UNSC: The Vietnam War

Letter from the Chair

Hello Everyone,

My name is Faith Farley and I will be chairing the UNSC: Vietnam war for WAMUNC XXVIII! I'm really excited to chair this committee because of my experience in UNSC's on the collegiate MUN circuit, and hope you all love the weird UNSC format as much as I do! I'm also very passionate about this committee's topic!

I am originally from Syracuse, New York and moved to Washington D.C to attend college at The George Washington University. I am a Senior (unc) at the Elliott School of International Affairs double majoring in International Affairs and Political Science, double Minoring in Peace Studies and History and triple concentrating in Security Policy, European and Eurasian Studies, and Comparative Political, Economic, and Social Systems. I am also Head Delegate of the George Washington University Model United Nations Travel Team, and have enjoyed traveling to collegiate conferences around the country! Outside of school, I work as a government relations intern for a higher education non-profit, the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers. In my free time I enjoy taking walks on the National Mall and trying out new coffee shops and restaurants.

Best Wishes,

Faith Farley

Procedure

This committee will operate as a double delegate hybrid committee, with Thursday and Friday being operated as a traditional crisis and Saturday operating as a general assembly style committee. Due to the format of this committee, crisis arcs should be accelerated, with delegates planning to have them finished by the last session on Friday. On Saturday morning, after the crisis section has concluded, delegates will receive the general assembly topic which will be debated for the remainder of the committee. As always, writing and working outside of committee is prohibited. I urge you all to uphold decorum during the committee and make friends with other delegates from different schools. I can't wait to see what you all come up with!

When planning crisis arcs I encourage delegates to use creative or funny means to implement a grounded or realistic end goal. Considering the accelerated nature of the crisis portion of the committee you are allowed to ask for more in each crisis note and advance your arc quickly. The Vietnam war is a sensitive topic that impacted thousands directly and indirectly across the war. Crisis note should NOT involve any of the following topics: genocide, war crimes, religious violence, mass atrocities, violence against civilians, women, or children. If you would not want your guardian to read it, don't write it! If you have any questions regarding the content of this committee or the scope of your crisis arc please don't hesitate to contact me. If you have any procedural questions, please email me at faith_farley17@gwu.edu.

Background

The Vietnam War (November 1955 - April 1975) was an armed conflict in Vietnam between the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam) and the Republic of Vietnam

(South Vietnam) and each side's allies. North Vietnam was supported by China and the Soviet Union, while South Vietnam was supported by western nations and the United States. This conflict served as a proxy war for the United States and Soviet Union during the Cold War.[1] The fighting between the groups mainly took place between the North Vietnam aligned groups: the North Vietnamese People's Army of Vietnam and Viet Cong, and the South Vietnam aligned: South Vietnamese Army of the Republic of Vietnam, the United States Armed Force, and other western allies.[2] This committee takes place on February 1st 1968 directly following the Tet Offensive with the committee being tasked with addressing the myriad of challenges that arose in Vietnam, creating a path to build peace in a deeply divided nation.

The Tet Offensive began on January 30, 1968. The Tet Offensive was a campaign by the North Vietnamese People's Army of Vietnam and Viet Cong against South Vietnam in the I and II Corps Tactical Zones. Main operations took place early on January 31st, with more than 80,000 Viet Cong troops attacking more than 100 towns and cities throughout South Vietnam.[3] These attacks crippled the South Vietnamese sense of security and marked a turning point in the war. While before the Tet Offensive the Viet Cong were winning, their leadership grew discontent with their progress in the war, threatened by the increase in American soldiers they decided to attack to cripple the Saigon government and destroy the American's hopes of success.[4] These attacks took the Americans and South Vietnamese by surprise, with the
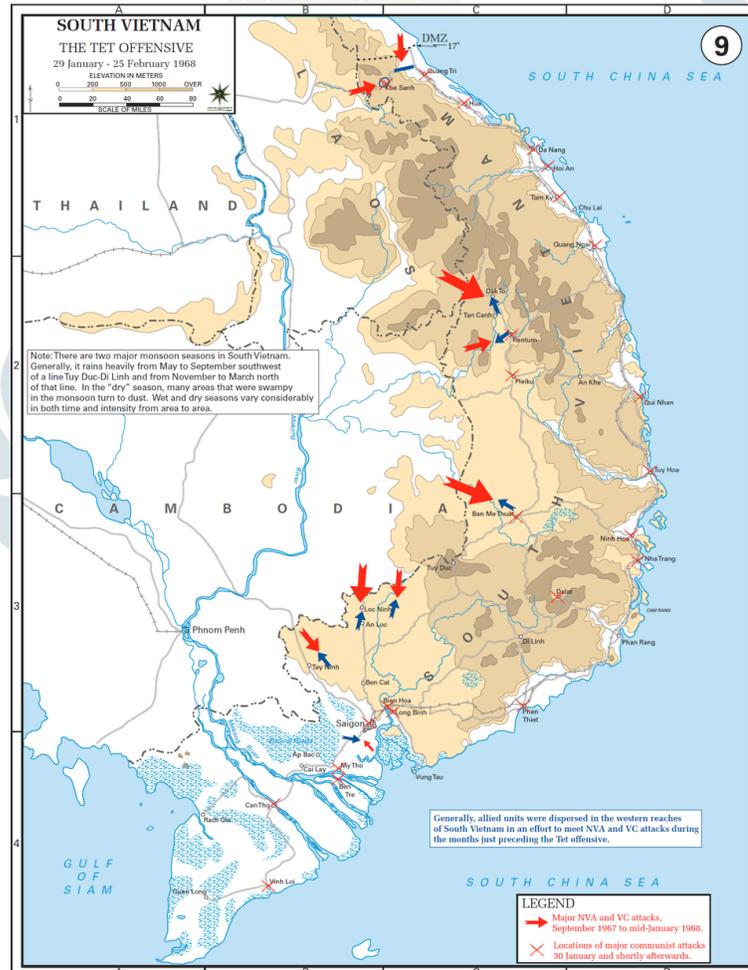
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[1] Miller E, Nguyen L-HT. Introduction: Points of Departure – The Global and Local Origins of the Vietnam War. In: Miller E, ed. The Cambridge History of the Vietnam War. The Cambridge History of the Vietnam War. Cambridge University Press; 2024:8-24.

[2] "Vietnam War - Tet Offensive, Homefront Impact, US Defeat ." Britannica. Accessed February 5, 2026. https://www.britannica.com/event/Vietnam-War/Tet-brings-the-war-home.

[3] "Vietnam War - Tet Offensive, Homefront Impact, US Defeat ." Britannica. Accessed February 5, 2026. https://www.britannica.com/event/Vietnam-War/Tet-brings-the-war-home.

[4] "U.S. Involvement in the Vietnam War: The Tet Offensive, 1968." U.S. Department of State. Accessed February 4, 2026. https://history.state.gov/milestones/1961-1968/tet.

Americans attempting to fight back but failing to coordinate and mount an effective counter offensive. Even though the Viet Cong were initially successful they were quickly pushed out of the towns they overtook, however the destructive nature of the attacks shook the United States and South Vietnamese confidence. Domestically many countries fighting in the proxy war were experiencing civilian protests against the war. In the United States students, intellectuals, and academics opposed the war on moral groups and due to the large number of Vietnamese civilian casualties and American casualties. These protests grew across the globe due to a myriad of reasons and should be considered in the broader scope of the conflict.[5]

[5] "Vietnam War - Tet Offensive, Homefront Impact, US Defeat." Britannica. Accessed February 5, 2026. https://www.britannica.com/event/Vietnam-War/Tet-brings-the-war-home.

Humanitarian Crisis in Vietnam

After the Tet Offensive, Vietnam faced a widespread humanitarian crisis with many civilians displaced without temporary or permanent shelter. The aftermath of the Tet Offensive saw people fleeing fighting in large cities like Saigon, into less populated areas that lacked the resources to support the large influx of refugees. Over 75,000 homes were destroyed or damaged, creating around 670,00 refugees resulting in the total displacement of over 1.5 million people.[6] While a few internal refugee camps exist within Vietnam, many of them were overburdened and lacked adequate resources to support the population of displaced persons. These internal refugee camps were not formalized or centralized, and were often created by displaced persons. The lack of international refugee camps both in Vietnam and in neighboring countries like Laos, Cambodia and Thailand has exacerbated the humanitarian crisis.[7] International groups have called for the creation of international refugee camps to minimize human suffering however these demands have not been fulfilled. On top of the lack of refugee camps, there is a serious lack of resources for displaced persons with many lacking access to essential goods like food, clean water, and shelter. Currently there is no system to distribute any aid to displaced refugees and as such many have to resort to stealing to survive. Overall the lack of resources and formal refugee camps both in Vietnam and in neighboring countries has increased human suffering and civilian casualties within the region.

Barriers to Peace

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[6] "Tet Offensive | Facts, Casualties, Videos, & Significance | Britannica." Tet Offensive. Accessed January 6, 2026. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Tet-Offensive.

[7] "Tet Offensive | Facts, Casualties, Videos, & Significance | Britannica." Tet Offensive. Accessed January 6, 2026. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Tet-Offensive.

In the aftermath of the Tet Offensive attempts at building peace within Vietnam were fraught and difficult, with several barriers preventing substantive peace talks from occurring between North Vietnam and South Vietnam. Peace negotiations were influenced by the Tet Offensive, as political and military calculations dramatically changed in North Vietnam and South Vietnam. The Tet was a military defeat for North Vietnam, but psychologically, it was a victory that undermined American public support for the war effort and prompted Washington to negotiate more speedily. This decrease in U.S. support created an opening that North Vietnam attempted to exploit militarily and politically. However, this haste was not necessarily in line with the interests of North or South Vietnam. North Vietnam saw the aftermath of the Tet Offensive as an opportunity for exploiting American political pressure in order to wring concessions, while South Vietnam feared U.S. eagerness for talks may lead to results that eroded its sovereignty or security. These concerns minimized both sides' willingness to negotiate due to fear of exploitation.

Another major complication lay in North Vietnam's "talk-fight" strategy, in which negotiations were used not as a path to compromise but as another front in the war effort. According to documentation from the Wilson Center, Hanoi believed that talks could ease pressure from U.S. bombing while it continued military operations on the ground. It also meant that North Vietnam felt little incentive early on to make meaningful concessions. In contrast, South Vietnam, the victim of continued communist offensives, took these actions as clear evidence that the North was negotiating in bad faith.[8] These actions meant that meaningful

[8] Pribbenow, ByMerle, and ByFilip Kovacevic. "North Vietnam's 'Talk-Fight' Strategy and the 1968 Peace Negotiations with the United States." Wilson Center. Accessed February 4, 2026. https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/north-vietnams-talk-fight-strategy-and-the-1968-peace-negotiations-the-united-states#:~:text=However%2C%20our%20Vietnamese%20revolution%20has,victory%20in%20the%20August%20Revolution.

negotiations were not undertaken as both sides were disingenuous in their desires for peace. As such it has fallen to the UNSC to help develop systems or strategies through which peace negotiations can ensue. Addressing these barriers is of the utmost importance to ensuring that lasting peace can be created between North Vietnam and South Vietnam to minimize human suffering within the region. While UNSC should work to minimize these barriers, delegates should ensure they are respecting both nations' sovereignties and not violating international norms through their actions.

In addition to the barriers to peace between North Vietnam and South Vietnam, the Cold War played a large part in inflaming the tensions and exacerbating the conflict, incentivizing the U.S. and USSR to continue the conflict. During the Cold War the threat of Nuclear War loomed over the U.S. and USSR so to avoid nuclear destruction the Cold War was fought through proxy wars between capitalism and communism. In the case of the Vietnam War the U.S. backed South Vietnam while the Soviet Union backed North Vietnam.[9] This international support exacerbated the conflict and increased civilian casualties and suffering, while simultaneously disincentivizing either side from pursuing substantive peace. The ideological aspect of the Vietnam war is crucial to incorporate into peace mediations, ensuring that the wishes of the Vietnamese people are respected over those of global superpowers. Additionally, justice is another aspect of peace that should be considered. After war countries and their citizens must go through a difficult rebuilding and redefinition process, redefining their sense of national identity and nationhood. In the case of Vietnam should the two halves be reunified or should North and South Vietnam

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[9] "The Vietnam War." The Vietnam War - The Cold War (1945–1989) - CVCE website. Accessed February 4, 2026.
https://www.cvce.eu/en/education/unit-content/-/unit/55c09dcc-a9f2-45e9-b240-eaef64452cae/5ad21c97-4435-4fd0-89ff-b6bddf117bf4.

remain separate? Delegates should consider all of the factors above when discussing the path to peace for the Vietnamese people.
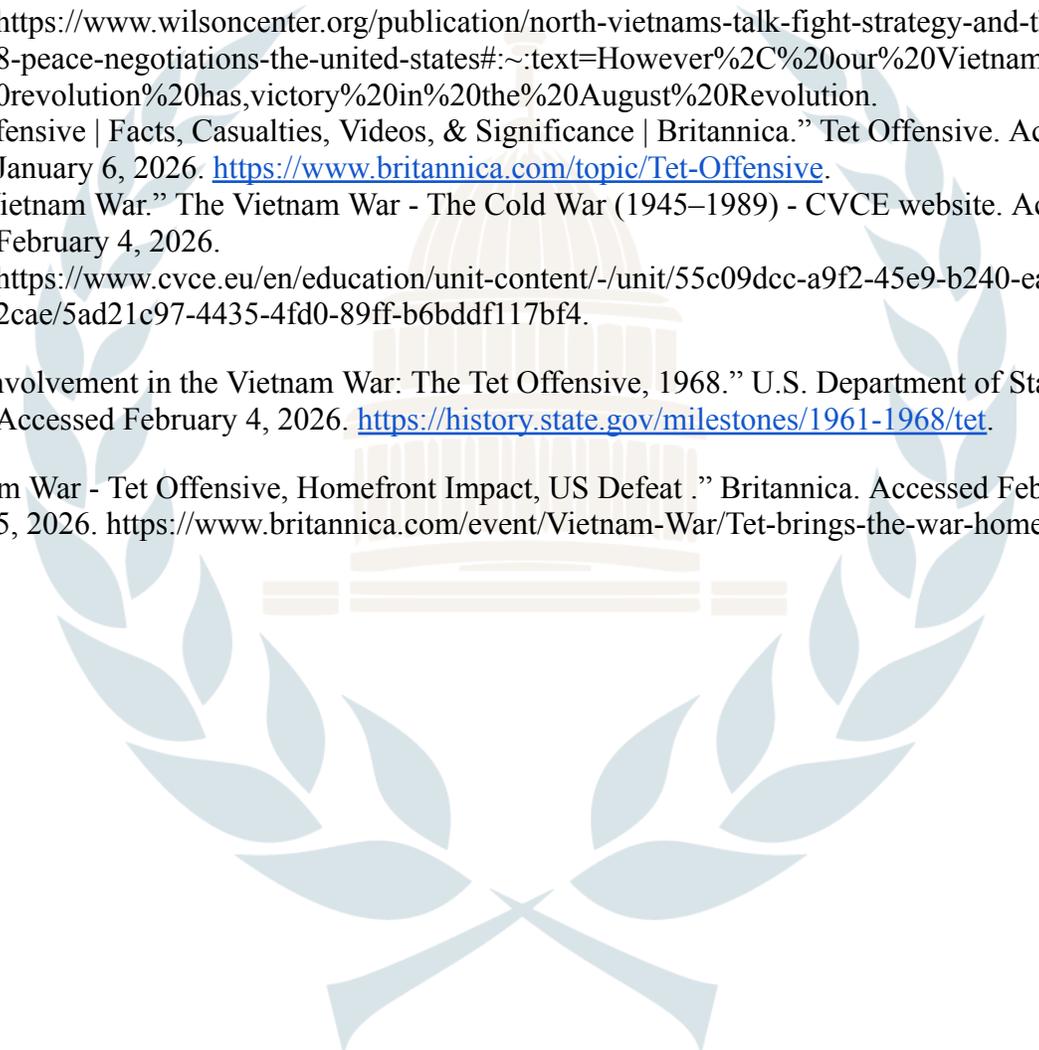
Questions to Consider

- How should the UNSC work to minimize human suffering in Vietnam and support displaced persons?
- Does the risk of retaliation from the great nuclear powers, the United States and Soviet Union, restrain or encourage states actions?
- What considerations should be made regarding the Cold War's impact on the Vietnam War?
- Do other proxy conflicts in Asia and Africa influence states' actions regarding the ongoing conflict?
- Is peace possible? What steps need to be taken to create a stable peace with Vietnam?
- What steps need to be taken to minimize civilian casualties during the Vietnam War?
- Should Vietnam be reunified or remain as two separate states?

Positions

- Soviet Union
- United States
- Republic of China
- France
- United Kingdom
- Algeria

- Brazil

- Canada

- Denmark

- Ethiopia

- Hungary

- India

- Pakistan

- Paraguay

- Senegal

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"U.S. Involvement in the Vietnam War: The Tet Offensive, 1968." U.S. Department of State. Accessed February 4, 2026. https://history.state.gov/milestones/1961-1968/tet.

"Vietnam War - Tet Offensive, Homefront Impact, US Defeat ." Britannica. Accessed February 5, 2026. https://www.britannica.com/event/Vietnam-War/Tet-brings-the-war-home.