
Why did the US lose the Vietnam war?

❶ On the left: an anti-war leaflet showing a Vietnamese child burnt by napalm, released by the leftist Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). On the right: Protestors carry signs during an anti-Vietnam War demonstration.



❷ Kennan on Vietnam.



George Frost Kennan (1904-2005) was an American diplomat and political scientist. In this excerpt from one of his books, looking back at the Vietnam war, he exposed the flaws in the American strategy.

We know today that Soviet connections with the communists in Southeast Asia were at that time actually distant and rudimentary. Ho Chi Minh was indeed primarily a nationalist who, despite his communist ideological rhetoric, would probably have been glad to keep a certain balance in his relations with the Communist world and with us, had we encouraged him to do so. Several of our best experts tried vainly to tell us this.

Let me expand a bit on this tendency of ours to insist on seeing as blind puppets of some other great power weaker or smaller factions or regimes whose relations with that great power are actually much more complicated and much less sinister than that. There seems to be a curious American tendency to search, at all times, for a single external center of evil, to which all our troubles can be attributed, rather than to recognize that there might be multiple sources of resistance to our purposes and undertakings, and that these sources might be relatively independent of each other.

George F. KENNAN, *American Diplomacy*, Chicago University Press, 1984, pages 161-162.

➤ Using the documents and your knowledge, explain why the US lost the Vietnam war and which lessons could be learnt from that defeat.