

# U.S. Foreign Aid to Vietnam: A Fifty-Year Historical Analysis (1975 - 2025).

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## Abstract:

This paper explores the 50-year evolution of U.S. foreign aid to Vietnam following the Vietnam War, from initial humanitarian relief to economic and technical assistance. It examines the impact of diplomatic normalization in 1995 and the 2025 cessation of USAID activities. Through analysis of primary documents, scholarly literature, and media reports, the paper critically assesses the influence of U.S. aid on Vietnam's reconstruction, economic modernization, and governance reforms, while considering the strategic and diplomatic underpinnings of the bilateral relationship. The research illuminates how aid modalities adapt to changing political climates and developmental needs, and highlights the role of soft power in major power competition.

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## **Introduction**

The Vietnam War concluded in 1975, leaving Vietnam devastated, its infrastructure and economy in ruins. Despite a contentious wartime history, the United States initiated aid programs to address urgent humanitarian needs and, eventually, support economic rebuilding. Initially, these efforts were hampered by limited cooperation and ideological differences due to the war's legacy and political tensions. The normalization of relations in 1995 marked a turning point, transforming U.S. aid into structured, sustained developmental assistance driven by both strategic geopolitical interests and a genuine commitment to post-conflict reconciliation (Vu & Nguyen, 2024).

Understanding the historical progression of U.S. aid to Vietnam is essential for several reasons. First, it illuminates the role that aid has played in transforming bilateral relations, shifting from enmity to a pragmatic partnership. Second, it provides insights into how aid modalities adapt in response to changing political climates and developmental needs. In addition, by examining the hypothetical cessation of USAID activities in 2025 under President Donald Trump, the study highlights potential vulnerabilities in the long-term developmental trajectory of Vietnam and prompts broader discussions on the future of U.S. foreign assistance. Lastly, this study investigates the role of soft power in the competition between major powers through the case of Vietnam. Both China and the United States, the two superpowers vying for power in the 21st century, consider Vietnam a contested region. Under President Donald Trump, the United States has adopted isolationist policies, withdrawn from global strategic regions, and dismantled soft power maintenance tools such as USAID. This has created a vacuum in Vietnam, and Southeast Asia more broadly, for China to fill. This study seeks to clarify the potential damage to US interests by examining the role of US aid in promoting these interests in Vietnam, a former enemy.

## **The evolution of U.S. aid to Vietnam**

The issue of US aid to Vietnam following the war's end in 1975 has not been thoroughly researched. To date, only a few reports, which are policy advocacy documents rather than academic studies, provide an overview of this process.

In 2005, the Congressional Research Service (CRS) published the report "Overview of the U.S. Aid Program in Vietnam," which outlines the history, structure, and primary components of American bilateral assistance in Vietnam since 1975, including shifts due to political, economic, and security considerations. (Congressional Research Service, 2005). Also in 2005, to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the normalization of relations between Vietnam and the United States in 1995, the Congressional Research Service (CRS) published the report "The Vietnam-U.S. Normalization Process" (Mark Manyin), which

examines the gradual reestablishment of economic and diplomatic ties between the two countries, emphasizing how American aid was restored and transformed during the normalization process beginning in the early 1990s.

CRS Report RL32427 in 2006, “Millennium Challenge Account: Implementation of a New U.S. Foreign Aid Initiative” provides an overview of US international aid policy, including a discussion of Vietnam. Although not exclusively focused on Vietnam, this report discusses aid mechanisms, including those affecting Vietnam, and provides insight into the design of the new U.S. foreign assistance programs, reflecting broader trends that impact American aid in Southeast Asia (Mark E. Manyin, 2005).

Official reports from USAID and other U.S. government agencies provide detailed accounts of aid initiatives, their implementation challenges, and assessments of their outcomes. These documents show that U.S. aid initiatives for Vietnam in the early postwar period focused on the humanitarian response immediately after 1975, while U.S. aid policy initiatives for Vietnam since the normalization of relations in 1995 have shifted attention to economic and technical assistance (Vu, T. & Nguyen, T., 2022). Simultaneously, Vietnamese government documents offer a domestic perspective on how these programs have influenced national development and governance.

The complex relationship between the United States and Vietnam has undergone a remarkable transformation in the decades since the end of the Vietnam War. From adversaries, the two countries have gradually forged a cooperative partnership, marked by robust trade connections and increasing security cooperation. American aid to Vietnam has been a critical component of this evolving relationship, encompassing humanitarian assistance, development initiatives, and security collaborations. This literature review delves into the existing scholarship on American aid to Vietnam since 1975, examining its historical context, motivations, impact, and Vietnamese perspectives (The Evolution of U.S.-Vietnam Ties, 2017).

### *Post-War Isolation*

April 18, 1975, just before the war ended, the U.S. Congress passed a series of laws restricting aid to Indochina. These included the Vietnam Contingency Act of 1975, which established a fund for humanitarian and withdrawal purposes, and authorized the use of armed forces to protect the withdrawal of U.S. citizens and their dependents. This act also mandated that funds be distributed through the United Nations or voluntary relief agencies (D-AL, 2025). The conclusion of the Vietnam War in 1975 ushered in a period of profound political and economic upheaval for Vietnam. The country, newly unified under the Communist Party of Vietnam, confronted international isolation and a faltering

economy (The Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, 2018). The United States, still grappling with the aftermath of a divisive war and facing declining Congressional support for foreign aid. As a result, the US enacted a trade embargo and severed diplomatic relations with Vietnam. This period of strained relations was further complicated by the unresolved issue of American prisoners of war (POWs) and those missing in action (MIAs), along with concerns about human rights in Vietnam (The House of Representatives, 1998).

### *Path to Normalization*

Despite these obstacles, a gradual shift in Vietnamese foreign policy towards greater independence, combined with Vietnam's need for economic integration, set the stage for improved relations with the United States in the 1990s. Vietnam's efforts to address the POW/MIA issue and engage in bilateral trade agreements, such as allowing the search for missing U.S. soldiers, were crucial steps towards the eventual normalization of diplomatic relations in 1995 (Vu, Tuong and Nguyen, Thuy, 2022). The resumption of U.S. aid to Vietnam closely followed this trajectory, beginning with a modest \$1 million allocated for prosthetics for Vietnamese war victims in 1991. This initial trickle of aid signaled the beginning of a new chapter in U.S.-Vietnam relations (Perrin Atreides, 2023).

According to statistics from the United States Census Bureau, in 1992, Vietnam had no exports to the United States and imported \$4.6 million worth of goods from the United States. The normalization of relations in 1995 marked a turning point. The United States and Vietnam established embassies and consulates, and trade relations expanded significantly.

In 1995, the United States exported \$252.3 million to Vietnam and imported \$199 million. In 1997, Vietnam had its first trade surplus with the United States. Vietnam exported \$388.4 million and imported \$286.7 million. Vietnam's trade surplus with the United States has lasted from 1997 to the present. In 2024, Vietnam's trade surplus with the United States is 123.46 billion USD (The US Census Bureau, 2024). The United States emerged as Vietnam's largest trading partner. This economic engagement played a crucial role in fostering closer ties between the two nations.

However, the legacy of the war continued to cast a long shadow. Americans grappled with the meaning of the conflict and its impact on U.S. foreign policy. The War Powers Resolution, passed by Congress in 1973 to limit the president's authority to commit forces to conflicts without congressional approval, reflected the growing reluctance to engage in foreign interventions. Despite these challenges, the relationship between the United States and Vietnam continued to evolve. The rise of China as a regional power created a convergence of interests, with both countries seeking to maintain stability in the South

China Sea. This shared concern has become a driving force behind increased cooperation and the expansion of American aid to Vietnam.

### *American Aid to Vietnam: Motivations and Goals*

The motivations behind American aid to Vietnam are multifaceted and have evolved over time. Initially, humanitarian concerns were paramount. The United States provided assistance to Vietnamese refugees fleeing the conflict and addressed the enduring consequences of the war, such as unexploded ordnance and the devastating effects of Agent Orange. Operation Babylift, initiated in 1975, airlifted thousands of Vietnamese orphans to the United States, highlighting the humanitarian efforts undertaken during the fall of South Vietnam.

As relations improved, the focus of American aid shifted towards development assistance. The World Bank's assistance program in Vietnam, with its objectives of supporting Vietnam's transition to a market economy, enhancing equitable and sustainable development, and promoting good governance, exemplifies this approach. In the first ten years, from 1993 to 2004, Vietnam received pledges of \$29 billion in Official Development Assistance (ODA), with about \$14 billion disbursed. In 2004 alone, international donors pledged \$2.25 billion in ODA, of which \$1.65 billion was disbursed (Le, T. 2004). Furthermore, the United States has increasingly viewed aid as a means to cultivate closer ties with Vietnam, particularly in the context of regional security concerns (Perrin Atreides, 2023).

The emergence of China as a regional power has led to a convergence of interests between the United States and Vietnam, with both countries seeking to maintain peace and stability in the South China Sea. American aid, including security assistance and military training programs such as IMET (International Military Education and Training), has become a tool to bolster Vietnam's defense capabilities and counter Chinese influence (Kaplan, R. D., 2012).

### *Types of American Aid to Vietnam*

The multifaceted relationship between the United States and Vietnam is reflected in the diverse range of programs and initiatives encompassed by American aid to Vietnam. These programs and initiatives, driven by the motivations and goals outlined above, can be broadly classified into several categories.

First of all, let's look at US humanitarian aid policy in Vietnam. Humanitarian aid includes assistance provided to Vietnamese refugees following the war (D-AL, J.

J., 2025). The United States played a significant role in the largest refugee resettlement effort in American history, with organizations like the International Rescue Committee (IRC) helping over 18,000 Vietnamese refugees begin new lives in the U.S. in 1975 alone (International Rescue Committee, 2016).

The Humanitarian Operation (HO) Program holds a significant place in U.S. history, offering aid to former South Vietnamese officials and those incarcerated in re-education camps following the Vietnam War. The HO Program arose from the aftermath of the Vietnam War, a conflict that deeply affected both Vietnam and the United States. With the fall of Saigon in 1975, many South Vietnamese citizens, particularly those associated with the former government or the U.S., faced imprisonment in re-education camps. Amidst this turmoil, the United States grappled with its moral obligation to those who used to be its ally. The HO Program, a component of the broader Orderly Departure Program (ODP), was established to provide a safe and orderly route for these individuals to resettle in the U.S. This program was discussed and launched in the 1980s and implemented throughout the 1990s (The Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, 2025).

The second type of aid that the United States is interested in giving to Vietnam is Development Aid. This category focuses on promoting economic growth, good governance, and sustainable development in Vietnam. It includes programs supporting education, healthcare, infrastructure development, and environmental protection (Thuy Nguyen, 2022).

Comparing the US development aid to Japan, South Korea, and China, we see that US development aid to Vietnam is fragmented, unsystematic, and fails to achieve strategic goals.

Michael Pillsbury, the director for Chinese strategy at Hudson Institute, in his book "The Hundred-Year Marathon: China's Secret Strategy to Replace America as the Global Superpower" (2016) pointed out that the United States has systematically provided educational, scientific and technical aid to China to help China build technological and educational foundations for economic development. The US aid policy in China, as per Michael Pillsbury, was a systematic approach that encompassed a wide range of interconnected areas, with the US government directly assisting their Chinese counterparts. This included the Labor Department sending experts to enhance Chinese productivity, the Treasury Department and the comptroller of the currency helping to improve Chinese banking practices, and the Federal Aviation Administration aiding Chinese aircraft manufacturers. Additionally, numerous other US government agencies contributed to hundreds of science assistance programs in China (Michael Pillsbury, 2016).

Over the past 30 years, from 1995 to 2025, the United States has not provided systematic development assistance to Vietnam. US central agencies have not assisted equivalent agencies in Vietnam. There have been no programs to support Vietnam's technological capacity building in any field. This is unlike the aviation technology capacity improvement support that the United States has provided to China (Nguyen, T., 2025).

The US did not only provide assistance to China by sharing financial management and civil aviation technology and improving labor productivity but also by sharing strategic military technology. Micheal Pillsbury stated that in 1985 US aid to China included the sale of six major weapons systems worth over \$1 billion, with the goal of strengthening China's army, navy, and air force and even assisting in the expansion of its marine corps. Additionally, in March 1986 the Reagan administration aided China in developing eight national research centers focused on genetic engineering, intelligent robotics, artificial intelligence, automation, biotechnology, lasers, supercomputers, space technology, and manned spaceflight. Pillsbury believes that the scientific and technological aid from the West, mainly the United States, helped China quickly become a rival to the West and the United States. Compared to the US development aid policy for Vietnam, the aid provided to China was far more systematic and strategic (Michael Pillsbury, 2016).

Comparing US aid to Vietnam before 1975 (aid to the Republic of Vietnam) and after 1995, we see significant gaps. Before 1975, NGOs had also played a significant role in development aid, with 33 American NGOs from diverse political backgrounds providing assistance in Vietnam by 1970 (American Experience, 2019). However, US aid to Vietnam since 1995 has focused on state-owned organizations, with civil society participation in Vietnam being very weak.

The political apprehensions that impeded US aid in Vietnam are also reflected in the situation of the Peace Corps. The Peace Corps played an important role in providing educational aid to South Korea during the Cold War. But after 1995, in Vietnam, the Peace Corps could not participate in US aid activities due to Vietnam's suspicions about political issues. Only recently have the Peace Corps' activities come into practice, although they are still very weak.

The U.S. Peace Corps is a volunteer program run by the United States government. Its mission is to promote world peace and friendship by fulfilling three goals: First, to help the people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women. Peace Corps volunteers provide technical assistance and training to communities in developing countries. Second, to help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served. American volunteers act as citizen diplomats, sharing American culture and values with the people they work with. Third, to help promote a better understanding

of other peoples on the part of Americans. American volunteers gain firsthand experience of other cultures and share their experiences with Americans upon their return. The Peace Corps was founded in 1961 by President John F. Kennedy. Since then, over 240,000 Americans have served as volunteers in 142 countries. Vietnam is the 143rd country to invite and partner with the Peace Corps. The establishment of the Peace Corps in Vietnam is a significant symbol of reconciliation and cooperation between the two countries after a long history of conflict (U.S. Mission Vietnam, 2024).

Negotiations for a bilateral agreement continued for the next 10 years. In 2016, during a trip to Vietnam, the bilateral agreement setting forth the framework for Peace Corps Vietnam was signed between the Peace Corps and the Government of Vietnam. The agreement was signed by Peace Corps Director Carrie Hessler-Radelet and Vietnam's Ambassador to the United States, Pham Quang Vinh. A second Peace Corps assessment was conducted in 2019 by a six-person team. This assessment reaffirmed that it was appropriate to open a Peace Corps program in Vietnam, and negotiations continued toward an Implementing Agreement. In October 2020, the Peace Corps launch team assembled in Hanoi, Vietnam. In 2020, an Implementing Agreement setting forth the operational plan for Peace Corps Vietnam was signed. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the agreement was signed on two dates. On July 10, 2020, the Vice Minister of Education and Training Nguyen Van Phuc signed the Agreement in Hanoi, Vietnam in the physical presence of US Ambassador Daniel Kritenbrink, and virtual presence of Peace Corps Director Jody Olsen. On July 17, 2020, the agreement was signed in ink by Director Olsen during a small event held at the Peace Corps office in Washington, D.C (The Beginning of the Story, 2016). The U.S. Peace Corps in Vietnam focuses on English education. Volunteers are assigned to high schools to support English language programming in and around Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City (Projects in Viet Nam, 2025).

As of December 2024, there were 36 Peace Corps volunteers serving in Vietnam. (U.S. Mission Vietnam, 2024). The second group of volunteers were sworn in in 2023, bringing the total number of Peace Corps volunteers in Vietnam to 18. In October 2023, a new group of volunteers arrived in Vietnam and are set to become the first group to serve at high schools across Ho Chi Minh City. The program is expected to continue to grow in the coming years. The Peace Corps is committed to working with the Vietnamese government to improve English language education in the country (U.S. Mission Vietnam, 2024).

The type of US aid to Vietnam that is most watched by international observers is Security Assistance. This category includes programs aimed at strengthening Vietnam's defense capabilities, such as the provision of military equipment, training, and intelligence sharing. The IMET program, which provides military education and training to Vietnamese officers, is a key component of this assistance.

The United States and Vietnam are slowly developing their security relationship, which has fallen behind their economic ties. Some in the US see their security interests as complementary, especially regarding China, and want to improve military cooperation. This led to Vietnamese Defense Minister Pham Van Tra's visit to Washington in November 2003 and the USS Vandergriff's port call in Saigon later that month - both firsts since the Vietnam War, followed by more visits in 2004.

One way to increase military cooperation is through an International Military Education and Training (IMET) program. Since 2002, the Bush Administration has sought funding for Expanded IMET (E-IMET) courses to improve Vietnamese officers' English skills, enabling them to attend conferences at Pacific Command Headquarters. However, no funds have been released as an IMET agreement is pending, and funding would depend on the proposed Vietnam Human Rights Act (The US Congressional Research Service, 2005).

Since the normalization of relations between the United States and Vietnam in 1995, the U.S. has become a significant provider of health-related assistance to Vietnam. This aid encompasses a wide range of programs and initiatives implemented by the U.S. government, as well as U.S.-based non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other organizations. This report provides a comprehensive overview of this assistance, examining the programs, their impact, the challenges encountered, and future plans.

The United States, through USAID, has been a major provider of health-related aid to Vietnam since 1995. This aid includes initiatives that strengthen health systems and prevent infectious diseases, aligning with Vietnam's own healthcare goals. The focus is on sustainable solutions and long-term capacity building within Vietnam's healthcare sector. A significant portion of the aid is dedicated to HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment under PEPFAR, with USAID collaborating with the Vietnamese government and community organizations on several large-scale projects. USAID also supports programs for tuberculosis (TB) control, providing technical assistance and resources to improve detection, treatment, and training, while advocating for greater commitment from the Vietnamese government to end TB by 2030 (U.S. Mission Vietnam, 2021).

Along with USAID, other U.S. government agencies contribute to health-related aid in Vietnam. Since 1994, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has been involved in HIV/AIDS programs. The Department of Defense (DoD) also plays a role, particularly through health security and health diplomacy efforts. These DoD efforts include ten Pacific Partnership engagements, providing medical and humanitarian assistance, and support to enhance Vietnam's capacity to respond to health emergencies in coastal regions through the support for Vietnam's coastal medicine and disaster management initiative, as well as many other programs.

The United States provided vital assistance to Vietnam during the COVID-19 pandemic, including funding for 77 ultra-low temperature freezers to support vaccine storage and distribution through the “Ultra-low temperature freezers program”, and enhancing Vietnam’s COVID-19 testing capabilities through the “mobile COVID-19 testing capability program.” By the end of June 2021, the United States had also contributed \$4 billion to the COVAX fund and pledged and delivered 80 million doses of COVID vaccines (U.S. Mission Vietnam, 2021).

### *Shifting Sands: From Post-War Relief to Comprehensive Strategic Partnership*

The evolution of U.S. aid to Vietnam reflects a significant shift from initial post-war constraints and humanitarian efforts to a more strategic partnership driven by economic and security interests. Following the normalization of relations in 1995, U.S. assistance transformed from primarily humanitarian relief, initially limited by political tensions, to developmental aid focused on economic growth and, increasingly, security cooperation. This evolution highlights two key issues: first, the dynamic transformation of U.S. aid from a constrained, post-war humanitarian response to a strategic developmental assistance, emphasizing economic and security collaboration; and second, the underlying strategic motivations, particularly the use of aid as a soft power tool to counter Chinese influence in the region, demonstrating how humanitarian goals are intertwined with geopolitical balance.

### **Analysis and Discussion**

In the immediate aftermath of the Vietnam War, U.S. aid was largely reactive, aimed at mitigating the humanitarian crisis that engulfed Vietnam. Despite the lingering bitterness from the war, limited aid initiatives were suggested to provide essential relief. However, these early efforts were hampered by political and ideological barriers, resulting in fragmented and short-term interventions. The ideological divide between the two nations meant that U.S. aid during this period was often symbolic and constrained by Cold War politics. Nonetheless, small-scale aid projects laid the groundwork for future cooperation by slowly building trust and demonstrating the potential benefits of developmental assistance.

The initial substantial assistance to Vietnam before 1995 was the HO program, which facilitated the resettlement of civil servants who had worked for the government of the Republic of Vietnam in the United States. Educational, economic, military, and scientific and technical aid programs were primarily implemented after 1995.

The normalization of diplomatic relations in 1995 marked a turning point. U.S. aid evolved into a more systematic and comprehensive program designed to support Vietnam's integration into the global economy. Assistance shifted from a focus on emergency relief to strategic investments in infrastructure, education, and public health.

In this era, U.S. aid programs targeted economic modernization through investments in transportation, energy, and digital infrastructure. Technical assistance initiatives sought to reform governance and improve public sector efficiency, thereby fostering a more conducive environment for foreign investment and sustainable development.

Despite these advances, U.S. aid was not without controversy. Critics argued that aid was sometimes used as a tool for advancing U.S. strategic interests rather than purely for developmental purposes. Debates over the effectiveness and conditionality of aid highlighted tensions between political objectives and humanitarian needs.

In 2025, subsequent to the inauguration of President Donald Trump, the US Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) elected to cease all USAID operations. The purpose of DOGE is to decrease government operating costs and increase investment in priority areas that directly benefit the United States. This policy marks a dramatic departure from decades of USAID engagement. This abrupt cessation caused concerns about the continuity of existing projects, particularly in the health, education, and infrastructure sectors. Analysts caution that the sudden withdrawal could disrupt critical developmental initiatives and undermine progress achieved over the previous decades.

The long-term implications of the policy shift are multifaceted. For Vietnam, the withdrawal of U.S. aid may necessitate a strategic pivot towards alternative sources of international assistance, including increased reliance on regional partners.

For U.S.-Vietnam relations, the move could signal a broader retraction of U.S. engagement in Southeast Asia, potentially altering the geopolitical balance in the region. These outcomes call for a re-examination of aid models and the formulation of new strategies to ensure sustainable development.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has traced the evolution of U.S. aid to Vietnam from the post-war era through the transformative period following normalization in 1995, culminating in the controversial policy change of 2025. The analysis reveals that while U.S. aid has contributed significantly to Vietnam's economic and institutional modernization, it has also been fraught with political complexities and implementation challenges. The cessation of USAID activities in 2025 - whether as a reflection of shifting U.S. priorities or a broader geopolitical recalibration - underscores the fragility of aid-dependent developmental models and the

need for diversified, resilient approaches to international development. Future research should further investigate the long-term impacts of such policy reversals and explore alternative frameworks for sustainable development that balance strategic interests with humanitarian imperatives and enhance the US - Vietnam relations.

This juncture necessitates a retrospective analysis of United States aid to Vietnam. Such an examination would illuminate the requisite modifications for the formulation of an efficacious strategy concerning future U.S.-Vietnam relations.

United States assistance to Vietnam had its genesis in the support provided by the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) to the Viet Minh movement from 1944 during World War II. At that time, the Viet Minh, led by President Ho Chi Minh, aligned with the Allied forces against Japanese fascism. However, following 1948, the onset of the Cold War polarized the world into communist and capitalist blocs. The Viet Minh, while pursuing independence from France, also gravitated towards the communist sphere. Consequently, several non-communist nationalist movements sought alignment with the United States. From 1950 onwards, U.S. aid was redirected towards opposition factions against the Viet Minh. From 1950 to 1967, U.S. assistance focused primarily on the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and its predecessor agencies. A USAID publication traces the evolution of U.S. support programs, commencing prior to 1954 and extending through the collapse of South Vietnam in 1975. This document also addresses the challenges encountered by U.S. aid agencies due to escalating tensions between North and South Vietnam, internal political conflicts, and the emergence of an armed insurgency in the South. Notably, it analyzes the 1967 establishment of CORDS (Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support), an initiative aimed at coordinating civilian assistance programs with military operations, and provides information on the location of pertinent records within the National Archives. This historical trajectory reveals a shift in U.S. intervention strategy, moving from primarily economic assistance to a confluence of aid and military engagement during the Vietnam War.

That is to say the United States aid to Vietnam exhibited a trajectory characterized by continual fluctuations, influenced by short-term vicissitudes in both international and Vietnamese domestic politics. U.S. aid policy in Vietnam was distinguished by its ephemeral nature, geared towards serving immediate interests rather than being anchored in a long-term strategic foundation.

This can be largely attributed to the U.S. lacking a comprehensive and systematic strategic framework for the entirety of Southeast Asia. United States policies towards the region frequently demonstrated a high degree of malleability, adjusted to accommodate specific U.S. objectives within discrete instances of international geopolitics.

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