

LESSON 9

NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY DURING THE COLD WAR (WITH VIETNAM CASE STUDY)

“There are now two great nations in the world, which starting from different points, seem to be advancing toward the same goal: the Russians and the Anglo-Americans...[E]ach seems called by some secret design of Providence one day to hold in its hands the destinies of half the world.”

—Alexis de Tocqueville, 1835
Democracy in America

Lesson Introduction

This lesson addresses the United States national security strategies implemented by the various presidential administrations during the Cold War. Due to the impact the Vietnam War had on future U.S. national security strategies, a case study on this conflict is included in this lesson to foster a better understanding of the ties between our national security strategy and the employment of U.S. military forces. During the Cold War, the national security objective of all administrations was centered on the containment of communist expansion across the globe. To achieve this objective, the various administrations developed varying national security strategies, which in turn shaped the force structure and employment options of the U.S. armed forces. The expansion of nuclear capabilities to other countries, the loss of China to communists, the Korean War, the race to space, U.S. domestic concerns, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Vietnam War, the unexpected end of two administrations (one to assassination and one to forego impeachment), and the rebirth of the U.S. commitment to national economic and military strength all had important effects on how the U.S. prosecuted the Cold War.

The end of World War II marked a dramatic change in the international environment. The old multi-polar order had been swept away, replaced by a bipolar world in which the United States and the Soviet Union, representing fundamentally opposing ideologies and interests, vied for ascendancy. Lining up behind each were middle powers and lesser states. Developing states in the so-called Third World sought to establish their own independent identities, often turning to the United States or the Soviet Union for aid and assistance. Within this milieu, the two superpowers waged a Cold War based on the assumption that confrontation was inevitable and unavoidable. As the vanguard socialist-communist state and believing history was on their side, Soviet leaders were confident the Soviet Union would triumph over the Western imperial powers. The United States was determined to resist Soviet expansionism and worldwide communism in what amounted to a zero-sum game. Unlike after World War I, the United States would not shy away from power politics on the world stage. Rooted in the belief that only it had the strength to create a general peace based on Wilsonian principles of self-determination, open markets, and collective security, the United States sought to exercise fully its power after 1945.

Three features of the American experience prior to World War II affected strategic thinking in the United States after the war: the effects of isolationism, the role of appeasement in precipitating the war, and the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. Regarding the first, the reluctance

of the United States to form alliances with other states and to commit itself to countering aggression was perceived by many to have encouraged Axis aggression. Worse, the idea that appeasement had not satisfied but had, in fact, encouraged Hitler became almost self-evident after the war. Moreover, the memory of Pearl Harbor was seared into the public consciousness. Combined, these aspects of the World War II experience shaped American strategic thinking during the Cold War. To avoid having to mobilize after war had broken out (as had occurred in World Wars I and II), the United States had to devise a strategy that included overseas commitments to keep potential aggressors from acting. Additionally, maintaining a military industrial base would be necessary to meet the requirements of a large standing military establishment. Finally, and most importantly, the strategy had to make rational the inherent irrationality of nuclear weapons.

The new rationality that emerged recognized that the sheer destructiveness of nuclear weapons made their utility open to question. The American monopoly on nuclear weapons was broken by Soviet acquisition of the Bomb in 1949. By the late 1960s a deliberately contrived nuclear parity was achieved which deterred each side from attacking the other due to the fear of a nuclear holocaust. Thus, issues of survival and broader national interests coincided in a manner that shaped strategic thinking in the decades following World War II.

The Korean War confirmed the fact that the rules of the international game had changed, prompting the rise of a new American strategy. One new rule was that neither the United States nor the Soviet Union would directly attack the other or even openly confront one another except in very limited circumstances. But even then the two sides would seek to confine such confrontations within the theaters in which conflict had erupted. Such tacit cooperation could not have existed except amid the conditions of nuclear stalemate. In that regard, President Truman was perhaps the first to appreciate that nuclear weapons had changed the meaning of *strategy* and that previous calculations regarding ends, ways, and means had been rendered largely obsolete. As Truman noted, war had undergone a technological change that made statecraft a very different thing than what it had been before. What had been rational before the bomb was no longer so, and the implications for military strategy were considerable, even if most of the players at the time were unaware of it.

Student Requirements by Educational Objective

Requirement 1

Objective 1. Summarize U.S. national security strategy thinking and policy formulation during the Cold War. [JPME Areas 1(c), 3(d), 4(b)]

Read:

- “The Sources of Soviet Conduct,” by X (pseudonym used by George Kennan), *Foreign Affairs*, July 1947 (12 pages)
- Excerpts from NSC 68, 14 April 1950 (11 pages)
- “Appendix A,” *The Era of Prevention* (book in progress), D. Robert Worley (6 pages)
- “Strategies of Containment, Past and Future,” John Lewis Gaddis, *Hoover Digest*, 2001 No.2 (6 pages)

The term *containment* is generally used to describe American grand strategy during the Cold War. In 1947, George Kennan, a former American diplomat and authority on the Soviet Union and the first director of the State Department’s Policy Planning Staff, coined the term in his famous anonymous essay that advocated the “long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies.” Containment as a strategy found its first official expression in an address by Truman to the Congress in 1947, requesting military and economic assistance to independent states facing internal as well as external threats to their continued existence. Although this address specifically requested support for Greece and Turkey, the broad mandate that Truman outlined to contain totalitarianism became known as the Truman Doctrine. It should be noted that Truman saw totalitarian regimes, not just communist regimes, as a threat to peace and stability. However, as world events unfolded over time, this strategy concentrated on containing Soviet expansion, with the U.S. tacitly supporting some totalitarian and communist regimes in order to erode Soviet influence. Another key feature of the Truman Doctrine that would have a lasting impact on U.S. strategy was the *domino theory*, named so after President Eisenhower illustrated the theory in terms of falling dominos.

For Kennan, containment was primarily a political and economic concept, as opposed to a prescriptive military strategy. Nevertheless, containment had three goals: restoring the balance of power following World War II; reducing the Soviet Union’s ability to project power outside its own borders; and modifying Soviet behavior in the international arena. Kennan believed operationalizing this concept meant the economic revitalization of Europe and Japan as *strongpoints* against Soviet adventurism; exploiting the tensions that existed within the international communist movement (i.e., the promotion of *Titoism* in Yugoslavia) and negotiating outstanding differences between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. in order to reduce tensions between the two superpowers and create the conditions facilitating the modification of Soviet behavior.

According to Kennan, the overarching goal of U.S. foreign policy was not to divide the globe into American and Soviet spheres of influence but, rather, to create independent centers of power in Europe and Asia capable of resisting Soviet expansionism. To achieve this goal, Kennan promoted an economic strategy. He regarded Soviet expansionism, rather than communism itself, as the principal threat and suggested that communist states were not only acceptable within this framework, but also potentially useful in thwarting Soviet expansionist ambitions. For example, the Soviets had been unable to control Tito (and, as a result, the Greek communists failed to achieve their aims during the Greek Civil War), and communist China actually posed a threat. Therefore, tensions in the communist camp could be exploited to inhibit Soviet adventurism. Kennan also believed that nationalism was more compelling than communism and

that, as a result, communism would eventually collapse. Finally, Kennan was a realist and believed that the Soviets could be persuaded to abandon their liberal *universalistic* concept of international relations (i.e., the notion that worldwide communism is the goal) in favor of a more *particularist* outlook, one in which a stable balance of power would better serve their specific state interests.

Kennan's ideas were at the heart of the containment strategy adopted by the United States, and the Marshall Plan remains the crown jewel of Kennan's influence. However, over time, the central role of political economy in the strategy gave way to military priorities, especially after the Korean War. For example, Kennan opposed the creation of the NATO military alliance because of the threat it posed to the Soviet Union, thus increasing the security dilemma for Soviet decisionmakers. Also, containment evolved from a strategy of promoting self-sufficient and independent centers of power (the strongpoints of Europe and Japan) to one of *perimeter defense*, in which the United States would respond not only to specific Soviet penetrations of the *free world* (e.g., the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979) but also communist encroachment in general (e.g., the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua, also in 1979). In that regard, according to the original Kennan thesis, Korea should have been abandoned because it did not constitute a stronghold, and a communist Korea posed no direct threat to the United States. However, the linkage between North Korea and the Soviet Union was such that the invasion of South Korea seemed analogous to Hitler's *annexation* of Czechoslovakia and the appeasement that had precipitated World War II. President Truman recalled how he was reminded of the 1930s when he was first informed of the North Korean attack, stating, "I recalled how each time that the democracies failed to act it had encouraged the aggressors to keep going ahead. Communism was acting in Korea just as Hitler, Mussolini, and the Japanese had acted ten, fifteen, and twenty years earlier. I felt certain that if South Korea was allowed to fall Communist leaders would be emboldened to override nations closer to our own shores" (*Memoirs*). As a result, and contrary to Kennan's strongpoint defense concept, Truman's administration issued NSC-68 in 1950, which promoted a perimeter defense concept. This concept of confronting the expansion of communism at every point would set the stage for American intervention in Southeast Asia.

In the immediate aftermath of World War II, military planners regarded the atomic bomb as just another weapon. The U.S. military strategy called for using the same heavy bombers that had delivered the bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and, therefore, no organizational or doctrinal changes were instituted. But with the advent of Soviet nuclear weapons, the threat of a nuclear Pearl Harbor caused American strategists to focus on preventing an attack instead of merely responding to one. By 1954, the Eisenhower Administration ventured its *New-Look* policy (NSC 162/2), which introduced the concept of massive retaliation. The idea was to threaten a possible *first-strike* against the Soviet Union or China if either of these states initiated a conventional war against the U.S. The policy was intended to provide a credible deterrent and, at the same time, constrain defense-related expenditures that might seriously weaken the U.S. economy. It was hoped that the mere *possibility* of nuclear attack would be sufficient to deter aggression on the part of the communists. In the event of a Soviet attack, NATO ground forces would not seek to achieve operational military success but would, rather, buy the time required to launch a strategic nuclear retaliatory strike. In effect, conventional forces would provide the *shield*, and strategic nuclear arms amounted to the *sword*. Given that the emphasis was on nuclear warfare rather

than conventional battle and given that nuclear weapons at the time were exclusively air deliverable, the U.S. Air Force became the centerpiece of military strategy and spending.

Still, even as massive nuclear retaliation was being codified as military strategy, the growing Soviet nuclear capability altered the equation and made the doctrine obsolete. The U.S. threat to use nuclear arms in the event of a Soviet conventional attack in Europe lost credibility because it was difficult to believe that the United States would risk its own survival because of its overseas commitments. Within this context, two developments made the threat of Soviet aggression seem acute. First, the Soviets began to enlarge the Red Army, and second, the Soviets began to field long-range bombers in 1957 (the Bison and Bear), which made the United States seem especially vulnerable to nuclear attack. More troubling, the Soviets tested an intercontinental missile in the summer of 1957 and then launched the first artificial satellite (*Sputnik*) in the fall of the same year. This produced the so-called “missile gap” that became a potent political issue in the U.S. presidential elections in 1960.

The impact of the above developments was threefold. First, American strategists were forced to reconsider the nuclear equation in terms of a “second-strike” capability. Second, planners began to seriously consider the prospect of nuclear warfighting. And third, policymakers were forced to consider the conditions that could precipitate nuclear war as well as how it would be fought. What provocation was sufficient to warrant nuclear weapons? Should nuclear weapons be used immediately, or only as a last resort? Or should nuclear weapons be part of a broader, flexible-response strategy?

First-strike and second-strike capability became a key feature in strategic deliberations regarding nuclear weapons as the United States searched for a new military strategy. A first-strike capability is not merely the ability to launch an attack first, but it is, rather, the ability to destroy an adversary’s ability to retaliate as a result of striking first. If such a first-strike capability is possible, then there is an incentive to attack first. The prospect that a first-strike capability could be achieved is considered dangerous in that the security dilemma intensifies as the balance of power becomes unstable. By having a second-strike capability, so it is argued, a state reduces the incentive of an adversary to attack. The result is a **balance of terror** in which stability flows from the condition called **mutually assured destruction**, or MAD.

MAD became the centerpiece of the U.S. nuclear strategy that framed Kennedy’s policy of *Flexible Response*. Within this framework, the issue of **extended deterrence**, that is providing a nuclear umbrella of protection for American allies, sharpened the issue of credibility.

Uncertainty is the key to extended deterrence, which can be manipulated by raising the political stakes. For example, stationing American troops in Europe raised the stakes in that any Soviet invasion would necessarily mean that American troops (and many of their dependents) would be killed, thus making the U.S. government more inclined to wage nuclear war against the Soviets—or so it was believed. Within this deterrent posture, it was not necessary to threaten an immediate nuclear response: it was enough to threaten to escalate to nuclear war in order to halt Russian aggression. Flexible Response expanded the U.S. conventional capability to wage war, not only to deal with limited theater-level conventional wars (including guerrilla wars), but also to defend against a Soviet thrust into Western Europe. If NATO conventional forces failed to stop a Soviet conventional attack, the option of using nuclear weapons remained.

Flexible Response was a coherent strategy but it, too, raised doubts. Matters of stability and vulnerability were at the core of these doubts, and these doubts were exacerbated by technological innovations that threatened to upset the balance of terror at the heart of MAD. During the 1950s and early 1960s, both sides relied upon heavy bombers to wage nuclear war. The advent of intercontinental missiles changed the equation but only until both sides had roughly the same capability. However, the appearance of new technologies, such as multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles, or MIRV technology, threatened the balance. When the Soviets fielded the SS-8 and SS-9, and later the SS-18 and SS-19, American analysts perceived these missiles to be a direct threat to land-based U.S. missiles, which gave rise to the American mobile MX missile. Nevertheless, by the 1970s, the United States had clearly lost its nuclear edge, and various labels appeared, such as *rough equivalence*, *parity*, and *essential equivalence*, in an attempt to describe the nuclear relationship between the two superpowers.

The relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union took a dramatic turn when Ronald Reagan became President. Reagan had concluded that a “window of vulnerability” had opened due to improvements in Soviet nuclear technology. Pledging to close this window, the Reagan Administration took steps to ensure the invulnerability of U.S. strategic systems. Combined with the decision to introduce intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Western Europe as a response to the fielding of the Soviet SS-20, Reagan’s policy of strategic defense was viewed in numerous circles as destabilizing. Crucial to the President’s policy was the controversial decision regarding the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), commonly referred to as **Star Wars**. Aside from the technological controversies surrounding the proposal, SDI threatened to upset the balance of terror. But the rhetoric began to cool when the Reagan Administration shifted from arms control to arms reduction. Negotiations regarding intermediate and strategic nuclear arms bore fruit by the end of Reagan’s presidency and early in President Bush’s term in office. The Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty was signed in 1987, and the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I) was signed in 1991.

Throughout the Cold War, the role of nuclear arms had a material (and psychological) effect on military strategy and force structure. During the Eisenhower Administration, airpower was center stage, prompting major force structure changes as well as exacerbating inter-service rivalry to an unprecedented degree. The NATO strategy of using conventional forces as a shield prompted the emergence of the Army’s *active defense* doctrine, which eventually gave way to *Air-Land Battle*. In the end, across all of the Services, planning had to take into account the role of nuclear weapons, whether tactical or strategic.

Requirement 2

Objective 2. Determine the relationship between the U.S. global strategic policy and the U.S. intervention in Vietnam. [JPME Areas 1(c), 3(d)(e), 4(b)]

Objective 3. Recognize how U.S. military strategy during the Vietnam conflict changed with relation to U.S foreign policy under three presidential administrations (Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon). [JPME Area 1(a)(b)(c), 2(b)(d), 3(a)(b)(c)(d)(e), 4(b)]

Objective 4. Explain whether U.S. military strategy and actions during the Vietnam conflict supported U.S. goals and objectives under three presidential administrations (Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon). [JPME Area 1(a)(d), 2(d), 3(a)(b)(c)(d)(e), 4(b)(e), 5(b)]

Read:

- *From Lexington to Desert Storm and Beyond: War and Politics in the American Experience*, Donald M. Snow and Dennis M. Drew (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2000), Ch. 7, "Vietnam War," pp. 174-209 (36 pages)

American policies toward Vietnam predate the U.S. war conducted there between 1961 and 1973. In brief, U.S. policy during World War II was anti-Vichy and, therefore, tacitly pro-Viet Minh. The Vichy government in France had collaborated with the Nazis, and the Viet Minh had fought against the Japanese. Additionally, Roosevelt disliked de Gaulle, and French colonial aspirations contradicted American ideals of self-determination. After the war, Truman, wanting French support for the Atlantic Alliance as a counterbalance to Soviet expansionism in East Europe, abandoned plans to push for independent IndoChinese states. The U.S. remained largely uninvolved in Vietnamese affairs after the war until 1950, when a decidedly pro-French policy was adopted. With the French defeat in 1954, the former associated states of French IndoChina became a largely American responsibility, and separate policies emerged for the now independent successor-states of Cambodia, Laos, and the divided Vietnams. Regarding North Vietnam, U.S. policy was inarguably hostile. For its part, South Vietnam was important almost exclusively in terms of the role it played within the American grand strategy of containment.

In reaching the decision to intervene, numerous analogies were employed by policymakers, with Vietnam being frequently compared to the Korean War, fascist aggression in the 1930s, the Greek Civil War of 1943-1949, the Malayan Emergency of 1948-1960, and the Berlin Crisis. The Korean War analogy was the most popular and is significant because the experience colored policymakers' perceptions of the Vietnam challenge. For instance, a fundamental lesson of Korea was translated into a belief that international communism was at the root of the problem in Vietnam. By comparing Vietnam to Korea, the analogy also implied that the stakes were extremely high. Moreover, if aggression by North Vietnam was comparable to that of North Korea, military action was the prescribed remedy. Implicit in this attitude was the idea that, although the Korean War may have ended in a stalemate in the 1950s, by the 1960s South Korea had emerged as a prosperous American ally and bulwark against communism and, therefore, an example of a successful, limited war. Thus, the assumption was that victory in Vietnam would bear similar fruits.

Policymakers assumed that the guerrilla war in South Vietnam was, as was the case in Korea, preparatory to conventional invasion by the North. Consequently, the U.S. Advisory Group had two principal objectives: first, to create a conventional army of divisional-sized units and supporting elements to meet any North Vietnamese invasion; and second, to establish *follow-through programs* to sustain these conventional forces. The infantry divisions would, as an aside, perform internal security duties. The decision to prepare the South Vietnamese for conventional warfare clearly stemmed from the American view that the guerrilla activities of the Viet Cong were a precursor to a conventional invasion of South Vietnam by the North. Admiral

Ulysses S. Grant Sharp, Commander-in-Chief of U.S. Pacific Command during the latter stages of the war, admitted as much in his 1968 report, *Report on the Vietnam War*. “Originally,” he wrote, “and in light of our recent experience in Korea, the emphasis was placed on developing South Vietnamese forces capable of meeting an overt thrust across the Demilitarized Zone.”

Despite the frequent use of the Korean War analogy, there were words of caution from some officials, most notably, George Ball, Undersecretary of State. Ball warned that the problem of Vietnam was unique, that South Vietnam was not South Korea and that it would be a mistake to rely too heavily on the Korean War analogy. In a memo to President Johnson, Ball listed five principal differences, as follows:

- There was a clear UN mandate for intervention in Korea. Such was not the case with Vietnam.
- At their peak, UN forces other than American in South Korea constituted a considerable contribution. In Vietnam, the U.S. was largely “going it alone.”
- In 1950, the South Korean government was stable under Syngman Rhee and had the general support of the principal political actors in the country. In South Vietnam, the government was in chaos.
- The Korean War started after independence was gained from Japan, and the South Korean people were willing to fight to retain their newfound freedom. In contrast, the Vietnamese people were weary of war (first against the French and then against the insurgents in the South)
- Finally, the Korean War began with overt aggression and a massive invasion by some 100,000 North Korean troops. This was a classical, conventional attack across an established border. This gave the United States “an unassailable political and legal base for counteraction.” There was no “invasion” of South Vietnam, but, rather, an infiltration. Moreover, the southern insurgents had substantial indigenous support. As a result, many nations were unconvinced that the source of the insurgency was North Vietnam.

Bombing North Vietnam, Ball argued, was unlikely to have any material effect on the insurgency and was unlikely to persuade the North Vietnamese to end their support for the insurgents. In fact, he argued, the North Vietnamese might retaliate by sending more support to the Viet Cong, including more ground forces. In short, an air attack on the North was likely to lead to escalation, resulting in the introduction of American ground forces. Nevertheless, the Korean War analogy held a grip on Johnson and the other principal members of his administration, and a major lesson of that war was that the United States had to do something. If the Korean analogy defined the problem in Vietnam as one of external aggression, its implicit solution was to use military force to check the same. But in so doing, and despite Ball’s articulation of the differences between Korea and Vietnam, there was one lesson that was shared by all of Johnson’s advisors: do not provoke China, lest it intervene in Vietnam as it had done in Korea.

The chain of assumptions that led to Johnson's decision to pursue a limited air campaign against the North was rooted in the overarching policy of containment. Interpreting the conflict in Vietnam as but a part of a larger global struggle meant that American objectives there would be merely an element of a broader strategic agenda, much of which would have only tenuous connections to the struggle in Vietnam itself. In short, the U.S. objective was not to defeat North Vietnam, but it was, rather, not to lose South Vietnam. This outlook at once promoted intervention to halt communist aggression but, at the same time, restrained U.S. action. Nevertheless, in the months following the coup that had ousted President Diem in November of 1963, U.S. officials increasingly looked to North Vietnam as the source of instability and insurgency in the South. Thus, while U.S. forces in the South would engage Viet Cong irregulars and North Vietnamese regulars in the field, military and diplomatic pressure would be brought to bear against the North to withdraw its forces and terminate its support to the insurgents. The centerpiece of U.S. coercive pressure would be aerial bombardment of North Vietnam. Airpower offered a means to bring the war home to the North Vietnamese in a manner that would realize the limited objectives of coercion without escalation to a broader ground war that might provoke Chinese intervention.

When the Marines' 9th Expeditionary Brigade arrived in South Vietnam, General William Westmoreland, commander of U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, or MACV, considered the military situation to be critical. Large Viet Cong formations (as many as 50 Viet Cong battalions) were battling South Vietnamese forces in positional warfare. To make matters worse, a full division of North Vietnamese Army (NVA) regulars had infiltrated the mountains and jungles of the Central Highlands. Westmoreland considered the presence of the NVA division to be the harbinger of a shift in communist strategy, from an internal war supported by the North to a conventional war involving NVA forces, not unlike what had occurred during the Korean War. Westmoreland believed that it would require a year or more to prepare ARVN to repulse a conventional thrust by the North. In the meantime, the Viet Cong had to be dealt with.

It was within this context that General Westmoreland saw no other option save increasing the number of American ground combat forces. In that the ostensible objective was to help South Vietnam to prosecute the war themselves, Westmoreland agreed to a loose dual-command arrangement with the South Vietnamese. On the U.S. side, Westmoreland established subordinate commands (U.S. Army, Vietnam; 7th Air Force, and Naval Force, Vietnam). The South Vietnamese divided the country into four *corps tactical zones*, three of which included parallel U.S. command elements. In I Corps (the northern provinces), III Marine Amphibious Force was the U.S. headquarters, and in II and III Corps (the central provinces and the area surrounding Saigon, respectively) the U.S. headquarters were I Field Force and II Field Force, respectively. In the Mekong Delta area, where no major U.S. forces were to be committed, the ARVN IV Corps commander exercised control of U.S. forces. As this command structure took shape, President Johnson authorized Westmoreland to begin "counterinsurgency operations" against the communists.

The military situation reached crisis proportions in early 1965 as Viet Cong main force units overran district capitals and destroyed ARVN units, up to battalion strength. Westmoreland concluded that U.S. units had to take over the fight, leaving ARVN to secure populated areas against Viet Cong popular forces and political cadres. To do this, Westmoreland informed the

President that he needed at least 175,000 American troops merely to stabilize the situation; that move would need to be followed by an additional 100,000 troops, which would be necessary to defeat the communists. On 28 July 1965, President Johnson ordered the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) to South Vietnam, the spearhead of a much larger force to come.

As the ground war in South Vietnam progressed, there was constant tension between the counterinsurgency effort and the task of finding, fixing, and destroying communist main force units. Inasmuch as the main role of U.S. forces was to draw the major enemy units into battle, *pacification*, encompassing a broad spectrum of economic development, political education, and security operations, took a back seat to *search and destroy* missions. Nevertheless, specially trained police and para-military forces were raised to secure areas thought to be cleared of Viet Cong main force units. Regional Force companies were assigned to provinces, and District and Popular Force platoons were assigned to villages. In addition, the CIA-directed **Phoenix Program** attempted to identify and eliminate Viet Cong leadership and infrastructure. Finally, *strategic hamlets* and *agrovilles* were created to control and secure the rural population.

Still, despite the importance both American and South Vietnamese officials attached to pacification, the overall effort experienced fluctuating emphasis. In fact, Diem's efforts were more of repression than pacification, and ARVN's conduct amongst the rural population was insensitive at best and often quite brutal. After Diem's ouster, political instability and poor coordination with American efforts reduced the effectiveness of the program even further. At the same time, the introduction of an ever-growing number of U.S. ground forces and the emphasis on defeating enemy main force units diverted attention away from pacification. Even after U.S. military power stabilized the situation in 1966, U.S. and South Vietnamese pacification initiatives continued to take a back seat to the **big unit war**. Disturbed by this situation, President Johnson appointed Robert Komer to be his special assistant to direct non-military programs in South Vietnam. With Komer at the helm, substantial headway was made in addressing pacification by the time the communists launched the Tet Offensive in 1968. Indeed, Komer saw the communist tactical defeat in Tet as an opportunity to be exploited, resulting in the Accelerated Pacification Program between 1969 and 1971.

In retrospect, much has been made of the "*disconnect*" between the big unit war pursued by Westmoreland and the pacification effort. U.S. forces had been introduced into South Vietnam to lead the counterinsurgency campaign against the Viet Cong, and President Johnson repeatedly stressed that American non-military efforts in South Vietnam were essential to U.S. aims. But Westmoreland concentrated on main force units, and the ground war remained the centerpiece of the American military effort. Increased security was realized under Komer's guidance, but the enormous firepower of U.S. forces, often indiscriminately employed, militated against these gains in the overall effort. Pacification did succeed in reducing Viet Cong effectiveness, but the enormous destruction wrought by U.S. and South Vietnamese forces, combined with the South Vietnamese government's recalcitrance with respect to systemic reforms, thwarted the goal of securing popular support for the central government. Thus, by 1969 the North Vietnamese had decided to move into the third stage of Maoist people's war. In 1972, sensing South Vietnam's vulnerability to conventional attack, North Vietnam launched a conventional invasion across the demilitarized zone. Although this offensive failed, the communists, in keeping with the Maoist

strategy of protracted people's war, retrenched and rebuilt and launched another invasion in 1974 that ended with the communist capture of Saigon in April 1975.

Throughout the U.S. involvement in Vietnam, the U.S. was in pursuit of the core consensual objective of containing the communist advance in Southeast Asia. It was not as much about territory, economic potential, or democratic ideals as it was about credibility: the assumption that if the United States allowed itself to be challenged successfully in IndoChina, then its determination to resist communist aggression elsewhere would be open to question. However, Dwight Eisenhower's decision against military intervention seems at odds with this thesis. The Eisenhower Administration had followed closely the French effort to defeat the Viet Minh, and Eisenhower briefly considered dispatching American troops to assist the French. But he quickly shelved any such idea, claiming afterward that he could not imagine putting ground forces anywhere in Southeast Asia. Some accounts suggest that Eisenhower was so opposed to the idea that he encouraged Congress to impose conditions that he knew he could not meet. Likewise, until his death, Kennedy had opposed the introduction of major combat forces into Vietnam. Although his reluctance might seem puzzling from the standpoint of containment, it makes sense in the context of his preferred strategy of flexible response. Although flexible response did not rule out the use of ground combat forces to defend South Vietnam, Kennedy was more inclined to experiment with unconventional warfare in the form of special forces advisors and the like. For Kennedy, the parallels between the Emergency in Malaya (in which the British succeeded in defeating the insurgency) and Vietnam were striking. However, it cannot be known what Kennedy would have done in the aftermath of Diem's removal and the subsequent turmoil that occurred. Regardless, Johnson was left to deal with the deteriorating situation, and he was ill prepared to handle such a complicated foreign policy issue. Johnson was more persuaded that Vietnam was like Korea in 1950 – and a Korea-type war was something the American military was more inclined to fight. Determined to hold on to a disintegrating South Vietnam and realizing the ARVN were not capable of winning with U.S. air support alone, Johnson concluded that introducing U.S. ground troops was the only way to defeat Vietnamese communist designs. However, Johnson's decision to *Americanize* the war was not accompanied by serious consideration of how the U.S. military could achieve the dual objectives of defeating the insurgency and thwarting North Vietnam's designs on the South.

Lesson Summary

Throughout the Cold War, containment was the overarching U.S. grand strategy to arrest Soviet expansionism. The U.S. leaders who implemented this strategy faced differing global realities that required varying approaches to meet this goal. Soviet nuclear tests, the loss of China, Korea, Vietnam, Berlin, Cuba, Nicaragua, and other important instances, along with the expansion of nuclear capabilities and domestic concerns, impacted the development of U.S. national security strategy. This lesson reviews the strategies employed by the U.S. during this period, examining the manner in which different administrations approached the difficult task of balancing domestic and foreign affairs while countering actual or perceived Soviet goals of global communism. The actions taken during this period are illustrative of how the development and employment of U.S. military capabilities are tied to U.S. national security strategy. The Vietnam War case study provides a more focused review of the interconnections between domestic and

foreign policies and the tragic effects of an ill-defined national security strategy applied in an unfamiliar setting. With this lesson, you have been provided the opportunity of a better understanding of the manner in which U.S. national security strategy was developed and implemented during the Cold War and the effects this strategy had on the composition of the U.S. military. This understanding will allow you to comprehend more fully the importance of U.S. national security strategy and how future strategies may impact U.S. military missions.

JPME Summary

AREA 1					AREA 2				AREA 3					AREA 4					AREA 5			
A	B	C	D	E	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	E	A	B	C	D	E	A	B	C	D
X	X	X	X			X		X	X	X	X	X	X		X			X		X		