

domestic social reform, he found himself tied to Kennedy's advisers and had little choice but to be loyal to his predecessor's memory. With little room for manoeuvre and under the guidance of McNamara, the war was escalated in 1965 - after the Gulf of Tonkin resolution the previous year - as ground troops arrived and 'Rolling Thunder' began. Because of his belief in the same containment theories as preceding presidents - the domino theory - he needed to maintain a position of superiority and strength both domestically and internationally.

However, Johnson cannot be entirely excused: he did have various options as a new president and could well have chosen a new administration and pushed a different policy to that of Kennedy. By the 1960s, the problem in Vietnam was not the fact that Truman and Eisenhower had got America involved there (although it was undeniably linked); the problem was the lack of new ideas and any policy other than escalation.

To conclude, what was consistent in all of the presidents' minds was the fact that no one could be seen as having 'lost' Vietnam. Ultimately, this was what drove forward the slowly escalating stalemate and led to solutions that were increasingly military and not political or economic. Presidents Kennedy and Johnson were undoubtedly the victims of earlier involvement in Vietnam but their policies were driven by faults and perceptions within their own administrations. All the presidents were constrained by Cold War theories that were convincing at the time and none could afford to withdraw if American credibility were to be maintained. The policies of Truman and Eisenhower were driven by the same motivations as those of Kennedy and Johnson but were undoubtedly more restrained in their actions. The latter could not afford to withdraw because of policies made during the 1950s and so they chose to escalate in an attempt to find a solution to the Vietnam problem.

Examiner's comments

Chloe has written an excellent answer that is undoubtedly of an A grade standard. She considers each president of the 1950s and 1960s in turn and comments frequently on aspects of their approach that have a clear and direct relevance for the question that is set. She has weighed the arguments that she has presented so that she considers both

sides of the question. She has obviously looked back to the actual question regularly in order to ensure that she keeps her answer completely on track. Chloe clearly has a good knowledge base about the issue and has used this to illustrate her line of argument. She has not made the mistake of describing in extensive detail information that would add little to the line of argument that she has developed.

It is true that some of the points made by Chloe are developed and supported a little sketchily and that the length of some of her paragraphs is very brief, but this does not undermine the overall impact of her response. Even though the time allowed to write the essay on Edexcel's unit 4 is relatively generous, there are still bound to be issues about what candidates leave out and absolute perfection is not required for an A grade. The key to the high grades is to present a clear line of supported argument and it is clear that this is what Chloe has achieved.

However, it should be noted that her general approach does have potential problems and should not necessarily be regarded as a template for answering essay questions. The possible danger of Chloe's approach is that she could have ended up with an answer that merely described a sequence of *ad hoc* issues with little focus on the question. Chloe has not fallen into this trap, but it would be very easy to do so when working under the pressure of examination conditions.

You could avoid this pitfall by approaching your response in a different way to Chloe. A suitable plan might be one that was formulated as a table and that looked at areas of agreement with the question focus (that is, examine the ways in which American policy in the 1950s did lead to military involvement) and then considered areas of disagreement (that is, examine the ways in which factors other than American policy in the 1950s led to military involvement). This would also have the advantage of enabling you to look for common themes across different presidencies without repeating yourself.

What Chloe's answer demonstrates very clearly is the fact that you can write an outstanding answer using a variety of different approaches. There is no single 'right way' to respond to questions. Develop the style that enables you to show your strengths most clearly to the examiner.

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