

# The Vietnam War: Impact on Canadian–American Relations

BEFORE READING

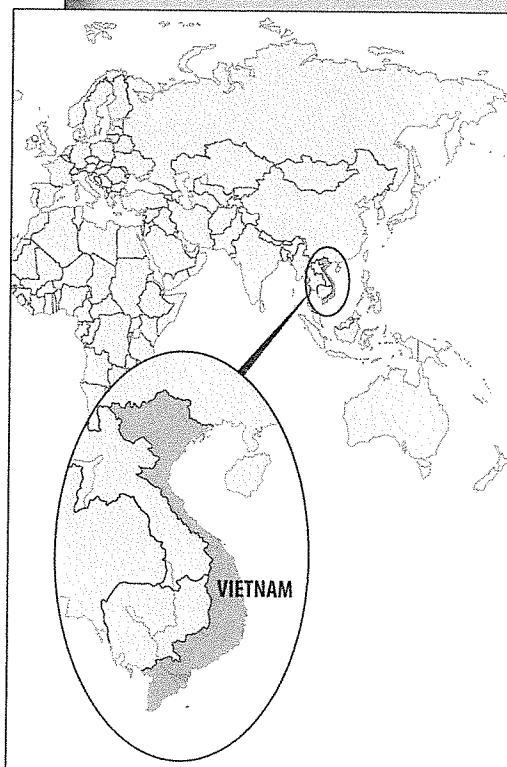
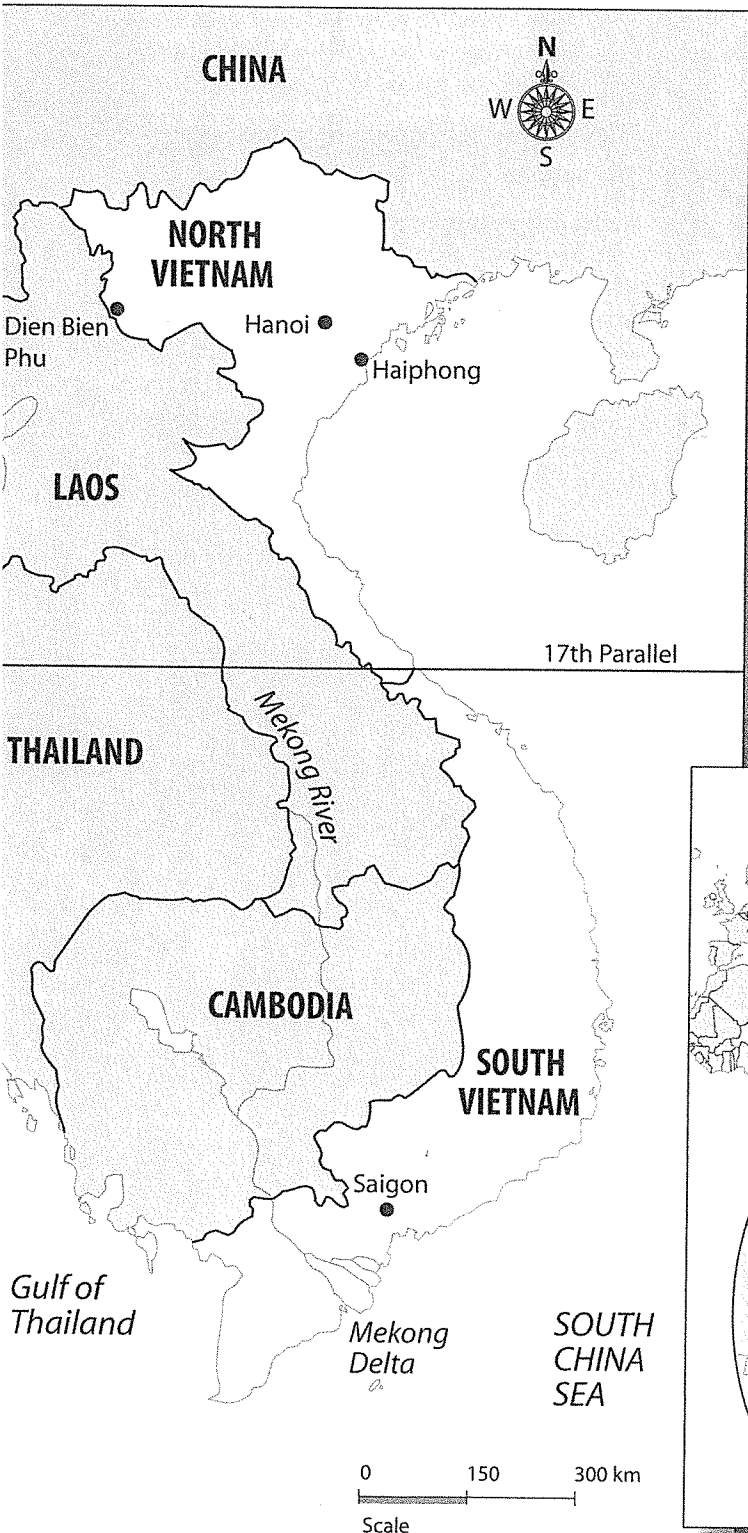
## WORDS TO KNOW

flashpoint	sulphurous	hegemony
partition	draft dodgers	influence peddlers
neutrality	deserters	ordnance

1. Think/Pair/Share: On your own, think about the question: What do you believe the Canadian government's position should be with regard to international conflicts? Pair: Discuss this question with a neighbour. Share: As a class, discuss your opinions.
2. Sending military personnel is one way to help resolve an armed conflict. With a partner, brainstorm other ways in which a country or its citizens can help in a conflict without sending troops.

## Evidence 6.40

In 1963, Lester Pearson and the Liberals won the federal election, replacing John Diefenbaker and the Conservatives. One of Pearson's first goals was to try to restore the good relationship Canada had with the United States before Diefenbaker's administration. It soon became evident that repairing the damage would be challenging. Domestically, the issue of US domination of Canada's culture and economy re-emerged. Internationally, the growing involvement of the United States in the Vietnam War became a flashpoint in Canadian–American relations.



What does the inset map suggest about the strategic importance of Vietnam to the United States and other countries in the West?

As you examine the evidence in Section Four, consider Canada's position on the conflict in Southeast Asia and the options its government had, given its close economic and political ties with the United States.

To keep track of your ideas, construct an organizer like the one below and record key points in each column.

Official government policy	"Secret" government policy	Private enterprise (industry, business)	Public opinion	What would you do?	Conclusions about impact on Canada-US relations

## Background

After the Second World War, France attempted to regain its hold over its colonies of Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam in Indochina. It had little difficulty establishing control in Laos and Cambodia, but met strong resistance from the communist party in the north part of Vietnam. In 1954, after nearly a decade of struggle, the French suffered a major defeat at Dien Bien Phu in northwestern Vietnam. An international conference in Geneva agreed that the Vietnam fighting should be concluded by a ceasefire between France and the communist forces in North Vietnam. France agreed to withdraw from its former Indo-chinese colonies.

In the agreement, Vietnam was divided into two parts at the 17th parallel, with a communist party in charge in the North and an anti-communist party in charge in the South. The partition was meant to be temporary until free elections could be held to reunite North and South. Elections were never held.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Western countries were afraid of growing communist strength around the world. Leaders of

many countries believed in what was called the "domino theory": once one country in a region fell to communism, all neighbouring countries were in danger of falling as well. This belief was a major reason for US involvement in Vietnam.

By the early 1960s, the United States was actively propping up the South Vietnamese regime, whose capital was Saigon, in its struggle against the South Vietnamese communist forces (the National Liberation Front for South Vietnam), who were supported by the North Vietnamese government in Hanoi. US assistance at first took the form of economic aid and provision of military advisers. However, by 1964, an increasing number of American combat troops were being sent to fight in South Vietnam. In February 1965, US President Lyndon Johnson initiated large-scale bombing of North Vietnam. By 1968, there were almost 500 000 US troops in South Vietnam. As the United States increased its support of the South, China and the Soviet Union sent more supplies to the North.

## The Canadian Government and the Vietnam War

Evidence 6.41

- Describe Canada's original role in the Vietnamese conflict.
  - How might such a role become difficult, given Canada's relationship with the United States? (Consider such factors as military, geographic, and economic ties, as well as views on the Cold War and other issues.)
- Why might the Canadian government feel torn between its loyalty to its American ally and its commitment to the International Control Commission? Considering the world situation in 1965, what approach might the Canadian government have taken?

DURING READING

How would such "non-neutrality" affect Canadian-American relations? Other countries' opinions of Canadian government policy? Be sure to add this information to the organizer you created at the start of Section Four.

**Gerald Clark, associate editor of the *Montreal Star*, wrote:**

... They [Canadian ICC members] are passing on [to the US] their first-hand observations of North Viet Nam of the effectiveness of US bombing attacks and on other matters of military significance. A harsher way of putting it is that they are functioning as spies when they are supposed to be serving as international civil servants.

## Canada and the International Control Commission

When the combat between the French and the Vietnamese ended, an International Control Commission (ICC) was established to supervise the transition to peace between North and South Vietnam. The ICC's job was to oversee implementation of the *Geneva Accords* ending the conflict between France and Vietnam, which included the withdrawal of foreign troops, reunification of Vietnam, and free elections.

As part of the ICC, Canada refused to provide direct troop support to its NATO ally, the United States, arguing that to do so would compromise Canada's neutrality on the ICC. However, suggestions emerged in the press that Canadian representatives sometimes acted on behalf of US interests.

There are many factors which I [Pearson] am not in a position to weigh. But there does appear to be at least a possibility that a suspension of such air strikes against North Vietnam, at the right time, might provide Hanoi authorities with an opportunity, if they wish to take it, to inject some flexibility into their policy without appearing to do so as the direct result of military pressure. ... I am not, of course, proposing any compromise on points of principle, nor any weakening of resistance to aggression in South Vietnam. ... I merely suggest that a measured and announced pause in one field of military action at the right time might facilitate the development of diplomatic resources.

Source: Lester B. Pearson, *Mike: The Memoirs of the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson*, Vol. 3 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), pp. 138-139.

Evidence 6.44

Canadian government became increasingly uneasy about the direction of the war. On April 2, 1965, as the recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, Prime Minister Pearson was invited to address the convocation at Temple University in Philadelphia. He delivered a speech that accepted most US policy in Vietnam but was critical of the US bombing initiative against the North (Evidence 6.42).

The fact that Pearson delivered a speech in the United States criticizing the American government was controversial. President Johnson was furious (Evidence 6.43 and 6.44). Pearson met with President Johnson the next day at Camp David, where Canadian Ambassador Charles Ritchie observed and recorded President Johnson's reaction to Pearson's speech.

Evidence 6.43

“ The President's reception of the speech was sulphurous, and the relationship between the two men never fully recovered. No doubt LBJ believed that an attempt had been made by one he thought to be a friend 'to dictate' United States policy in his own backyard. ”

**Some time later, Ritchie and two presidential aides returned to see the end of the meeting.**

“ ... the two figures were still there and the drama seemed to be approaching a climax of physical violence. Mike, only half seated, half leaning on the terrace balustrade, was now completely silent. The President strode up to him and seized him by the lapel of his coat, at the same time raising his other arm to the heavens. ... ”

Source: Charles Ritchie, *Storm Signals: More Undiplomatic Diaries, 1962-1971* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1983), pp. 80-83.

How would you feel if a leader from another country criticized Canadian government policy while in Canada? Why might the bombing of North Vietnam have provoked Pearson to take such a public stance? What impact might Pearson's speech have on Canadian-American relations?

What impact would such a cartoon have on public opinion in Canada? Would it help or hurt Pearson's image? Why? According to the account of the event, did Johnson actually behave as depicted in the cartoon? Why would the cartoonist alter the image?



Source: Duncan Macpherson, *Toronto Daily Star*, 1965.

Another area in which the Canadian government antagonized the US government was allowing American draft dodgers and deserters to immigrate to Canada. The first group of Americans to come to Canada were draft dodgers and their wives or girlfriends. These were mainly White, middle-class young men, often university educated, who applied at border crossings to become landed immigrants. Deserters were those who trained and served in the military. They were mainly less educated men who learned of the anti-war movement once they were in the army or who became disillusioned after serving in Vietnam.

What conclusions can you draw about the impact on Canada of this immigration boost? On Canadian-American relations? On Canadian public attitudes toward the Vietnam conflict?

Between 1964 and 1973, it is estimated that 20 000 draft dodgers and 12 000 army deserters found refuge in Canada.

## The Public and the Vietnam War

### Public Support for the War

As you examine Evidence 6.45 and 6.46, add to the public opinion column of your organizer.

READING DURING

Many Canadians supported the United States in its efforts to defeat communism in South Vietnam.

Approximately 30 000 Canadians served in Vietnam in all branches of the US armed forces. One hundred and three of the names of known Canadian casualties are on the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial in Washington, DC. Initially, Canadian veterans of the Vietnam War were not officially recognized by the Canadian Legion, as Canada was not involved in the fighting. In 1994, full membership was extended to these veterans. In addition, Canadian veterans of the Vietnam War had a difficult time finding a place to erect a memorial in Canada. The National Capital Commission declined to locate a spot for a monument. In July 1995, a memorial to the 103 killed was erected in Windsor. Known as the "North Wall," it was financed, designed, and built by a group of Americans known as the Michigan Association of Concerned Veterans who wished to honour Canadians who participated in the war.

Why do you think it was so difficult for these veterans to gain recognition in Canada?

What conclusions can you draw regarding Canadian public opinion on the war in Vietnam by late 1966 based on this evidence? How do Canadian attitudes compare with those of other countries? Are you surprised by any differences?

## US War in Viet Nam Must Be Won; I'd Go, If Called On

American soldiers are being killed by the hundreds in Viet Nam. The war is steadily being enlarged. The United States presently will have nearly 200 000 men in the battle area, yet they seek not a single foot of territory, and not a dollar's worth of material advantage. They are fighting for an ideal—the great principle that nations, large or small, shall have the right to govern themselves without interference by aggressor governments bent on extending hegemony [control] over others. But why should this be solely America's burden, their mission? Why should America make the only sacrifice? ... The American people support the war in Viet Nam because they are convinced that if Viet Nam is taken over by Red China [People's Republic of China], the rest of the Asian continent will come under the domination of the Communists. ... Let the army of freedom be increased. Americans have contributed 200 000 men; let England and France each contribute 100 000, and Canada at least could send 50 000 men. I'd go if called upon. It's a war that must be won. The United States should not have to fight alone.

Joseph J. Prevost, *Toronto Daily Star*

### Evidence 6.46

## AUSSIES SUPPORT US VIET POLICY

By THE CANADIAN GROUP OF PUBLIC OPINION

**GALLUP POL  
OF CANADA**

Behind the conflict of opinion among governments on US policy in Viet Nam lies an equal conflict among the public of these countries.

In a unique study by the Gallup Affiliates in Canada, Great Britain, the United States, France, West Germany, and Australia, interviewers put the same choice to a sample of adults:

"Just from what you have heard or read, which of these statements comes closest to the way you, yourself, feel about the war in Viet Nam:

- The US should withdraw its troops
- The US should carry on its present level of fighting
- The US should increase the strengths of its attacks against North Viet Nam."

A majority of French citizens, as much as seven in 10, believe the US should withdraw its troops. Australia is twice as convinced as the others that the war should go on at its present level. Here are the details.

	Withdraw troops	Carry on	Increase attacks	No opinion
Canada	31%	18%	27%	24%
USA	18	18	55	9
Great Britain	42	17	16	25
West Germany	51	19	15	13
Australia	21	43	24	12
France	68	8	5	19

As you examine Evidence 6.47, add the information to your organizer in the public opinion column.

As the war dragged on and Canadians watched the violence and casualties mount daily, an increasing number took to the streets to protest the war and Canada's involvement.

Many supporters of the anti-war movement assisted US draft dodgers and deserters, providing legal advice, counselling Americans before and after they arrived in Canada, and offering financial support when necessary.

**How do you think the US government and the American public would respond to such actions? How would they affect Canadian-American relations? Add this information to your organizer.**



"Influence Peddlers!"



Source: Len Norris, *Vancouver Sun*, October 19, 1978.

Norris  
THE VANCOUVER SUN ©

## Private Enterprise and the Vietnam War

### DURING READING

1. In examining the evidence that follows, use an organizer like the one below to record some observations and conclusions about how US foreign ownership and Canada's economic ties with the United States might have an impact on the Canadian-American relationship during the Vietnam War.

I read...	I think...	Therefore...

2. As you examine the evidence, record data in your organizer under the private enterprise column (page 161).
3. Revisit your answer to question 2 at the beginning of Section Four in the Before Reading section. Does the following evidence help you understand "other" ways that might be employed to support a war effort? Explain.
4. Should the Canadian government have tried to bring the actions of private enterprises (industry, business) more in line with publicly stated government policy on Vietnam? If you were a member of the government, what would you have done?

Canadian author Victor Levant gathered a multitude of international sources to provide an exhaustive account of Canada's role in Vietnam. He was particularly interested in economic connections:

Evidence 6.48

**What do these data tell you about the impact of the Vietnam War on the Canadian economy? Is there a difference between commercial support of a conflict and supporting a conflict with troops? Do the actions of private enterprise create a moral dilemma for a government or its citizens? Should the government attempt to influence private trade?**

Source: Victor Levant, *Quiet Complicity: Canadian Involvement in Vietnam* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1986), pp. 52-53.

... expenditures [in Canada by foreign countries] on construction, machinery, and equipment in Canada grew along with US involvement in Indochina: adjusted for inflation, the increase was 13.6 percent in 1964, 12.3 percent in 1965, and 11.3 percent in 1966. ... Most of the capital invested in the Canadian economy was from the United States. ... Solid gains in Canadian exports to the United States were made in the late 1960s. ... The most dramatic individual increases occurred in firearms, ordnance, and ammunition; aircraft engines and parts; navigational equipment and parts; automobile and vehicle parts (other than passenger), chemical products; apparel; industrial machinery and equipment. ... A considerable number of Canadian metals and minerals entered directly into the production of US war material. Canadian food and beverages fed US troops, Canadian war material was used on the battlefields of South Vietnam and flown in sorties over Hanoi and Haiphong, automobile parts fabricated in Canada were installed in US army vehicles and many Canadian raw materials stoked the fire of the US military industrial complex.

Evidence 6.49

How might these headlines, taken from newspapers of the day, have affected public opinion? If similar headlines were to appear in today's news media, how would you be affected?

Globe and Mail,  
April 7, 1966

# Explosives for US Up Sharply in Canada

Financial Post,  
February 4, 1967

# Defence Sharing Is Truly Big Business

Maclean's,  
May 1967

# We're Making Millions Out of Vietnam

Ottawa Citizen,  
March 27, 1968

# Employment Big Gainer in Arms Pact

Evidence 6.50

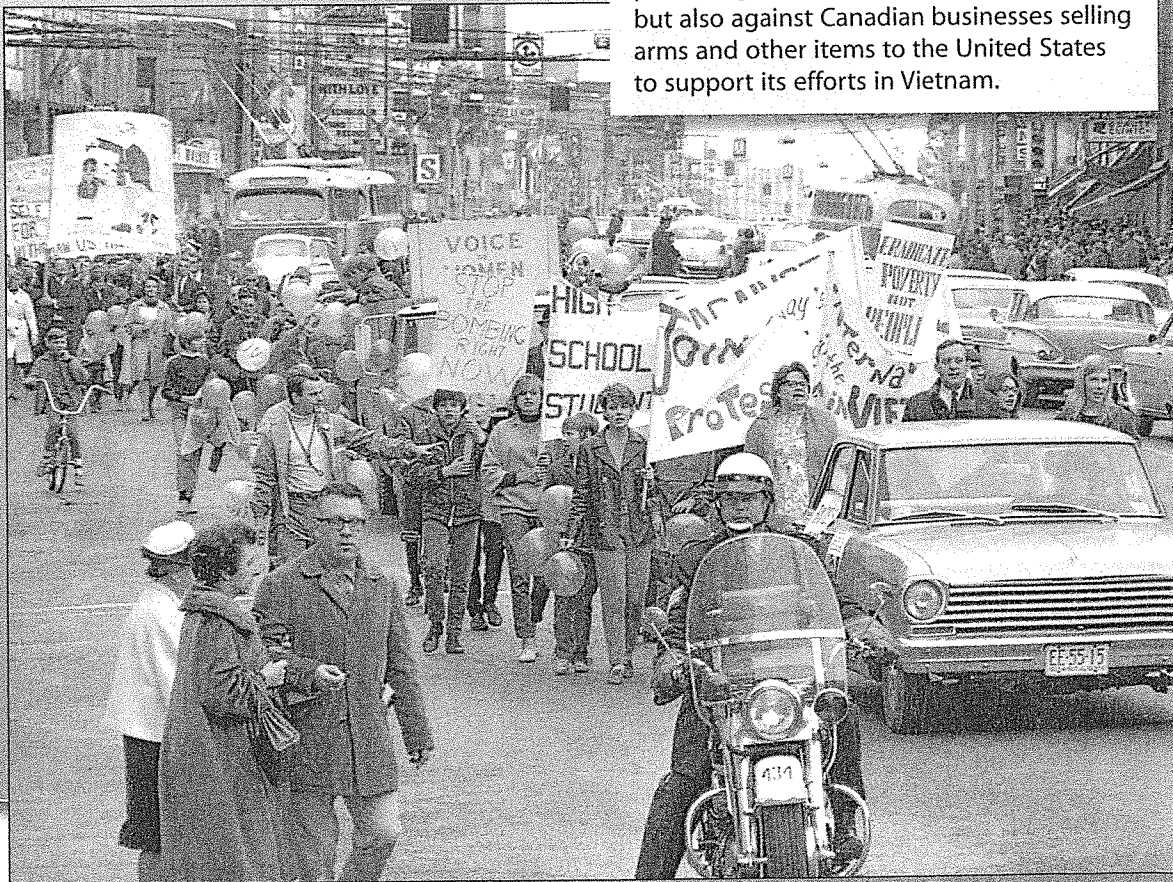
"If it were a question of morality and if I felt that it were bad to sell arms to the United States in a moral sense, then I would have to feel that it's bad to sell them nickel and asbestos and airplane components."

Source: Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau to CBC interviewer Patrick Watson, 1968.

What do Trudeau's comments suggest about the difficulty of separating government policy—neutrality and support for UN solutions—and the actions of private enterprise?

Evidence 6.51

Toward the end of the 1960s, Canadians, like these marchers in Alberta, were increasingly protesting not only against the war itself but also against Canadian businesses selling arms and other items to the United States to support its efforts in Vietnam.



1. Write a letter to Prime Minister Pearson or Prime Minister Trudeau outlining your position on Canada's involvement in the Vietnam War. Assume the role of a person at the time (a draft dodger; someone working in a factory benefiting from war production; an anti-war protester; a Canadian enlisted in the US forces).
2. Design a placard that supports or opposes an issue raised in Section Four.
3. Hold a "four corners" debate in your classroom, responding to this statement: *Governments should*

AFTER READING