

Had a look Nearly there Nailed it!

**Reasons for
US failure
in Vietnam**

The strengths of North Vietnam

US failure in the war can be explained by understanding the range of advantages – cultural, political and geographical – the North Vietnamese had. The USA found these difficult to match.

Strengths of North Vietnam

- ✔ Vietnam had previously been one country so the North had a good geographical and cultural understanding of the South.
- ✔ Many people in North and South Vietnam wanted to be reunited as a single country.
- ✔ The North Vietnamese, unlike the Americans, had a good knowledge of the natural environment in South Vietnam.
- ✔ They shared a language with the South Vietnamese.
- ✔ The North Vietnamese expected full commitment to the war from the oldest to the youngest citizen.
- ✔ Children were given military training and performed support roles, like carrying messages.
- ✔ The North Vietnamese believed that fighting and dying for their country was a matter of honour.
- ✔ Opposing the aim of the war – to reunify their country with the South Vietnamese people – was not an option in North Vietnamese political culture. Open political opposition to the government was not allowed.



A US marine carries a Vietnamese woman who was suspected of being a Vietcong. She is blindfolded.

Significance of Soviet and Chinese support

North Vietnam had financial help from other communist countries – China and the USSR. They sent over \$3 billion in aid to North Vietnam between 1954 and 1967.

Soviet support: From 1965, after the US military escalation took hold, the USSR became North Vietnam's main source of economic aid.

Chinese support: From the start of the war against the French, China gave technical military and financial help to North Vietnam. After the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin incident, which marked a turning point for US involvement in Vietnam, the Chinese dramatically increased their support for North Vietnam and the Vietcong in South Vietnam. Between 1965 and 1971, over 320 000 Chinese troops were sent to North Vietnam.

Vietcong tactics and commitment

The guerrilla tactics of North Vietnam's allies, the Vietcong (VC), were difficult to undermine. The VC were used to fighting in jungle conditions and were well organised and equipped for guerrilla-style warfare.

The strong commitment of the VC and North Vietnamese troops was also difficult to challenge, as they had a clear ideology about why they needed to win the war and the reasons they were fighting. In comparison, the ARVN received poor training and did not have the same levels of belief in what they were fighting for.

Turn to page 19 for more on guerrilla warfare.

How did the Ho Chi Minh Trail help North Vietnam win the war?

Laos and Cambodia allowed the Ho Chi Minh Trail to operate in their countries. This was a vital supply route for the North Vietnamese to reach the VC in South Vietnam. Militarily it caused the USA a lot of difficulty. It was about 1000km long and some sections of it were made-up trails to trick the enemy. Thousands of Vietnamese were involved in keeping the route open and workable. The Americans used biological weapons to deforest the jungle and expose the trail, yet despite this the route was kept going throughout the war.

Now try this

To read more on the Ho Chi Minh Trail, turn to page 18.

Complete a table to summarise the different types of advantages the North Vietnamese had. Head the columns 'Political advantages', 'Geographical advantages' and 'Cultural advantages'.

Tasks:

1. Complete the 'now try this' task
2. Explain using the columns you have just created what was the most important reasons why America failed in the Vietnam war.