


# Why Did the U.S. Invade Vietnam?

Consider the following three answers.

## 1. The U.S. invaded Vietnam to stop the spread of communism.



The U.S. was extremely opposed to communism. Ho Chi Minh, the communist leader of North Vietnam, was being supported by communist China, which was an enemy of the U.S. Ho Chi Minh was the leader of a huge movement, and it looked like he was popular enough to win elections and unite North and South Vietnam under a communist government. The United States was afraid that if Vietnam became communist, other countries would, too. U.S. government officials called this “the domino effect.”

## 2. The U.S. invaded Vietnam to protect strategic interests.

France, which was an ally of the United States, controlled Vietnam until 1954. The U.S. worried about what would happen if France left. Who would protect U.S. access to important natural resources like rubber and tin, as well as military positions? To make sure Vietnam would continue to be a U.S. ally, the U.S. sided with South Vietnam and sent troops to support South Vietnam against North Vietnam.



## 3. The U.S. invaded Vietnam to stop the threat of a good example.

A popular uprising against the French had brought millions of Vietnamese together. They did not want to be controlled by a colonial power anymore. In 1954, an international agreement called the Geneva Accords split the country into North and South Vietnam



so that troops who had been fighting each other could separate and the country could prepare for internationally supervised elections in 1956. It was widely believed that the communist leader from the north, Ho Chi Minh, would win the election and unify the country. The U.S., which exercised control over many small nations around the world, did not want the Vietnamese to succeed in overthrowing a colonial power and winning control of their own destiny. This would be a bad example to other small nations and should be severely punished.

### What do you think?

Which of these reasons do you think are true? Which have you heard before? Are there other reasons for the Vietnam War? Do any of these reasons provide enough justification for the invasion? If so, which ones?

### More on Vietnam

See p. 33 for “Some Facts about the Vietnam War.”