

# A Brief History of Vietnam

## Prehistory

Inhabited by human beings for hundreds of thousands of years, the area of Southeast Asia now called Vietnam was the site of a civilization that engaged in agriculture and pottery-making as early as 6,000 BC, roughly the same time such activities began in the city-states of ancient Mesopotamia. During this period, a succession of dynasties ruled the structured society that developed among the varied and changing ethnic groups living in the region.

## The Emergence of Vietnam

The rulers of the Trieu dynasty (207-111 BC), the first to identify themselves as Vietnamese, governed a kingdom called “Nam Viet” encompassing parts of what is now Guangdong in southern China as well as the northern portion of what is now Vietnam.

## Chinese Domination and Vietnamese Rebellion (111 BC–939 AD)

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In 111 BC, Chinese troops invaded Nam Viet, established new territories and installed Chinese officials to govern the area, except for portions of the highlands where some of the original Vietnamese nobles managed to retain control. Chinese domination of the region continued for a thousand years, interrupted periodically by Vietnamese revolts.

In 40 AD, the Trung Sisters led a successful rebellion against the Chinese, recapturing much of northern Vietnam. When one of the sisters proclaimed herself Queen, the Chinese Emperor sent a large army to quell the revolt. After a long, difficult campaign, the Chinese suppressed the uprising in 43 AD and the Trung Sisters committed suicide to avoid capture. Ever since, the sisters have been revered in Vietnam as exemplars of sacrificial service to the nation.

To avoid another revolt, the Han and subsequent Chinese dynasties sought to eliminate the power of the Vietnamese nobles, both directly by removing them from positions of authority and indirectly by inculcating in the native elite Chinese culture and politics. This approach proved successful, as nearly 200 years went by before the Vietnamese again attempted to rebel. Once more the insurrection was led by a woman, popularly known as Lady Trieu, and lasted about five years (until 248 AD), when Vietnamese aspirations were again crushed in battle. After the defeat, Lady Trieu, emulating her predecessors the Trung sisters, committed suicide. She too is still celebrated as a national heroine.

In subsequent centuries, revolts against Chinese rule continued to take place with regularity, but all ultimately failed. Early in the 10th century, however, as China became politically fragmented, parts of Vietnam were able to attain autonomy. In 938 AD, China sent in its army to bring the unruly regions back under control, but it was soundly defeated and the leader of the victorious Vietnamese declared himself emperor. The

Chinese defeat inaugurated an age of independence for Vietnam that continued for nearly a millennium until the French colonization of Indochina in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

### Vietnamese Dynastic Rule (939-1945)

The nature of Vietnamese society changed little during the nearly 1,000 years between independence from China in the 10th century and the French conquest in the 19<sup>th</sup>. The emperor was the ultimate source of political authority, the final dispenser of justice and law, the supreme commander-in-chief of the armed forces, and the overseer of religious rituals. Royal administration was carried out by mandarins who were trained in the rigorous study of Confucian texts, exactly like their counterparts in China. Vietnam's highly centralized government was efficient and stable and its administrative system was more advanced than those of other Southeast Asian states. No serious challenges to the emperor's authority arose since titles of nobility were granted at the emperor's discretion and could not be inherited, periodic land reforms prevented a powerful class of landowners from being created, and a religious/priestly class never evolved. Consequently, power bases capable of competing with the emperor did not form. The resulting royal absolutism ensured a stable, well-ordered society, but also one resistant to social, cultural, and technological innovations. And the few individuals who sought to reform the system focused solely on the past for inspiration.

The stability of Vietnamese society during this period was occasionally upset by dynastic struggles to control the imperial throne and also by wars with China (one war fought in 1076 was inconclusive, another in 1418 resulted in a Vietnamese victory). In addition, the Vietnamese were threatened by successive invasions of Mongol armies (1258-88) led first by Mongke Khan and then by Kublai Khan. Unique among the targets of Mongol expansion, Vietnam succeeded in repulsing the aggressive invaders. Subsequently, the Vietnamese expanded their rule southward, fighting a series of wars with the Kingdom of Champa, in what is now central Vietnam, and eventually conquering most of the kingdom in 1471.

### Early Contacts with the West and Catholic Missionaries

The West's interaction with Vietnam dates back to 166 AD with the arrival of merchants from the Roman Empire. Marco Polo visited in 1292 and the Portuguese sailed to Vietnam in 1516 followed by European traders and missionaries. Portuguese missionaries developed a Vietnamese Romanized alphabet, which a French Jesuit priest substantially improved upon in 1651. European efforts to establish trading posts in Vietnam failed, but European missionaries were allowed to operate for an extended period of time and by 1700 they had succeeded in converting up to a tenth of the population to Catholicism. As hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese converted and whole districts turned Catholic, Vietnamese emperors vacillated between accepting and attacking the foreign religion. At times, in order to access the missionaries' technical advice and their connections to modern weapons makers, the emperors tolerated Christianity. At other times, Christianity's rejection of Confucian ancestor worship, which undermined the mandarin system and ultimately the authority of the emperor, resulted in the bloody persecution of Catholics.

In 1784, French Catholic prelate, Pigneaux de Behaine, sailed from Vietnam to France to seek military backing for Nguyen Anh, one of several claimants to the throne. In

1788, he returned to Vietnam with a small number of volunteers and a regiment of troops picked up from France's colony in India. One of Pigneaux's associates organized Nguyen Anh's navy along European lines and in 1792 defeated the rival imperial claimants. After Saigon fell to Nguyen Anh's forces, the Nguyen dynasty was established in 1802.

## French Colonization

In 1858, under orders from the Emperor Napoleon III, French gunships attacked the port of Da Nang, but failed to gain a foothold there. Stymied in central Vietnam, they sailed south and captured the poorly defended city of Saigon. From 1859 to 1867, French troops extended their control outward from Saigon, taking over all six provinces of the Mekong delta and creating a colony they named Cochinchina.

In 1873, French troops landed in northern Vietnam, which they called Tonkin, and captured Hanoi. Stout resistance by the Vietnamese and the attacks of mercenaries hired by the local mandarins resulted in the recapture of Hanoi and the killing of two top French commanders. Despite this setback, the French persisted and again conquered the city in 1882. In the subsequent Tonkin Campaign (1883-1886) the north was finally subdued.

In 1887, France proclaimed the founding of French Indochina comprised of Tonkin (northern Vietnam), Annam (central Vietnam), and Cochinchina (southern Vietnam plus Cambodia and, after 1893, Laos). The French treated the three sectors of Indochina somewhat differently: Cochinchina had the status of a colony; Annam was nominally a protectorate ruled by the Nguyen dynasty; and Tonkin was a hybrid, with a French governor, but also with some local governments run by Vietnamese officials.

As France extended its control over Vietnam, it chose to follow a general policy of "assimilation" or governing directly through French officials. This was in contrast to the British in India, who governed indirectly through native institutions. Since France could conceive of no greater blessing than the "civilizing" effect of French ideas and culture, the national presence they imposed on Vietnam was much more intrusive and disruptive than that of Britain's in India. For example, France utilized five thousand colonial officials to govern Indochina, while Great Britain governed an Indian population ten times larger with the same number of officials.

## Vietnamese Resistance to the French

After Saigon fell to the French in 1858, resistance movements broke out in surrounding occupied areas, some led by former court officers and others by peasants who frequently used guerilla tactics. In the north, the resistance lasted for decades with fighting continuing in central Vietnam until 1895. In the northern mountains, the insurrection, headed by a local bandit chief, wasn't suppressed until 1911. In 1885, in a high-profile show of resistance, the teenage Emperor of Vietnam left the Imperial Palace in Hue and instigated the "Save the King" movement, an attempt to rally the people against the French. The young Emperor was captured in 1888 and exiled to French Algeria, but in the next few guerrillas supporting the Save the King movement and detesting all things associated with the French, murdered around one-third of Vietnam's Christians.

Anti-French revolts started by the mandarins were primarily aimed at restoring the old feudal society. By 1900, however, a new generation of Vietnamese who had never lived in precolonial Vietnam and who believed returning to the feudal order was neither feasible nor desirable had come of age. Although as eager as their grandparents to see an independent Vietnam, they realized that modern technology and governmental systems were needed to establish a republic once independence had been achieved. Two distinct movements for modernization developed: a) the Go East Movement started in 1905 which aimed to organize a successful armed revolt against the French; and b) the Modernization Movement which stressed a peaceful, non-violent struggle to gain independence and a peaceful transition of power. Both movements were suppressed by the French.

## Ho Chi Minh, World War I, and Colonialism

In 1911, a young Vietnamese, who would later become famous as Ho Chi Minh, left Saigon as a “galley boy” on a French freighter and sailed around the world. He stopped in such places as Bombay, Le Havre, Boston, and San Francisco before working for a year as a laborer in Brooklyn. He then travelled to London and finally to Paris. In 1918 in anticipation of the Versailles peace conference, US President Wilson had made a speech in which he asserted that “national aspirations must be respected,” that people may be “dominated and governed only by their own consent,” and that “every territorial settlement involved in this war must be made in the interest and for the benefit of the populations concerned.” Encouraged by the president’s endorsement of self-determination, Ho Chi Minh wrote “that all subject peoples are filled with hope by the prospect that an era of right and justice is opening to them.” He planned to deliver his written statement to Wilson when the president arrived at the peace talks in 1919, but Ho was never allowed to see him. In any case, it transpired that Wilson’s focus was on self-determination for the emerging nations of Eastern Europe and the peace conferees never seriously considered applying his idealistic concepts to colonial possessions.

After the Versailles conference ended, Ho Chi Minh, who had been veering leftward politically, participated in the founding of the French Communist Party in 1920 and in 1924 he traveled to the Soviet Union to join the Communist International (the Comintern).

## Nationalism and Marxism

After the World War I, when both the Go East Movement the Modernization Movement in Vietnam had been suppressed by the French, Vietnamese revolutionaries began to turn to more radical paths, inspired by the recent revolutions in China and Russia. The Vietnamese Nationalist Party was founded in 1927 and in 1930 fomented an armed mutiny in northern Vietnam. But the revolt failed, resulting in the capture and execution by guillotine of many of the Party’s leaders.

Marxism’s introduction into Vietnam spurred the creation of three separate Communist parties: the Indochinese Communist Party, Annamese Communist Party, and the Indochinese Communist Union. In the late 1920’s, the Comintern gave Ho Chi Minh the responsibility of building Communist movements in Southeast Asia and in 1930 it sent him to Hong Kong to coordinate the unification of the various communist parties into the Vietnamese Communist Party (CPV). Although Ho succeeded in combining the

parties, the French were able to identify and execute most of the top CPV leaders, almost annihilating the party during the 1930s.

## World War II

In 1940, Japan invaded and conquered Indochina, keeping the Vichy French colonial administration, including the figurehead Emperor Bao Dai, in place as a puppet regime. In 1941 Ho Chi Minh, disguised as a Chinese journalist, slipped across the border into northern Vietnam from China and formed the Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi or “League for the Independence of Vietnam”, almost always referred to by the shortened version “Viet Minh”. The organization, with Ho as chairman, pledged to attack both the Japanese and French occupiers and, although it presented itself as an umbrella group of all parties fighting for Vietnam's independence, it was effectively an instrument of the Communist Party. During the Japanese occupation, the Viet Minh was able to organize a small armed force and work with the American Office of Strategic Services (the “OSS”, predecessor of the CIA) to collect intelligence on the Japanese. In August 1945, Japan's defeat created a power vacuum in which Vietnamese nationalists of all stripes sought to seize power. Collectively they forced Emperor Bao Dai to abdicate and by September 1945 the Viet Minh and other nationalists controlled most of the country.

## Post-World-War-II-Vietnam and the Cold War

On September 2, 1945 in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh proclaimed the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) using language borrowed from America's Declaration of Independence:

We hold the truth that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, among them life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Ho had also been inspired by the Atlantic Charter, issued in 1941 by the US and Great Britain, which had pledged “to see sovereign rights and self-government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them.” President Roosevelt was viscerally opposed to the restoration of French or British colonial power after World War II, but under pressure to keep the Allied alliance together, he took inconsistent positions. In 1942 for example, in order to motivate General De Gaulle to fight the Germans, he promised the return to France of all its overseas dominions after the war. Two years later, observing that France had “milked Indochina for one hundred years” leaving its people “worse off than they were at the beginning”, he proposed that, rather than being returned to France, Indochina should be placed under an international trusteeship leading to eventual independence. Roosevelt's death in April 1945 drastically reduced the possibility that the US would take a principled anti-colonial stand.

After Ho's declaration of a Vietnamese republic in September 1945, Viet Minh rule was cut short by the Nationalist Chinese and British occupation forces which were anti-communist and supported the Viet Minh's political enemies. In 1946, Vietnam held its first National Assembly election, which was won by the Viet Minh in central and northern Vietnam, where they were strongest. The Viet Minh then drafted the first Vietnamese constitution and attempted to govern the country, but were thwarted by the turmoil that was engulfing Indochina. Violent conflict erupted everywhere: the French, who had replaced the British as an Allied occupying force, sought to regain power by military

force; Cochinchinese politicians formed a secessionist government; Communist and non-Communist forces battled each other, while Stalinists purged Trotskyists; and religious sects, gangsters, and assorted resistance groups created their own militias. Although the Viet Minh eventually suppressed all non-Communist parties, the French refused to recognize them as the government of an independent Vietnam.

Soon after Harry Truman was sworn in as president, a hardline response to the threat of international communism became the dominant theme of US foreign policy. This new focus was the result of at least four separate, but seemingly related developments: 1) the USSR's domination of Eastern Europe and the threatened expansion of communist power to Greece, Turkey and even the democracies of Western Europe; 2) the Communist victory in China; 3) the Korean War; and 4) Senator Joseph McCarthy's anti-communist crusade in the United States.

In such an atmosphere any potential US support for an independent Vietnam quickly vanished since: a) Ho was an avowed communist; and b) France had to be placated to minimize the possibility that the French Communist Party would be voted into power and the country would join the Communist Block. Indeed, after McCarthy accused the Democrats and others in the US government of treason for "losing China", it became politically impossible to argue that the Viet Minh were really more nationalist than communist. No US politician, especially no Democrat, wanted to be accused of "losing Vietnam". From that point on, the US treated Indochina and, more specifically Vietnam, strictly as another battleground in the global war against communism. So it was under the guise of anti-communism that the US provided the financial aid that made the French military's effort to recolonize the region possible. That aid totaled \$2.5 billion by 1954, more than the US provided France under the Marshall Plan.

### The First Indochina War (the "French War")

The full-scale armed conflict between the Viet Minh and France, subsequently named the First Indochina War by the Vietnamese, erupted in late 1946. Ignoring the political claims of the Viet Minh, the French formed a Provisional Central Government in 1948, reuniting Annam and Tonkin. With the addition of Cochinchina to the government in July 1949, France proclaimed the State of Vietnam as a semi-independent nation within the French Union. In a nod to Vietnamese nationalism, France installed former emperor Bao Dai as the nominal head of the new state, ostensibly offering a Vietnamese political alternative to Ho Chi Minh.

The war between the French and the Viet Minh continued and, despite massive American aid, France's attempt to dominate Vietnam militarily was unsuccessful. The French failed for two fundamental reasons: a) France had suffered a total, demoralizing defeat in World War II leaving its people weary of war; and b) the war Ho Chi Minh waged was one of attrition designed to inflict enough casualties to break the will of the French people: "You can kill ten of my men for every one I kill of yours, but even at those odds, you will lose and I will win."

Over a period of nine years, the French attempted to engage the Viet Minh in large-scale actions where superior Western firepower could annihilate the guerillas. But the Viet Minh wouldn't cooperate and, instead, waged a war of ambushes and retreats

where they took heavy casualties in order to inflict such casualties on the French that they would be demoralized and lose the will to carry on. The result was over 100,000 French dead, wounded, and missing. Finally in 1954, shortly after peace negotiations had begun in Geneva, the large-scale action France had long hoped for took place at Dien Bien Phu. To France's astonishment and horror, the Viet Minh successfully besieged the French forces, decimated their ranks, and forced them to surrender. The catastrophic defeat caused France to relinquish any hope of remaining in Vietnam.

## The Geneva Conference

Victory on the battlefield, however, did not translate into victory at the peace table where the Viet Minh failed to achieve the independent, united Vietnam they desired. The Korean War, which had recently ended, had persuaded the USSR and China, the Viet Minh's principal international sponsors, that, at least for the time being, they should avoid further confrontation with West. In addition, China, a traditional enemy of Vietnam, was less than enthusiastic about having a united Vietnam on its doorstep. As a result, both communist powers declined to support the Viet Minh's demand that Vietnam be recognized as an independent nation under Ho Chi Minh's leadership. Instead, the 1954 Geneva Conference divided Vietnam by a Demilitarized Zone ("DMZ") at roughly 17 degrees North Latitude, with Ho Chi Minh's communist government (the Democratic Republic of Vietnam), supported by the USSR and China, ruling the North from Hanoi and Ngo Dinh Diem's non-communist government (the Republic of Vietnam), supported by the United States, ruling the South from Saigon.

France, as well as some powerful voices in the Eisenhower Administration, the US Military, and the US Congress had strongly advocated American military intervention to rescue the besieged French garrison at Dien Bien Phu. But President Eisenhower, forcefully backed by Army Chief of Staff General Matthew Ridgeway, ultimately decided against using American airpower or ground troops. Although Eisenhower's decision was based in part on an understandable reluctance to embark on a ground war in Asia, especially in light of US experience in the recently concluded Korean War, and a realistic assessment of the limited effectiveness of air power, it is probable that he would have approved a US rescue effort if he had succeeded in persuading the British to join in.

Unfortunately, the reasons the US decided not to undertake direct military intervention in the First Indochina War were soon forgotten or ignored. Likewise, the divisions within the communist world exemplified by the refusal of China and Russia to back the Viet Minh in Geneva, as well as communist Yugoslavia's defiance of Stalin and the growing antagonism between the USSR and communist China, failed to influence orthodox US political doctrine that Communism was a global monolith receiving its marching orders directly from Moscow. America's failure to appreciate the tensions within international communism, to recognize the basis for the Viet Minh's strong appeal to Vietnamese nationalists, and to understand the military/political reasons for France's defeat in Indochina created an atmosphere in which the incremental commitment of US prestige

and military resources could slowly, almost unthinkingly, metamorphize into the what the Vietnamese variously called the Second Indochina War or the American War and what America called the Vietnam War.

## The Diem Era

Ngo Dinh Diem was a staunch Catholic and anti-communist nationalist whom Ho Chi Minh, in an attempt to expand support for his regime, had once asked to join the Viet Minh government. After Diem declined the offer, he was considered an enemy and the Viet Minh attempted to assassinate him in 1950. As a result, Diem left Vietnam and spent some time in the United States where he appeared to impress some officials including Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas and U.S. Representatives Mike Mansfield of Montana and John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts. Diem also won the support of Roman Catholic cardinal Francis Spellman.

In early 1954, the Vietnamese Emperor Bao Dai offered Diem the Prime Minister position in a new Vietnamese government and, after the French surrendered at Dien Bien Phu and the Geneva Conference began in April 1954, Diem returned to Vietnam to become Prime Minister. In 1956, Diem, backed by the US, refused to participate in the Vietnam-wide elections called for by the Geneva Accords, instead holding an election restricted to South Vietnam where he received 98% of the vote and defeated the former emperor Bao Dai. Despite widespread protests against the rigged election, Diem proclaimed the Republic of Vietnam with himself as president in October 1955.

Although the US didn't know much about Ngo Dinh Diem, except that he was an anti-Communist, and wasn't initially optimistic about his prospects, the Eisenhower Administration decided to provide South Vietnam with \$100,000,000 in aid in 1955. At the same time, the US Navy ferried hundreds of thousands of refugees, mainly Catholics, from North to South Vietnam and the US agreed to train the South Vietnamese army.

With the aid of the CIA, Diem succeeded in crushing two religious cults, the Hoa and the Cao Dai, which for years had maintained their own standing armies, as well as the Binh Xuyen, an armed criminal cartel that had controlled a large part of Saigon. In 1956 Diem's efforts to assert control were turned against the communists and in 1957 the Viet Minh, which South Vietnam's government had begun to disparage by calling it the Viet Cong ("Cong" for communist), struck back, assassinating more than 400 minor officials throughout South Vietnam. During this time America continued to provide equipment to the Army of South Vietnam ("ARVN") as well US military personnel to train the South Vietnamese on tactics and the use of the new weaponry. In July 1959, two American advisers, an officer and an NCO, were killed by the Viet Cong at Bien Hoa - - the first US casualties in the Vietnam War.

After his election to the US presidency, John Kennedy expanded Eisenhower's program of providing economic and military aid to the Diem regime. At the time America



continue to view Communism as a monolithic diabolical force whose expansion had to be resisted at any cost. Therefore, although neither the Eisenhower nor Kennedy administrations had a high opinion of Diem or his government, they praised and supported him because they couldn't find anyone better. The inherent deception in such a policy was epitomized by Vice President Lyndon Johnson's comparing Diem to Winston Churchill after concluding a fact-finding tour of Vietnam in 1961. When asked in an off-the-record interview whether he really meant the comparison, Johnson replied, "Shit, Diem's the only boy we got out there."

In 1962 Kennedy increased the number of US advisers from 700 to 12,000. In January 1963, the Vietcong badly defeated the ARVN at Ap Bac in the Mekong Delta, a battle in which American Lt. Colonel John Paul Vann participated. When Vann described to the press how poorly the ARVN had performed, he was vehemently contradicted by the American Ambassador in Saigon, who claimed it was actually an ARVN victory, and Vann was transferred back to the US shortly afterwards. Vann arrived in Washington, where he had been scheduled to brief the Joint-Chiefs-of-Staff on the military-political situation in South Vietnam. When General Maxwell Taylor, Chairman of the Joint-Chiefs-of-Staff learned of the less than optimistic content of Vann's presentation, the briefing was cancelled. In disgust, Vann retired from the Army.

## Regime Change

Diem's older brother, Ngo Dinh Thuc, was the Catholic archbishop of Hue and in early May 1963 a large public celebration was held in that city to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of Thuc's ordination to the priesthood. During the festivities many of the participants waved Papal banners, but a week later when the Buddhists of Hue assembled to celebrate the birthday of the Buddha, they were forbidden by the Catholic province chief to fly the Buddhist flag. As a result, the Buddhists mounted a protest and the ARVN, seeking to suppress it, opened fire and a large number of protesters, including eight children, were shot dead or trampled to death. Shortly afterward, a Buddhist priest doused himself with gasoline and set himself ablaze on a busy Saigon street, other self-immolations followed, and the protests spiraled out of Diem's control.

With the American media now focused on the Buddhist protests, Diem's harsh crackdown, and his sister-in-law's mocking references to "barbecues", the Kennedy Administration began to lose faith in the Diem regime. On November 1<sup>st</sup>, a coup instigated by American Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge and the CIA with the approval of Washington was carried out by the Vietnamese military. Diem and his brother Nhu were shot to death and four Vietnamese generals took control of the government. In 1963 the US sent \$500 million in aid to Vietnam and by year-end 15,000 American military advisers were in country. On November 22<sup>nd</sup> Kennedy was assassinated and Lyndon Johnson became the President of the United States.

## The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution - 1964

In January, General Nguyen Khan seized power in Saigon and installed General Minh, one of the four generals who had ousted Diem, as a figurehead chief of state. In July covert South Vietnamese maritime operations against North Vietnam were begun with the aid of the US Navy.

On August 2<sup>nd</sup> North Vietnamese patrol boats attacked the USS Maddox in the Gulf of Tonkin and two days later a similar “incident” was reported. Having been accused by Republican presidential candidate Barry Goldwater of being “soft on communism”, President Johnson wanted to take more aggressive action against North Vietnam, but felt he needed Congressional approval to do so. The Gulf of Tonkin incident provided a perfect opportunity and on August 7<sup>th</sup> Congress passed a joint resolution that empowered the President “to take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force, to assist any member or protocol state of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty [which included South Vietnam] requesting assistance in defense of its freedom.”

Although it later transpired that the government possessed reliable information that the second attack had not taken place, the substance of the resolution had been drafted months before the incident in anticipation of an armed clash, real or imagined, and the Johnson Administration seized the moment. The president later admitted how flimsy the basis of the resolution was, commenting privately: “For all I know, our Navy was shooting at whales out there.” Nevertheless, Johnson, who had previously resisted requests to bomb the North, immediately ordered US warplanes to attack North Vietnam and the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution served as the legal basis for an immensely escalated US military effort in Vietnam.

In November Johnson was elected president, defeating Barry Goldwater in a landslide.