

Cold War Flashpoints

A series of international incidents between the late 1950s and the 1980s caused the Cold War to heat up. Each of these flashpoints added to the antagonism between East and West and heightened fears of a Third World War.

FLASHPOINT: THE HUNGARIAN REVOLUTION, 1956

Stalin's death in March 1953 opened the door to new leadership and opportunity for the Soviet Union. When Nikita Khrushchev finally emerged as the new leader, he openly criticized Stalin's legacy in a policy of "de-Stalinization" that proved popular at home and around the world.

Khrushchev's speeches at the Twentieth Communist Party Congress in 1956 denouncing Stalin unleashed a great deal of hope in the world and raised expectations for nations in the communist bloc. Khrushchev called for greater individual liberty and denounced the role of the secret police. He also questioned

Stalin's belief that the Soviet Union was the centre of communism. This suggested that the satellite nations could experiment with their own brand of communism, as Marshal Josip Broz Tito in Yugoslavia had been doing since 1948 (see Chapter Seven).

Hardline Stalinists in Soviet bloc nations felt threatened by Khrushchev's new approach and its effects. In Poland, for example, the Stalinist leader, Boleslaw Bierut, was replaced by the popular leader, Wladyslaw Gomulka. Gomulka had been imprisoned by the government in 1951 because he favoured social and economic reforms to reduce Soviet control of his country. Khrushchev confronted Gomulka in a dramatic face-to-face meeting in which the Polish leader stood firm while promising to remain within the Warsaw Pact and friendly to the USSR. Khrushchev analysed the situation and agreed. Gomulka could stay, and Poland was given elbow room to develop its own national brand of communism.

Inspired by the success of Poland, the people of Hungary began to call for similar



Figure 5.7

Rebels wave the Hungarian flag from a Soviet tank captured in the main square in front of the houses of parliament in Budapest on 2 November 1956.

changes. Intellectuals demanded more freedom and a return to true socialist values and ideals. Workers wanted better wages and working conditions. Hungarian nationalists railed against Soviet domination and influence. A wave of resentment rose against the brutality, incompetence, and corruption of the Hungarian Communist regime.

On 23 October 1956, 50 000 Hungarians gathered in front of the Polish embassy in their capital city, Budapest. Their new prime minister, Erno Gero, spoke to the crowd. The throng was expecting some statements about change and freedom, but Gero lectured them instead. The mob became enraged, destroying a large statue of Stalin and battling with the police. As the situation deteriorated and violence spread, Prime Minister Gero was replaced by Imre Nagy,

who was much more sympathetic to change. Pushed by events, and misreading the extent of support from the US, Nagy made the fatal error of announcing that Hungary would withdraw from the Warsaw Pact to become a neutral, multi-party democracy. This was a step too far for the Soviet Union. On November 4, Soviet tanks and troops moved into Budapest to crush the revolution.

Soon the world was faced with images and reports of savage fighting in the streets of Budapest. Hungarian freedom fighters, the hated secret police, and Soviet soldiers all committed acts of cruelty and brutality. Corpses hung from lampposts, soldiers were burned alive in their vehicles, and civilians were cut down in crossfires. Some Hungarian freedom fighters were little more than children waging a hopeless war against heavily armed, seasoned soldiers and tanks. The revolution was soon smashed; Nagy, the Communist rebel, was executed, and a pro-Soviet government was restored under Janos Kadar.

All of this took place with little response from the West or the United Nations. Hungary's calls for assistance went largely unheeded. The West was in the middle of the Suez Crisis and was focused on the Middle East. Also, many in the West considered this a distant internal battle among communists.

The use of force in Hungary was seen by many in the West as proof of Soviet aggression. The Soviet Union, meanwhile, claimed that it had been invited by Hungarian Communists to intervene. The Soviets were not deterred by American power from crushing Hungary. They had acted to make sure that a buffer state stayed friendly. Hungary was in their sphere of influence, and the fact that the US was not prepared to fight over Hungary signalled acceptance of that reality.

FLASHPOINT:**CZECHOSLOVAKIA, 1968**

On 19 November 1956, reflecting on the recent brutal end of the Hungarian revolution, journalist Milovan Djilas wrote, "The Hungarian revolution blazed a path which, sooner or later, other communist countries must follow." These prophetic words came true 12 years later in the nearby country of Czechoslovakia. While the time and place were different, the issue was the same: Can Soviet bloc nations break free of Soviet control? And, as in the Hungarian revolution, the answer was no.

The crisis in Czechoslovakia had its roots in the bitter Sino-Soviet dispute of the 1960s. When China became a communist state in 1949 it was not prepared to simply be a member of the Soviet bloc. For example, China wanted the atomic bomb, but the Soviets insisted on joint controls, which the Chinese refused. Then, as Khrushchev consolidated his power and offered détente to the West (see page 168), Mao became suspicious. Was the Soviet Union secretly forming an alliance with the West against China? The final straw was their conflicting policies toward Tibet. In 1959 China was denounced by the West for brutally crushing a pro-independence rebellion in Tibet. China was greatly annoyed to find the Soviets offering symbolic public support for Tibet. By 1960 the Sino-Soviet dispute escalated into a series of serious border confrontations that continued into the 1970s.

The Sino-Soviet rift gave nations in the Soviet bloc an opportunity to play one side against the other. Albania and Romania openly condemned Soviet policy and joined the unofficial Chinese communist bloc. The Soviets did not act, however, since these countries maintained strongly repressive communist

regimes. But when Czechoslovakia challenged Soviet control, the revolution was crushed. Czechoslovakia crossed the line by offering liberal communism and national independence.

Czechoslovakia was led by an old Stalinist, Antonin Novotny, until he was overthrown by Alexander Dubcek in January 1968. While claiming allegiance to Moscow, Dubcek announced a policy of "socialism with a human face." He promised the people a less repressive and more efficient government where workers would have a greater say in running their factories. The Soviets were willing to accept moderate changes, but the people of Czechoslovakia began to demand more freedoms. In the spring, Dubcek presented an action program that included freedom of speech, a free press, free elections, and closer ties with the West. This program resulted in what became known as the "Prague Spring" as people began to exercise their new rights. Unlike other Eastern European countries, Czechoslovakia had been a democracy from 1918 to 1938, and this apparent return to democracy was a dream come true for the population. Small and large groups gathered to celebrate and debate the future of their country.

It was clear that the Communist Party in Czechoslovakia would not win in a free election and that a non-communist government would want to leave the Soviet bloc. This in turn could cause a ripple effect on the other East European countries. The Soviet press began to criticize the Czech leadership, demanding that they act against the "enemies of socialism." On 20 August 1968, Leonid Brezhnev ordered 500 000 Warsaw Pact troops into Czechoslovakia on the basis of what became known as the **Brezhnev Doctrine**. This doctrine stated that intervention was justified by communist bloc

forces in any communist country threatened by internal or external forces "hostile to socialism."

Unlike in the Hungarian revolution,

there was little organized resistance to this overwhelming force. Dubcek was removed from office and assigned a minor role in the government.



Figure 5.8

Soviet tanks move in to occupy downtown Prague in August 1968.

In Review

1. What is meant by "de-Stalinization"?
2. What caused the Soviet intervention in Hungary?
3. Why didn't the West send in troops to help win freedom for Hungary?
4. In what way did the Sino-Soviet dispute encourage dissent within the Eastern European Soviet bloc nations?
5. In what ways were the Czechoslovakian and Hungarian revolutions the same? In what ways were they different?

FLASHPOINT: THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS, 1962

The island of Cuba, 150 km off the Florida coast, had long been an American military, political, and economic stronghold. By 1945, Americans owned 90 per cent of the country's mineral wealth, 80 per cent of its utilities, and 40 per cent of its sugar cane fields. The island was ruled by the corrupt dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista until a young socialist revolutionary named Fidel Castro succeeded in ousting the regime in 1959.

When Castro took power he promised free elections, but none were ever held. Instead, Castro set out to contain all opposition to his regime through government control of the media, the trade unions, and the University of Havana. Those who opposed Castro's government had three alternatives: silence, imprisonment, or exile.

Castro also moved quickly to rid the country of foreign interests and regain control of Cuba's economy. Economic policy was centralized under a planning authority controlled by Castro. Private businesses, which were mostly foreign-owned, were **nationalized**. Some US\$1 billion in property owned by Americans was confiscated. In order to redistribute property to the poor, all large estates were expropriated and divided into plots for small landowners. Extensive public housing projects were undertaken, and education and health care were made available to all Cubans at government expense. In time, Castro's regime succeeded in creating a first-class health care system and an education system unequalled in Latin America. His socialist policies, however, pitted the island nation against the United States.

American investors and their government were outraged at the confiscation of American property. In retaliation,

President Dwight Eisenhower imposed a trade embargo on Cuba (an embargo that continues to the present day [2003]). American goods could not be exported to Cuba, nor could Cuban goods be imported to the United States. In need of economic and political support, Castro found a willing ally in the Soviet Union, which saw an opportunity to gain an outpost close to the United States. The USSR bought huge quantities of sugar from Cuba and gave large sums of money for the purchase of equipment. The Soviets also began to ship military weapons and personnel to the Caribbean island. Threats and economic pressure from the United States only served to push Castro closer to the Soviets and to embrace communism more fully. Finally, in 1961, Eisenhower severed diplomatic relations with Cuba.

It wasn't long before armed confrontation between the superpowers was ignited in Cuba. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had trained a small army of Cuban exiles; their mission was to overthrow Castro. On 17 April 1961, 1500 exiles landed in Cuba at the Bay of Pigs. The invasion was a disaster as Cuban troops quickly rounded up the invaders.

The Bay of Pigs incident embarrassed the United States and its new president, John F. Kennedy. Perhaps more significantly, however, the abortive invasion strengthened Cuba's ties to the Soviet Union. Soviet weapons were deployed to defend Cuba from another invasion. But between August and October 1962, American intelligence sources and spy plane photographs revealed that something much more sinister was being shipped to Cuba. On October 22, Kennedy announced that the United States had proof that Cuba was building missile sites that could be used to launch Soviet nuclear weapons at the US. Kennedy took a firm stand. He ordered a naval blockade of

"It shall be the policy of this nation to regard any nuclear missile launched from Cuba against any nation in the Western Hemisphere as an attack by the Soviet Union on the United States requiring a full retaliatory response upon the Soviet Union."

— John F. Kennedy, in an address to the nation, 22 October 1961

"They talk about who won and who lost. Human reason won. Mankind won."

— Nikita Khrushchev, 1962

Cuba. No ships would be allowed into or out of Cuban ports.

Ready to launch a nuclear war, the two superpowers were poised, as Kennedy said, at "the abyss of destruction." This was a classic example of brinkmanship.

The Soviets called the American reaction a "crude form of blackmail" and warned that "if the aggressors unleash a war, the Soviet Union will strike a mighty retaliatory blow." But in reality the Soviets were in a difficult position. The missile sites had been discovered before they were completed and so posed no real threat to the United States. The Americans would have the advantage,

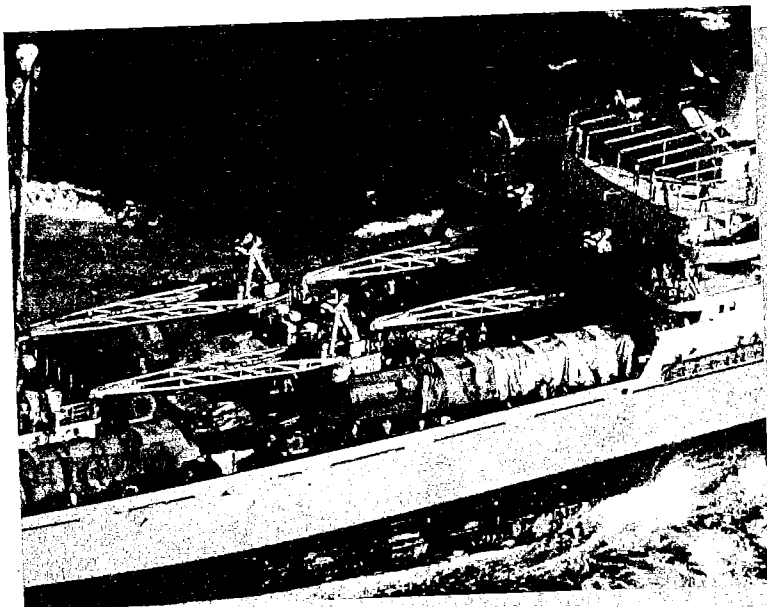


Figure 5.9

The world was on the brink of nuclear war when the Soviet Union attempted to establish a nuclear missile base in Cuba. US aerial reconnaissance shows Soviet missiles aboard a ship bound for Cuba. To find out how the US was able to get pictures of the missile sites, go to www.weblearn.ca and click on the "NORAD" module then open the "1960s" reading.

while the Soviets would be caught in a fight far from home on the enemy's doorstep. Their plan had backfired. But now what were they to do about it?

At first, Khrushchev threatened retaliation. But behind the scenes, Kennedy's brother Robert, the US Attorney General, met with the Soviet ambassador to the US on October 27 to present an ultimatum: remove the missiles by the following day or the US would remove them by force. In return, Kennedy guaranteed that the US would not invade Cuba and assured the Soviets that the US had already decided to remove its missiles from Turkey.

In response, Khrushchev wrote directly to the president to negotiate a settlement. He offered to withdraw the missiles if the Americans guaranteed they would not invade Cuba. For Khrushchev it was a face-saving measure. Each side could now withdraw with honour. The missiles were removed and the crisis ended.

While each side claimed success, American Secretary of State Dean Rusk expressed the situation accurately when he said "We were eyeball to eyeball, and I think the other fellow just blinked." The crisis had shown the perils of courting catastrophe. Both sides knew there could be no victory in a nuclear war.

The Cuban Missile Crisis highlighted the need for closer international communications. In response, the famous **hotline** was established between the leaders of the two superpowers. In the event of another major crisis, the two leaders would be able to talk to each other immediately and directly.

MAP STUDY

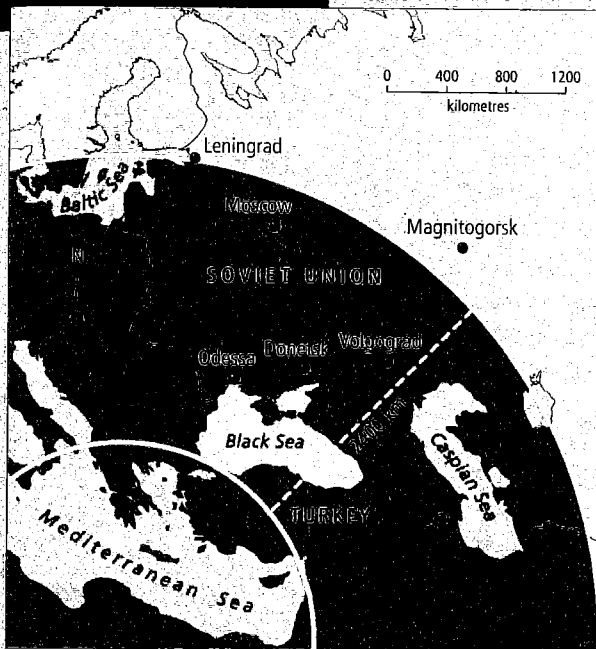


Figure 5.10
US Missile Sites in Turkey



Figure 5.11
Range of Cuban Missile Sites If Built

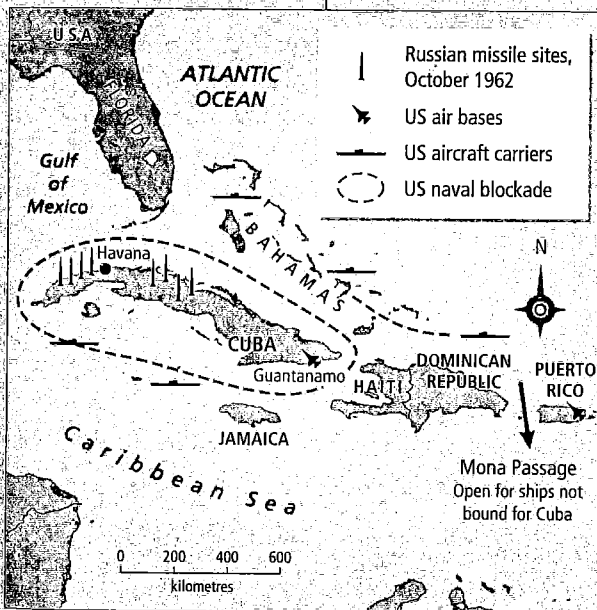


Figure 5.12
US Naval Blockade of Cuba
During the Missile Crisis

These maps show the range of nuclear missiles in Turkey and Cuba. The location of the missile sites directly threatened the superpowers.

Interpreting

1. The withdrawal of missiles from Turkey was downplayed in the US and given prominence in the USSR. Explain why you think this was the case.
2. Compare the proximity of Turkey to the USSR, and Cuba to the US, in Figures 5.10 and 5.11. Do you think the Soviets were justified in trying to place missiles in Cuba?
3. Estimate the distance from the blockade line to Cuba in Figure 5.12. Do you think Kennedy would have authorized the destruction of the Soviet fleet if it had crossed the line? Do you think both leaders were guilty of pursuing a policy of brinkmanship in this conflict?

FLASHPOINT: THE WAR IN VIETNAM

The French had controlled the colony of Indochina (Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia) since the 1860s. During the Second World War, however, nationalism swept through this corner of Southeast Asia. The British and Dutch reluctantly accepted the inevitability of their colonies gaining independence. The French, on the other hand, were determined to keep theirs and to fight the local nationalist forces.

The Indochinese were led by Ho Chi Minh, a popular nationalist and communist leader who had been seeking Vietnamese independence for more than 25 years. He led his forces using classic **guerrilla warfare** tactics against the French: controlling the countryside, fighting small hit-and-run battles, using sabotage, and winning the support of the local people. In 1954, the main French forces were surrounded at Dienbienphu and forced to surrender. This marked the end of French control in the region. But it would prove to be far easier to win a victory on the battlefields than to create a lasting peace.

Following the Vietnamese victory, a peace conference was held in Geneva, Switzerland. It was agreed that Vietnam would be divided temporarily at the 17th parallel and that elections to reunite the country would be held by 1956. North Vietnam, under Ho Chi Minh, established a communist state. With American support, the South established a government under Ngo Dinh Diem, an ardent anti-communist and willing puppet of American policy. Diem refused to allow the elections to be held, and Vietnam remained divided into two separate and hostile states.

North Vietnam realized that an invasion of the South would provoke foreign intervention, as had happened in Korea in

1950. So instead of invading, North Vietnam began to actively support the Viet Cong communist opposition groups in the South. By 1959, the Viet Cong guerrilla forces were launching major attacks throughout the South.

American Intervention in Vietnam

At first, the Americans stayed on the sidelines of France's Indochina conflict. However, the communist victory in China, the strengthening of the communist regime in North Korea, and tensions with the USSR in Europe led the Americans to adopt a more aggressive stance. In 1954, President Eisenhower proposed the **domino theory** to explain the spread of communism. According to this theory, the fall of one nation to communism leads to the fall of the adjacent country, and so on, like a row of dominos. Thus, it was feared that if the US allowed Vietnam to fall to communism, Laos, Cambodia, and other nations in the region would follow.

In 1960, the US sent 800 military advisors to help the South Vietnamese army. Under Kennedy, the number of personnel was expanded to 16 000. However, the South Vietnamese army was still unsuccessful in containing the communist forces.

With Kennedy's assassination on 22 November 1963, Lyndon Johnson assumed the presidency. Johnson did not want to be accused of being "soft" on communism, nor did he want to be the only American president to lose a war. He was determined to take a hardline approach. In 1964, American naval vessels in the Gulf of Tonkin were allegedly fired upon by the North Vietnamese. (Recent documents indicate that American naval forces may have provoked the incident.) Johnson used the Gulf of Tonkin incident as justification "to take all necessary measures to repel

MAP STUDY

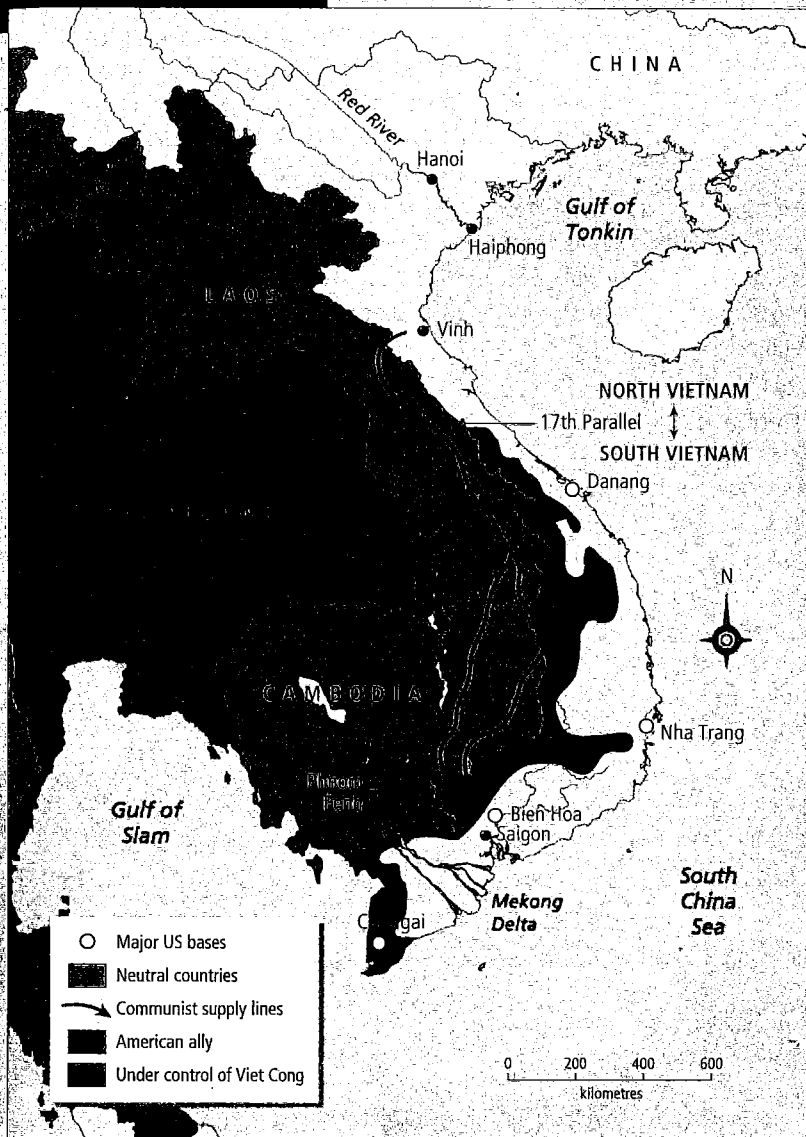


Figure 5.15
Vietnam War, 1960 to 1973

Note that the North Vietnam forces used the neutral countries of Laos and Cambodia for their supply lines. American bombing of these neutral countries to stop the flow of supplies caused international condemnation.

Interpreting

1. Note the locations of the major US bases. What reasons can you suggest for these locations?
2. Compare the American and North Vietnamese strategies for fighting the war. Which strategy proved more successful?

"As Ed Murrow once said about Vietnam, anyone who isn't confused doesn't really understand the situation."

— Walter Bryan,
The Improbable Irish, 1969

"Television brought the brutality of war into the comfort of the living room. Vietnam was lost in the living rooms of America—not on the battlefields of Vietnam."

— Marshall McLuhan,
Canadian communications
theorist and cultural critic

armed attack and to prevent further aggression." From the American perspective this was a **limited war**; that is, a war that did not involve the total effort of the nation, as did, for example, the Second World War. In fact, no formal declaration of war was ever issued, although the conflict gradually escalated into a full-scale war in all but name. By 1965, more than 500 000 American troops were in Vietnam, accompanied by squadrons of helicopters, fighters, and bombers.

The North and South Vietnamese forces were not evenly matched. Typical of other puppet regimes, South Vietnam was hindered by corruption and the lack of popular support. It was never able to mount an effective fighting force. The North Vietnamese, however, were trained and equipped by China and the Soviet Union. The Viet Cong were backed by troops from the regular North Vietnamese forces. Massive American bombing raids

on the North killed some two million civilians, but they could not stop the flow of troops and equipment southward along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. When the Viet Cong lost large numbers of fighters in the Tet Offensive in 1968, North Vietnamese regular troops assumed a larger role in the fighting. In spite of their losses, North Vietnam was determined to continue the fight, believing time was on its side.

In the end, the United States, the most powerful military force in the world, lost the war in Vietnam. The reasons lie in the nature of the conflict. Ho Chi Minh and his followers were fighting a traditional war of liberation. They had fought the Japanese, the French, then the Americans. They were fighting for their homeland and their culture. They appealed to the people, who supported them as defenders from yet another group of foreigners. The Americans, on the other hand, were fighting for the abstract idea of "stopping communist



Figure 5.16

North Vietnamese president Ho Chi Minh (right) sought and received aid from Communist China's leader Mao Zedong.

aggression." Technically, the American soldiers were there simply to help the South Vietnamese troops defend their country from the North. Some critics called the US involvement a "war by proxy" because the South Vietnamese forces were used to achieve American goals.

American Division Over the War

The American people were divided over the Vietnam War. Many simply didn't understand why US troops were in Vietnam in the first place. They found it hard to believe that the American way of life was somehow threatened by a small country thousands of kilometres away.

It was evident that the conflict in Vietnam would not be resolved quickly or easily. As the war escalated, so too did the anti-war protests at home. Sit-ins at army recruiting offices and demonstrations at military bases often turned violent. Demonstrators burned their draft cards and the American flag. Police were pelted with rocks and bricks; often they used clubs and tear gas to control the crowds. Organized marches like that in October 1967 on the Pentagon brought hundreds of thousands of protesters into riotous confrontations with police and National Guard troops. (See Chapter Nine for more information on the protest movement.)

Tens of thousands of Americans fled the country as **draft dodgers**, many settling in Canada. Others chose to go to jail rather than serve in Vietnam. Those who did fight felt betrayed and discarded by Americans at home. The war in Vietnam was taking its toll on American society at large.

The Costs and Consequences of Vietnam

In 1973, the United States joined North Vietnam in signing the Paris Peace Accords. They called for a withdrawal of

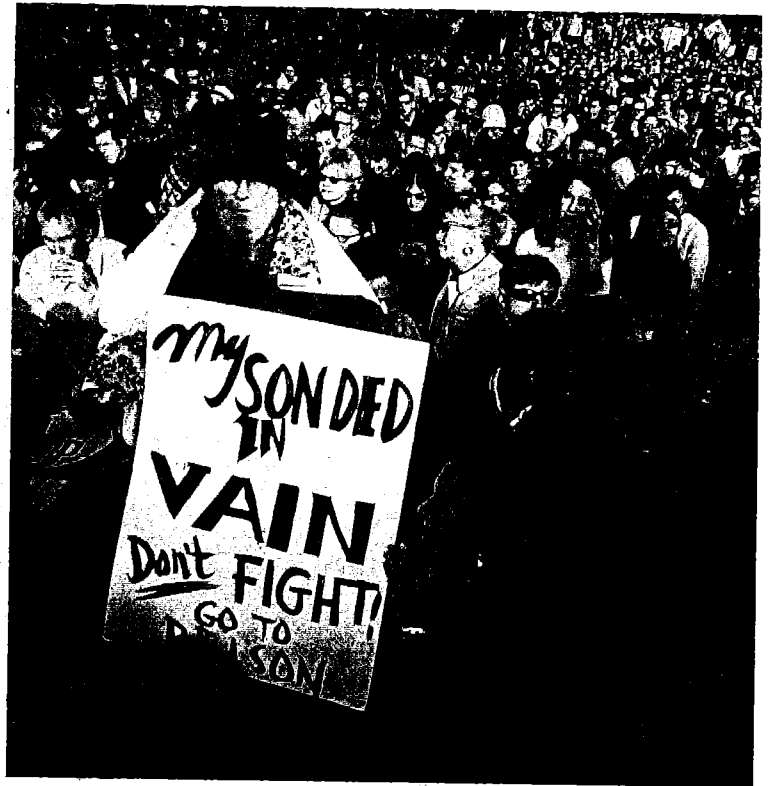


Figure 5.17

Anti-war protesters march through the streets of San Francisco, ca. 1968. Identify and explain the significance of the message on the woman's placard. To avoid going to jail, many protesters fled to Canada as draft dodgers. In 1977, President Jimmy Carter announced a general amnesty for all draft dodgers.

all American troops, the exchange of all prisoners of war, the withdrawal of foreign forces from Laos and Cambodia, and consultations between North and South Vietnam regarding general elections. The two Vietnams were left to determine their own destinies. In 1975, North Vietnam occupied South Vietnam and reunited the country by force of arms.

What did Vietnam cost the world? Most people would say it cost far too much. Over three million American military personnel served in Southeast Asia; 57 000 were killed in action, 300 000 were wounded, and 2500 were listed as "Missing in Action" and have never been accounted for. Tragically, an estimated

"I regard the war in Indochina as the greatest military, political, economic, and moral blunder in our national history."

— George McGovern,
Democratic candidate for
the US presidency, 1972

50 000 American Vietnam veterans have committed suicide since their return from the war; even larger numbers still battle the substance abuse problems or psychological wounds they brought back from Vietnam. In material terms, the US spent over \$150 billion on the war effort.

Among the Vietnamese on both sides, the losses were even more staggering, although more difficult to verify. Certainly more than a million Vietnamese were killed; half the dead were civilians. Hundreds of thousands of uprooted people sought refuge in other, often unfriendly, countries. The economies of both North and South Vietnam were drained. Agriculture, forestry, and fishing industries were devastated.

American involvement in Vietnam did not contain communism in that country or anywhere else in Southeast Asia. In fact, the war proved that the policy of containment through the use of force was unworkable and that American military power was not invincible. Furthermore, American prestige, popularity, and support were diminished in the eyes of many nations around the world.

But perhaps the most serious consequences for the United States were experienced within the country itself. The astronomical defence expenditures distorted the American economy, making it heavily dependent on defence contracts for jobs and profits. With the end of the war, the economy slid into recession and high inflation. The war transformed the vision many people held of themselves as a nation, and it undermined their trust in government, in politicians, and in their country.

FLASHPOINT: WAR IN AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan occupied a strategic position between the Soviet Union, Pakistan, and

Iran. For nearly a century before the Second World War, the British Empire competed for influence in the region, first with imperial Russia and later with the USSR. In the process, Afghanistan was invaded many times. But no foreign power ever succeeded in controlling the fervently independent people of Afghanistan for long.

"What America lost in Vietnam was, to put it in one word, virtue."

— Barbara Tuchman, American historian

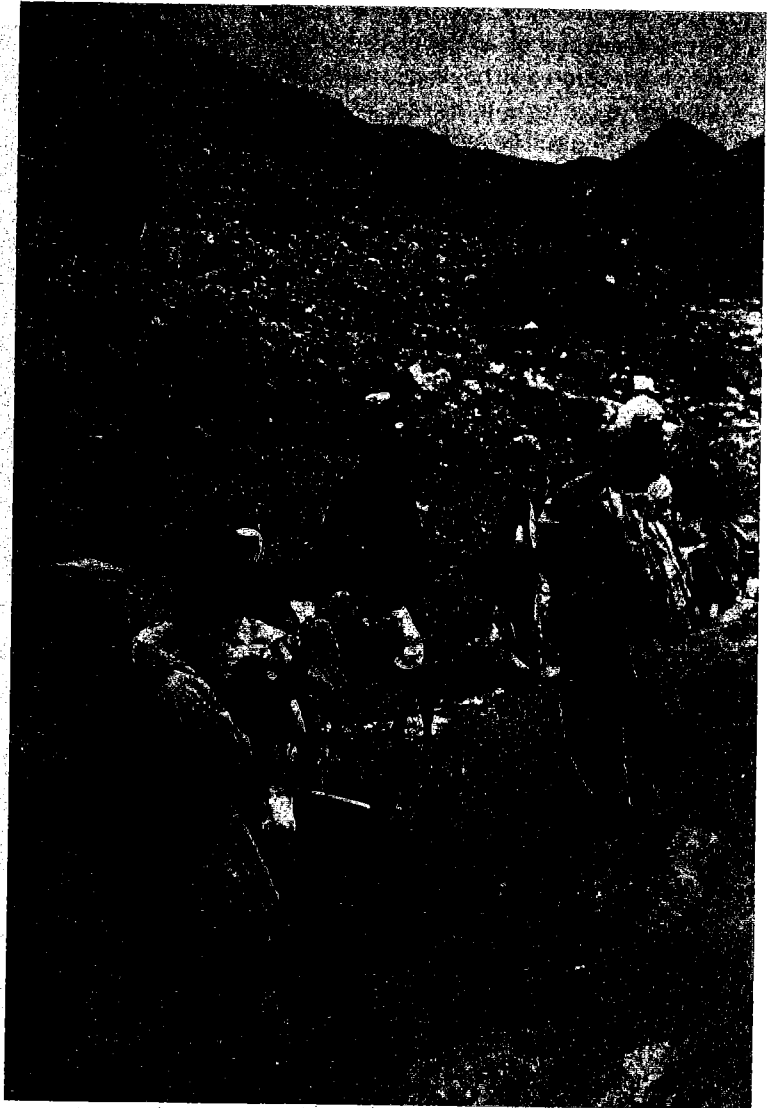


Figure 5.18

Refugees from the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan crossed mountain passes into Pakistan. In 2001, refugees were again on the move trying to get out of the way of the American-led war on terrorism.

Between 1945 and 1978, Afghanistan had been first a monarchy and then, following a coup, a republic. Both governments were dependent on Soviet aid, but they also sought ties with pro-Western governments in Iran and Pakistan. The government of Mohammed Daoud, from 1973 to 1978, was dictatorial and repressive. It was strongly opposed by factions on both the political right and left.

In 1978, the Communist Party in Afghanistan seized control and banned all other political groups. The Soviet Union immediately recognized the government and sent in 85 000 troops to support the new state. But the Communist government was unpopular, partly because of its radical reform policies, which alienated small landowners and offended the religious beliefs of the Muslim Afghans. While rival factions among the communists struggled for supremacy, non-communist rebels launched a revolution in the surrounding mountains. Units of the Afghan army began to join the rebels. It became clear that the Afghan communists could neither control the rebellion nor be relied upon to follow Moscow's orders.

The Soviets invaded the country in December 1979 and promptly installed their own choice for leader, Babrak Karmal. At the time, Islamic fundamentalists were sweeping into power in Iran and Pakistan. The Soviets were concerned that these neighbouring countries would offer support to Islamic fundamentalists in Afghanistan, which might create instability in the southern republics of the Soviet Union, where more than 50 million Muslims lived. They also considered the People's Republic of China a potential rival and wanted to preserve their domination of the area.

For the next 10 years, anti-government *Mujahidin* ("fighter in a holy war") guerrillas waged war against Afghan

troops armed with and supported by Soviet tanks, aircraft, and equipment. In 1982, the Soviets launched a massive attack against the rebels, but with little success. The Soviet Union sent hundreds of thousands of troops into the country in a futile attempt to put down—or at least outlast—the rebellion. While Soviet troops controlled the country's few cities, the Mujahidin controlled most of the countryside. The conflict became known as the Soviet Union's Vietnam.

The war in Afghanistan renewed tensions between the Soviet Union and the West. The United States unofficially supported the rebels, and by 1986 had provided more than \$3 billion in military aid. In protest against the Soviet's intervention, the US cut grain exports to the USSR and, along with Canada and more than 30 other countries, boycotted the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow.

By the late 1980s, the new Soviet president, Mikhail Gorbachev, initiated a dramatic change in Soviet foreign policy. With growing opposition to the war at home, and with domestic problems mounting, Gorbachev announced that the Soviet Union had no desire to impose its policies on its neighbours and that Soviet forces would be withdrawn from Afghanistan. The Communist government in Afghanistan was quickly overthrown by the rebels, and the country was left to sort out its long-standing religious, ethnic, and political conflicts on its own. After the Soviet withdrawal, Afghanistan fell under the control of the Taliban—Islamic fundamentalists—who were strongly opposed to Western ideas and culture. The Taliban regime provided shelter and support for a wide range of terrorist groups, including al-Qaeda, the group that masterminded the 11 September 2001 attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon (see Chapter Twelve).