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In 1971, America was fighting an undeclared war in Southeast Asia. Many people in the country did not support that war. From early American losses, during the Kennedy Administration, through the final U.S. withdrawal, U.S. citizens wondered what the fighting was about - and why *they* were doing it.

Interestingly, American help was first sought from the enemy himself - Ho Chi Minh - when he sent a telegram to President Truman in 1946. No American troops were sent into Vietnam at that time, however. It wasn't until later, after Vietnam split in two, that the Eisenhower administration sent its first "advisors" to South Vietnam in 1955.

By that time, Ho Chi Minh's request for help had been granted by America's adversaries. The stage was set for possible confrontation.

When President Kennedy took office his Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, tried to determine whether American involvement in Southeast Asia was wise. By 1963, McNamara and General Maxwell Taylor (Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) had learned some interesting facts:

- Students in South Vietnam did not support their government;
- Internal discontent with the South Vietnamese regime had "become a seething problem;
- The war could not be won without a change of leadership in South Vietnam;
- South Vietnam could not win a war against the North without American help;
- The "Viet Cong" were "putting up a formidable fight;
- There wasn't much support for the South Vietnamese government;
- "This is a Vietnamese war and the country and the war must, in the end, be run solely by the Vietnamese"
- The Vietnamese people didn't care who won the war - they simply wanted peace.

McNamara and Taylor even recommended that 1,000 American advisors be pulled out of Vietnam by the end of 1963. They believed U.S. involvement in the volatile political situation could be over by 1965 and recognized

...any significant slowing in the rate of progress would surely have a serious effect on U.S. popular support for the U.S. effort.

During the Kennedy Administration (and those Administrations which followed) neither the press nor the public was told about those key points. Significant developments and events in Vietnam seemed to take on a different character by the time news reached the people.

As American non-combat military "advisors" assigned to Vietnam were getting killed, however, families of dead soldiers didn't like what they learned:

- If their sons and brothers weren't fighting, why were they dying?
- And ... why were they in Vietnam in the first place?

One family demanded some answers from the President.

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Media Stream



Vietnam War Protesters

Image online, courtesy the U.S. National Archives.

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Ho Chi Minh - Photo

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Ho Chi Minh at the Party Congress

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Robert McNamara

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