold War?