Conflict in Indochina
Key features and issues:

- nature and role of nationalism
- nature and role of communism
- nature and consequences of US involvement
- strategies and tactics
- impact of the war on civilians in Indochina
- attempts at peacemaking
- reasons for communist victory
1 **Indochina after the French**
   - consequences of the Vietnamese victory against the French
   - consequences of the Geneva Peace Agreement for the Vietnamese people to 1964
   - political, social, economic and military developments within North and South Vietnam

2 **The USA and Indochina**
   - political and social issues in Indochina by 1960
   - nature and development of US policy towards Indochina generally and Vietnam in particular
   - impact of direct US military involvement in Vietnam and the consequences for Vietnam and Cambodia
3 The Second Indochina War
   - nature and effectiveness of the strategy and tactics employed by the North Vietnamese Army and the National Liberation Front (NLF), and by the South Vietnamese and the USA
   - impact of the 1968 Tet Offensive
   - impact of the war on civilians in Indochina
   - impact of the spread of the Vietnam War to Cambodia
   - nature and significance of anti-war movements in the USA
   - the defeat of the South Vietnamese forces
4 Pol Pot’s Regime
- rise to power of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia
- nature, aims and methods of Pol Pot
1954 – French defeat at Dien Bien Phu

- Battle took place over 4 stages:
  - 13 March: cut off French supply routes
  - 30 March: start of a 5-day assault
  - 5 April: encroachment; digging trenches closer
  - 1-7 May: human assault

Why? Guerilla tactics – able to convert to conventional tactics – history and motivation

- April/May 1954
  - End disputes in Korea and Indochina
  - May 8: France present peace proposal
  - DRV represent two days later: withdraw all troops and hold free elections
  - Geneva Accords: face-saving while recognising Vietnamese victory

Result: Vietnam split in two at the 17th parallel; promise of elections to be held in July 1956
1956 – postponement of elections in Vietnam

- Diem argued that he was not bound by agreements that he did not approve and that the Communists in the North could not be trusted to carry out fair elections.
1960 – formation of the NLF and beginning of insurgency into the South

• Diem becoming increasingly repressive – Denunciation Campaign
  – In response to insurgency and to reassert control of SV but led to disaffected/alienated population
  – Failure to hold SV elections seen as US conspiracy – right to take back what they won from French= SV
1963 – Overthrow of Diem

- By the end of 1958: 40,000 political prisoners were in SV gaols; 12,000 had been killed between 1955-1957
- Opposition to Diem turned into violent protests – Americans began to reconsider Diem
- A group of discontented SV generals began to plot a coup d’etat – with tacit approval from the Americans
1964 – Gulf of Tonkin Incident

- US destroyer Maddox, involved in surveillance of the NV coast, was fired upon by several NV gunboats
- Claims they were attacked again a few days later
- President Johnson appears on TV to announce American intentions in Vietnam
1965 – commitment of US troops to Vietnam

- First American combat troops arrive on 8 March 1965
- By end of 1965: 200,000
  - Elephant war
1968 – Tet Offensive

- 31 January 1968
- 70,000 communist soldiers launched a surprise offensive
- Surged into more than 100 cities and towns throughout SV, including Saigon
- Culmination of years of planning
- Military loss – political victory
1968 – My Lai Massacre

• Massacre of 347 Vietnamese civilians (old men, women, children and babies) in My Lai – on orders from US Captain Medina

• Emphasised horror of the war for civilians – also defoliants
1968 – commencement of the Paris Peace Talks

- Nixon’s strategy – talk directly and secretly to the NV – but not willing to talk to the Viet Cong
- Negotiations were held up by both sides
1969 – US extends operations into Cambodia

- Operation Menu – ‘secret’ bombing which lasted 14 months
- Soon after Nixon’s inauguration, it was recommended short bombing raids be carried out against the VC headquarters thought to be in Cambodia
- The bombings pushed the Vietnamese Communists further into Cambodia
1970 – confrontation at Kent State University

- Four young people are gunned down as students battle National Guardsmen
1971 – the release of the Pentagon Papers

- The papers were first brought to the attention of the public on the front page of the New York Times in 1971
- the Pentagon Papers "demonstrated, among other things, that the Johnson Administration had systematically lied, not only to the public but also to Congress"
1973 – defeat and withdrawal of US troops from Vietnam

• Vietnamisation 1969 – gradual withdrawal of US troops from SV and the speeding up of training for SV troops
• Nixon’s aim – ‘peace with honour’
• In June 1973, the US Congress stopped funding American activity in Southeast Asia.
• In November, the War Powers Act gave Congress control over the President’s use of American troops abroad
1975 – Fall of Saigon

• With the departure of American troops the government of SV was on its own.
• Despite the declared cease-fire on 1973, the fighting never really stopped.
• NVA forces had not been removed from SV
• In 1975, the whole of Indochina fell to its communist armies
1975 – unification of Vietnam

• The speed of the Communist quest of SV took everyone, including NV, by surprise

• Communist rule meant ‘social transformation’ – 1.3 million relocated into rural areas; shortages of food and shelter

• Many Vietnamese left the country by trekking into China or by boat to non-Communist countries
1975 – fall of Lon Nol regime in Cambodia

- Lon Nol - previously Deputy PM to Sihanouk who he overthrew
- Lon Nol regime was overthrown by the Khmer Rouge
- Khmer Rouge take control – begin ‘Year Zero’ by marching millions of people out of Phnom Penh into the countryside
- Aim to create a simple peasant communal society – only 1.5 of the 6 million needed
- Target was anyone not born a worker or a peasant, or who had an education
- Estimated death toll for these years range from 1 to 3 million – a fifth of the population