

MODERN HISTORY

Conflict in Indochina Speech (Success of Nixon's foreign policy)

When Richard Nixon inherited the responsibility of taking control of the Second Indochina War in 1968, there were over 500,000 US troops stationed across Vietnam, and the average number of Americans killed each month was around 1200. Nixon's political methods and policies designed to deal with these issues can be split into his domestic and foreign approaches. In the case of Nixon, while his foreign policy was actually rather strong, it was the dire weakness and infeasibility of his domestic policy which led to the eventual collapse of both. It is through this that his success in dealing with the war can be scrutinised and assessed.

The major foreign policies implemented by Nixon during his first term were of course Vietnamisation and "Peace with Honour". Nixon wished to gradually end the war, through negotiation with the North, while slowly decreasing American involvement. For the most part, he did this, however the North Vietnamese knew that it was only a matter of time before Nixon was forced to withdraw his troops as a result of increased public opinion against the war in America. This resulted in failure of negotiations, and Nixon's establishment of Vietnamisation and "the Nixon Doctrine". The process of Vietnamisation is mentioned in the third source, in which general Bruce Palmer writes "...the United States did not do well by its loyal ally, leaving the legacy of a fatally flawed strategy that gave the strategic and offensive initiative to Hanoi." In this source we are able to see Nixon's switching of emphasis from his foreign policy to his domestic policy, as his American public became increasingly outraged in response to the war.

This issue questions Nixon's political integrity. In this respect, Nixon's success can be very much questioned. And from this, it can be said that Nixon was not in fact particularly successful in developing his model designed for dealing with the conflict in Indochina.

Following this logic, Nixon's political integrity across his domestic and foreign policies can also be questioned through his actions in 1970. Nixon attempted to appeal to his "Silent Majority" in gaining support for his involvement in Indochina. However, when Cambodia fell into a civil war between Communists and non-communist forces, Nixon decided to deploy troop factions designed to destroy communist strongholds. This only served to further outrage his American public, who believed he was striving for an end to the war, and rightfully questioned his attack of a neutral country. This is mentioned in Source 1, in which Nixon himself attempts to justify his actions to his public on television, and blames the NVA and VC for "blatant violation of Cambodia's neutrality". It was however Cambodia's neutrality that Nixon was breaching when he launched his "incursion" into Cambodian territory. It is through these actions that Nixon's policy clash can be observed as well, and hence his model for developing policies towards Indochina flawed in one form or another.

The final source to be evaluated is Shelby Stanton's account of the activity of the US troops in the period 1965-1973. In this source, the "blunting of the armies combat edge" after 1965 is used to describe the "reduction in the combat potential of entire divisions and brigades" in the US forces. The relevance that this has in evaluating the political success of Nixon and his approach to the war in Indochina is very much one deeply rooted in the contextual environment which Nixon was unfortunate enough to inherit from Lyndon Johnson as his successor. As previously stated, Nixon inherited an average of 1200 American deaths per month, and a state of affairs that is by no means enviable. What repercussions this had lies in the initial skill of Nixon's foreign policy development in dealing with this as best he could, considering. It is in this way, that Nixon was able to develop successful individual policies, whether on a foreign or a domestic stage, which is the central reason why his policies towards Indochina may be observed as somewhat "successful".

The final policy to be assessed is the policy developed by Nixon and his secretary of state Henry Kissinger. It is of course, the concept of "Linkage". This policy hoped, that if the US began

communication with the Soviets and the Chinese, that these communist nations would put pressure on Hanoi to begin negotiations. While this is credible, the key factor in deciding the fate of this policy is the approach that was taken by Nixon and his staff. They continued to support the idea of Linkage long after it became clear that it was unsuccessful. In this case, it was not the policy, but the approach taken by Nixon, that decided the success of his ability to develop his policies.

In summation, it can be granted that Nixon did, at most stages of his presidency, have a successful grip on aspects of his policy development. However, it was in his inability to hold transverse political integrity, that his policy development towards Indochina can be perceived as not particularly successful at all. Secondly, while his policies may have been successful if undertaken a little differently, his approach ensured that negotiations with the North failed, Vietnamisation ended with Southern loss, and Nixon ended his second term stepping down as the president of the USA.