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### Introduction

The evolution of the US-led War in Vietnam was complex. To understand events in Indo-China it is necessary to go back to 1945, when Japanese occupation of the area ended. The Communist-led guerrillas under Ho Chi Minh then established an independent state, whilst the French attempted to restore their former colonial empire and took control of South Vietnam. The French were decisively defeated by the Communist Vietminh forces in 1954 at the battle of Dien Bien Phu, and withdrew. But the US took over support for a South Vietnamese anti-communist state, and the international agreement, reached at the Geneva Conference of 1954, to create a unified Vietnam through elections, was ignored. As the South Vietnamese government struggled to resist internal guerrilla opposition by the National Liberation Front ('Vietcong'), and the increasing pressure from North Vietnam, the US government supplied military 'advisors', and from 1963 sent increasing numbers of US troops. The Australian government also agreed to send troops to Vietnam. In 1965 the US began to bomb North Vietnam.

Resistance to the US role in the war (initiated largely by pacifists from 1961) became widespread in 1965, when the first teach-ins were held, both in the US and around the world. Opposition was especially strong in Australia, where there was resistance to the draft, and in Japan, where US bases were used in prosecuting the war. Canadians became involved in offering refuge to US draft resisters. Protests against the war in countries not directly involved often took the form of marches and confrontations outside US embassies. In the US itself, in addition to frequent large demonstrations and student direct action against the military presence on campuses, there was also widespread draft resistance (eg. burning draft cards) and acts of solidarity with draft resisters. Resistance also grew significantly inside the armed forces, with the development of underground newsletters and organizations as well as public protest and acts of defiance, and also desertions. Vietnam veterans also became involved in militant opposition to the war.

US bombing, and dropping of chemicals to defoliate the Ho Chi Minh trail, spread beyond Vietnam to Laos. Even more controversially, the US under Nixon began in 1969 an undeclared war of bombing and military incursions against what it claimed were North Vietnamese/National Liberation Front bases in neutral Cambodia. This secret war destabilized Prince Sihanouk, who was eventually ousted in a military coup. After the US Administration launched an invasion of Cambodia in spring 1970, without consulting Congress, opposition increased dramatically – about a third of colleges and universities were closed down by mass protests. At Kent State university in Ohio confrontation between the students and the National Guard led to four students being shot dead.

Some books written at the time of the war or immediately afterwards are not now in print (though some have been republished). Many are, however, available second hand and will still be in libraries covering the history of the period. Some are excerpted or available in full online, as we have indicated in relation to some titles.

There is a large literature on the origins and development of the French and then American wars in Indo-China; only a few selective references are listed below:

Charlton, Michael ; Moncrieff, Anthony, [Many Reasons Why: The American Involvement in Vietnam](#) [1], [1978], London, Hill and Wang, 1989, pp. 250

Based on BBC series of programmes and consisting primarily of interviews with wide range of those involved in first French and then US policy on Vietnam, and individuals prominent in opposition. Covers period 1945-1973. Chapters 7 and 8 discuss protests inside US and the leaking by Daniel Ellsberg of [The Pentagon Papers](#) [2], which revealed in detail secret internal policy making.

McCarthy, Mary, [Vietnam](#) [3], Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968, pp. 119



Influential account by US novelist of her visit to Vietnam, in which she argued that the US was fighting a war it could not win, and called for withdrawal.

Shawcross, William, [Side Show: Kissinger, Nixon and the Destruction of Cambodia](#) [4], [1979], London, Andre Deutsch and Fontana, 1980, pp. 467

Detailed analysis of the evolution of the US war on Cambodia.

Sheehan, Neil ; Smith, Hedrick ; Kenworthy, E.W. ; Butterfield, Fox, [The Pentagon Papers as published by the New York Times](#) [5], New York, Bantam Books, 1971, pp. 677

Based on extensive Pentagon files on conduct of war and US role, leaked by Daniel Ellsberg, then an official in the Pentagon.

Wintle, Justin, [The Vietnam Wars](#) [6], London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1991, pp. 202

A brief history and analysis of the wars in Vietnam from the 1945 declaration of independence to the US withdrawal in 1973.

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[1] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/1989/many-reasons-why-american-involvement-vietnam> [2] <https://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers> [3] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/1968/vietnam> [4] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/1980/side-show-kissinger-nixon-d-destruction-cambodia> [5] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/1971/pentagon-papers-published-new-york-times> [6] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/1991/vietnam-wars>