

Case Study - L. B. Johnson and Vietnam

Why did Johnson get involved

- He believed in the **Domino Theory**, that if one country fell to communism the surrounding countries would.
- Johnson believed that **US credibility** was at stake in the international community.
- His **advisors** believed in a military solution.
- Johnson did **not want to be the first president to lose a war** and due to his **domineering personality** those around him did not want to go against him.
- The **aid programme** to South Vietnam was not working and its army was too weak to resist the Vietcong who were extending their hold.
- He used the **Gulf of Tonkin** incident to extend US involvement.

The **Tonkin resolution** was a misleading account of the attack on the US Maddox. It gave Johnson unlimited power to take all necessary measures in the war with Vietnam and allowed them to invade North Vietnam.

His involvement

- **Operation Rolling Thunder** = air assaults on North Vietnam.
- Sanctioned a \$1billion **aid programme** to strengthen South Vietnam
- He built up **ground forces** in 1965 to 180,000
- He rejected offers of **peace talks**
- Took a **close interest** in the war. Every morning looked for the number of US casualties and met with advisors every Tuesday to decide military targets.
- He **claimed** the bombing was at military targets which was not true. The campaign failed to cripple what was an agricultural economy.

Why he reduced involvement

- Decline in support - **the anti war movement** was increasing.
- **The failure of the bombing campaign.**
- The **Tet Offensive** undermined his claims that he was winning the war.
- The war was taking resources from his **Great Society**
- **Credibility gap** was opening up- people began to doubt the government.
- There was a change in his **advisors** which led to a change in tactics.

How he ended his involvement.

- He called a **halt to the bombing**.
- Withdrew from the **Presidential race**.
- Made proposal for **peace talks**.

Conclusion

- It highlighted the **increasing role of the president** in shaping foreign affairs.
- Showed that the **power of the president was growing**.
- It distracted from **domestic policy**
- Caused **budget deficits** and rising prices.
- Led to **division** in the US with those who were anti war and those who defended the country.
- Showed the **limits** to American warfare technology.