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DSST A History of the Vietnam War Exam



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Question: 1

One of the often-cited criticisms of the American viewpoint on North Vietnamese politics was:

- A. That American policy approved of socialism but not full-scale communism.
- B. That American officials wanted to restore the French colonial government.
- C. That American policy was to make Southeast Asia dependent on its support.
- D. That Americans viewed communism as a monolith.

Answer: D

Explanation:

A common American belief during the Cold War period was that all communist countries had compatible interests, objectives, and geopolitical designs. In other words, the US government tended to equate Russian ambitions with those of the Chinese, the North Vietnamese, the Koreans, and others. The other options are illogical. America had never owned colonies and did not favor colonial governments. It wanted an independent Vietnam, free of communist rule. Option "a" is irrelevant in that "socialism" was not on the agenda.

Question: 2

The NLF, an acronym for National Liberation Front, was:

- A. A political and military unit comprised strictly of North Vietnamese soldiers who remained in the South after the war with the French.
- B. A strictly political organization of anti-Diem activists directed by the Hanoi regime.
- C. A group of dissidents and former landowners who objected to the Diem governments land reform measures.
- D. An autonomous political and quasi-military organization of former anti-French resistance forces.

Answer: D

Explanation:

The important thing to know here is that the NLF was an autonomous, or self-directed, group of resistance fighters who had fought the French and now turned their attention to opposition to the Diem government. Ho Chi Minh had been sometimes frustrated by his attempts to restrain the NLF from going beyond his recommendations with regard to opposing the Diem government. "D" is the correct answer. While the NLF may have contained a few regular troops, it was made up largely of civilian forces who wanted reunification with North Vietnam and independence from foreign control, and who had rejected Diem's government.

Question: 3

The Strategic Hamlet program is best described as a:

- A. Systematic placement of fortified camps intended to be under the control and protection of the Diem government.
- B. Plan developed by Nhu Diem to capture villages controlled by the Viet Cong.
- C. Ring of forts surrounded by well-trained South Vietnamese troops.
- D. Plan to bait the Viet Cong into entering hamlets in South Vietnam where they could be identified and eliminated.

Answer: A

Explanation:

One of the greatest difficulties in the Vietnam conflict was the challenge of knowing friend from foe in a population that was integrated and often infiltrated by NLF and Viet Cong elements. The Strategic Hamlet program was devised by President Diem's brother Nhu and employed as a means of separating and protecting villages that supported the Diem government. Government-protected villages were often surrounded by ditches, mounds, barbed wire, or other obstacles to infiltration. The best answer is There would not have been enough "well-trained South Vietnamese troops" to protect the hamlets, as suggested in answer.

Question: 4

When President John F. Kennedy took over from President Eisenhower in 1961, Eisenhower's advice to Kennedy was:

- A. To beware of Laos, because that's where the greatest challenge to democracy by the communists would occur.
- B. To beware of Vietnam, because that's where the greatest challenge to democracy by the communists would occur.
- C. To beware of right-wing elements in the military-industrial complex who wanted an unnecessary war in Southeast Asia.
- D. To beware of Vice President Lyndon Baines Johnson, who had geopolitical ambitions of his own.

Answer: A

Explanation:

Be aware that there are lots of "conspiracy" theories and that all of them rely on half-truths. Eisenhower did once warn of the "military-industrial complex," but not to Kennedy, and he wouldn't likely have used the term "right wing." Equally misleading is answer "d," which would have been unheard of in politics. Interestingly, Eisenhower warned Kennedy of Laos, where the communist Pathet Lao was in open warfare against the royal Lao Army. Therefore, choice "a" is the correct one, though it is easy to see why one might be lured to option.

Question: 5

Prime Minister Diem's response to the growing NLF insurgency was to:

- A. Demand that President Kennedy send troops to train his own people and deploy forces to protect friendly hamlets from attack.
- B. Request help from the US with troop training and economic assistance, but keep US forces out of Vietnam.
- C. Request NATO forces to form a defense line between the 16th and 17th parallels.
- D. Initiate a broad re-education program for NLF sympathizers.

Answer: B

Explanation:

Re-education programs seem to have been a communist strategy' during the Cold War era, and the methods were typically brutal. Knowing that would eliminate answer "d." The initial predominant feeling among Diem and his family allies is that the US should assist with economic and training missions from a remove. Because of past resentment to French colonial rule, there was a justifiable perception that the presence of US troops would catalyze further resistance from the anti-Diem forces. Choice "b" is the correct answer. Choices "c" and "a" are wrong because those things didn't happen.

Question: 6

Among the weaknesses of the Strategic Hamlet program were:

- A. They were protected by untrained and incapable "militias" with little motivation to protect.
- B. There were too many hamlets and villages to protect and too few had been incorporated into strategic hamlets."
- C. Disagreement among US diplomats about the efficacy of the Strategic Hamlet program.
- D. They were susceptible to North Viet propaganda campaigns that characterized them as "concentration camps."
- E. All of the above.

Answer: E

Explanation:

Divisiveness often occurs when military decisions must be made. Interestingly, Kennedy's Assistant Secretary of State, Roger Hilsman, agreed with the North Vietnamese that the strategic hamlets had been made into concentration camps; on the other hand, the US ambassador to South Vietnam (Noting) believed the strategic hamlets were an effective way to protect the portion of the population that supported Diem. The other answer options are also true. The Strategic Hamlet program, by 1962, had constructed only 4,000 of 11,000 planned villages, and the existing ones were poorly defended with untrained and ineffective militia. Option "e" (all of the above) is the right answer here.

Question: 7

A key difference between President Kennedy's civilian and military advisors was:

- A. That "winning hearts and minds" was not the business of the US military in Vietnam.
- B. That military advisors favored Diem while civilian advisors thought that someone else would make a better Vietnamese president.
- C. That the feared Soviet and Chinese expansions could be halted by resisting communism in small countries like Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos.
- D. Whether or not the use of drones to target key Viet Cong strongholds was an effective fighting technique.

Answer: A

Explanation:

You should eliminate choice "d" easily, as the effective use of drone aircraft is a very recent development. Choice "c" poses the problem well, but in the Cold War period, all sides were generally in agreement that communism had to be contained—so that's not a good answer. Regarding "b," it's true that there were opposing points of view about Diem's leadership, but it wasn't neatly divided between military and civilian opinions. Option "a" is the best choice. The military generally didn't like being directed to win "hearts and minds," something they felt was better left to civilians.

Question: 8

In the early years of his presidency, Kennedy felt pressured to send troops to contain communism because of:

- A. A perceived failure in Laos and certain failure in the Cuban Bay of Pigs Invasion.
- B. Presidents who projected a strong military posture were likely to be re-elected.
- C. JFK's own military experience in PT boat 109 had shaped him into a military man and made him an advocate of the use of force in geopolitical conflict resolution.
- D. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara had advised Kennedy of the dangers of hegemonic "dominoes" in Southeast Asia.
- E. All of the above.

Answer: A

Explanation:

All of the answers except for "e" may contain a degree of truth, but the pressures most often cited are those in choice "a." The peace talks and agreements with Soviet Premier Khrushchev had created a perception of American "surrender," while the horrific, failed Bay of Pigs Invasion of Cuba clearly dogged the new president's early administration. Kennedy felt that he had to be strong in deterring communism in Southeast Asia, and in Vietnam particularly.

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