

Was God Involved During The War In Vietnam?

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0. Abstract

The Vietnam War was one of the ugliest wars of the 20th century. Millions were killed and the war itself often misunderstood. Although the main topic of this paper is regarding the question; if God was involved or not during the war, I also explain why the war was often misunderstood. I will also give a simple description of the entire war. Beyond the politics and battlefield statistics, however, Vietnam raises a deeper question: where was God while millions suffered and history seemed to move without mercy? This paper examines that question through the religious convictions, human choices, victories, failures, and enormous loss that defined the war, while asking whether divine involvement can ever be separated from the actions of mankind itself.

1. World Governments Split Into Two

Right after the end of World War II, the two primary victors, the United States and the former Soviet Union, became superpowers. That also started the cold war. The Soviet Union was more of a military superpower than an economic one due to the great economic damage it sustained during the war (*Office of the Historian, n.d.-e*). The United States on the other hand was a superpower on both economy and military. With both countries leading and influencing the world after the war, the governments in the world were mostly split into communism and democracy.

2. Vietnam

This splitting of world politics included Vietnam which was split into the communist Soviet backed north and the democratic United States backed South (*Office of the Historian, n.d.-a*). You might think the split might have promoted peace as both sides have their own territory. But it was just another upcoming war.

3. Religion

The Soviet Union became the first state to make the elimination of religion an ideological objective, confiscating church property, persecuting believers, and promoting atheism through the state and educational system (*Library of Congress, n.d.-a*). Basically communist governments are all atheistic. Karl Marx stated: "*Communism begins where atheism begins*" (often translated or paraphrased as "*Communism begins from the outset with atheism*") is a famous statement from his 1844 work [*Private Property and Communism*] (part of the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*).

Adopting the concepts of the Soviet communist party's takeover during the Russian revolution. The government they set up was truly the first anti-God or atheistic government in history. North Vietnam's Marxist-Leninist government promoted anti-religious propaganda and placed significant controls on religious organization. (*Banchong-Silpa, 1964*) Basically north Vietnam adopted this type of belief system and government. But it doesn't necessarily mean that the vast majority of their population were atheist. They still hold to traditional beliefs, but not Christianity. It's their government that's atheistic in nature.

On the other hand, democratic governments adopt the concept of freedom derived more specifically from Christian teachings. And the United States after World War II was the undisputed leader of all democratic governments worldwide. And religion (Christianity in particular) played a major role during the American Revolution and the development of the early republic (*Library of Congress, n.d.-b*). So south Vietnam adopted this type of government.

4. Christianity in the United States

The United States reached an all time high number of church attendance during the 1950s and 1960s, church membership remained around 70%, while weekly attendance was roughly 40–45% (*Newport, 2013*). Driven by the lessons of the Second World War and the communist threat. A lot of news of atrocities from communist regimes reached the United States during the 1950s. People in America knew communism is atheistic, so they turned to God more to counter the communist threat. President Eisenhower was also key to the surge of Christianity in America during this time.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower also publicly emphasized religion during his presidency. He was baptized and joined the National Presbyterian Church shortly after becoming president in 1953 (*History.com Editors, 2018*).

During Eisenhower's presidency, Congress formally established "In God We Trust" as the national motto in 1956, and the motto began appearing on paper currency in 1957 (*U.S. House of Representatives, 2011*).

He also mentioned the Soviets as atheistic in nature and promoted Christianity a lot. This time period also saw the rise of the great evangelist Billy Graham. So Christianity was very strong in America during the early decades of the Cold War.

5. The Start of the Vietnam War

During 1964 and 1965, the Communist North was aggressively attacking the Democratic South through the Vietcong (*Office of the Historian, n.d.-c*). They call themselves guerilla fighters seeking to unite the country under communist rule. These Vietcong fighters were already living in the South and were backed by the Communist government of the North. Several attacks were made with no significant response from the United States. Until the Johnson administration had had enough. Following the Gulf of Tonkin crisis was the Gulf of Tonkin resolution which finally deployed ground troops to fight the Viet Cong (*Office of the Historian, n.d.-c*). The first ground troops the Americans sent on foreign soil since the Korean War. Because before sending ground troops, it was mostly only American Air Power doing the job. The addition of ground troops is a signal for a wider war.

6. So how was God Involved?

Now, if you believe in God, then you might say that God is involved in everything. But let's focus now on how God might be involved directly or indirectly during the war. On my point number 3 and 4 above, I've shown the more or less religion of the opposing sides. And with strong Christian influence in America during the early stages of the Vietnam War, we can tell that part of the motivation of the soldiers who volunteered and served was to stop atheist communism. In fact there were a record high number of young Americans who volunteered to serve during the war. We can tell that their strong Christian upbringing helped them decide to serve, as they want the concept of freedom, derived from Christianity, to prevail and to be spread around the world. In short, part of them wants to save the world. A very good heart.

On the battlefield, Christian influence also helps a lot, as many soldiers carry Bibles with them and wear the cross, as sources of strength and remove or reduce the fear of death.

So was God Involved during the early stages of the war? Yes. It can be direct or indirect.

7. 1966-1968

During this time period, the United States military adopted a body count strategy where victory depends on the high number of enemy dead or body count rather than territory taken. Search-and-destroy operations and enemy body counts consequently became important measures of military progress (*Sewall, 2016*). That was because they noticed, during the early stages of the war, that the kill ratio was heavily in favor of the American military due to better training, better equipment, and unlimited air power.

And since the American media had unlimited access to the war, the body counts and pictures of war were also brought to American TVs at home. It had a tremendous effect on how Americans viewed the war (*Office of the Historian, n.d.-d*). At first they could take and endure the casualties, but as the war dragged on with no surrender from the enemy, Americans became impatient and took to the streets to condemn the war. And with Operation Rolling Thunder beginning in 1965, the massive bombing of North Vietnam by American bombers, especially on the Ho Chi Minh trail, the death count soared. (*Office of the Historian, n.d.-c*).

After repeated statements from the American leadership especially the military where they claim victory is just inches away, the Tet Offensive in 1968 shattered those predictions. And Americans knew from then on that they were at a stalemate in the war.

8. The Christian Motivation Slowly Declined

The fight to stop the spread of communism in Vietnam, the Christian inspired motivation to serve, slowly slipped away as casualties mounted on both sides. People in the United States began disinterested in the war and wanted the troops home. Particularly after the Tet Offensive, while protests against continued U.S. involvement intensified (*Office of the Historian, n.d.-d*).

9. 1969-1973

The leadership of the United States in 1969 slowly changed with a new presidency. President Johnson and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara grew tired of the war especially due to the high casualty count and frustration over the stubbornness of the enemy to surrender. The new president Richard Nixon, vowed to end the war as soon as possible (Cosmas, 2006; *Office of the Historian, n.d.-b*). Peace with honor as he put it was the hope. But the war dragged on for several more years before an agreement at Paris, France was signed on January 27th 1973 (*Office of the Historian, n.d.-b*). It was a stalemate as there were no significant changes. North and South remained divided. All the dead with no real victors at this point. It was deeply discouraging.

10. 1974-1975

As Americans withdrew their forces from the South, the North was rebuilding their military. Planning not to honor the peace agreement, the North once again invaded the South. Without American aid, the South fell quickly, culminating in the fall of Saigon on April 30 in 1975 (*Office of the Historian, n.d.-b*). So Vietnam later on was united under communist rule.

11. How the War was Misunderstood.

People often think that the United States lost the war. True because they lost South Vietnam to the communists in the end. But during the course of the war, it was an overwhelming military victory for the Americans. They never lost a single important battle. And had a high kill ratio over the Communists. Unfortunately battlefield success did not ultimately produce the political outcome the United States sought (*Johnson & Mason, 2009*). Also, the Americans could/would not have lost South Vietnam if only the American government honored their agreement to defend the South if ever the North attacks again in 1975. President Ford at the time asked Congress for additional emergency military assistance for South Vietnam and to honor the Paris agreement (Ford, 1975). But Americans were tired of war so they decided not to help anymore.

So the United States won every important battle but lost the war.

In that sense, the United States could win many individual battles and maintain overwhelming battlefield superiority while still failing to achieve its ultimate political objective in Vietnam (*Johnson & Mason, 2009*).

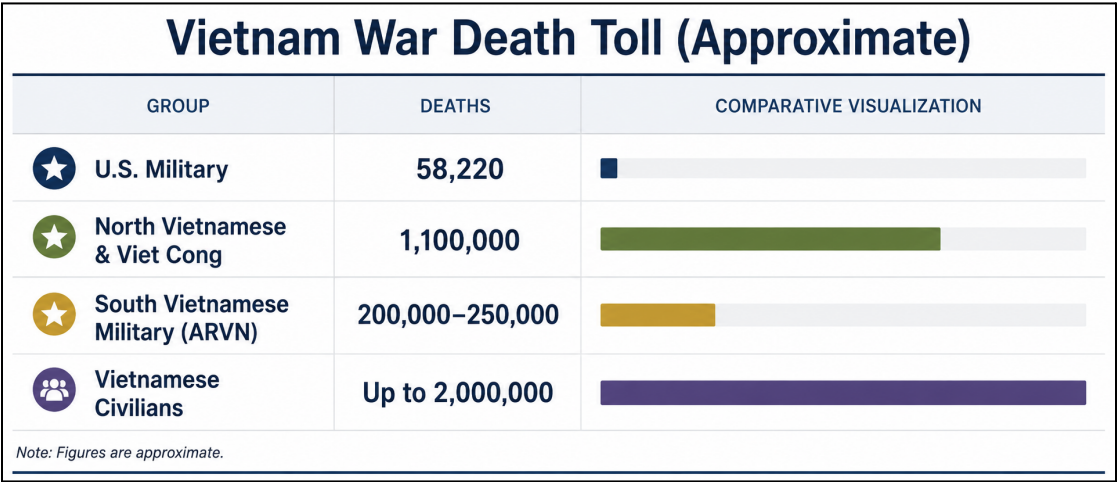


Figure 1. Estimated death toll of the Vietnam War. Approximate deaths include 58,220 U.S. military personnel (*National Archives and Records Administration, 2022*), about 1.1 million North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces, approximately 200,000–250,000 South Vietnamese military personnel (ARVN), and up to 2 million Vietnamese civilians (*History.com Editors, 2026*). The bars provide a visual comparison of the estimated losses among each group.

12. Conclusion

Was God's hand revealed through war? If so, His hand was not revealed through an easy victory or a clear miracle. Perhaps the more frightening question is this: when mankind turns an entire nation into a battlefield, how much of the horror should we really be asking God to explain, and how much of it belongs to us?

So was God involved during the war? During the early stages yes, but not as much later on. You might say that God was involved all throughout, as God is in control of everything after all, and you can be right. So God, whether direct or indirect was there all along. The end result of atheistic communist winning does not prove that God doesn't care, but rather a well crafted divine plan in which we may never know the true purpose is.

Scripture presents God as sovereign over nations and the course of human history: "He removeth kings, and setteth up kings" (Daniel 2:21), and God has "determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation" (Acts 17:26). The Bible even recognizes that there is "a time of war, and a time of peace" (Ecclesiastes 3:8). Therefore, you might say that God was involved throughout the entire conflict, whether directly or indirectly.

God referred to Assyria as "the rod of mine anger" even though Assyria itself did not understand the purpose for which it was being used (Isaiah 10:5–7). Likewise, God told Habakkuk that He was raising up the Chaldeans, a violent and ungodly nation, to accomplish something the prophet himself struggled to understand (Habakkuk 1:5–11). These passages demonstrate that, biblically, the temporary success of an ungodly government does not by itself demonstrate God's absence.

What God's ultimate purpose was in Vietnam may therefore remain beyond our ability to know. Scripture reminds us, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways" (Isaiah 55:8–9), while Paul describes God's judgments as "unsearchable" and His ways "past finding out" (Romans 11:33). Human beings make decisions, governments wage wars, and terrible consequences follow, yet "the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand" (Proverbs 19:21). From a biblical perspective, then, God may have been present throughout Vietnam even when His purpose was completely hidden from those living through it.

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