

# CHAPTER

# 30

# The Vietnam War

1954–1975

## Why It Matters

The Vietnam War created very bitter divisions within the United States. Supporters argued that patriotism demanded that communism be halted. Opponents argued that intervening in Vietnam was immoral. Many young people protested or resisted the draft. Victory was not achieved, although more than 58,000 American soldiers died. After the war, the nation had many wounds to heal.

## The Impact Today

Changes brought about by the war are still evident in the United States today.

- The nation is reluctant to commit troops overseas.
- The War Powers Act limits a president's power to involve the nation in war.



**The American Vision Video** The Chapter 30 video, "Vietnam: A Different War," explores the causes and the impact of this longest war in American history.

1954

- Vietnam defeat French
- Geneva Accords signed

1964

- Congress passes Gulf of Tonkin Resolution

1965

- U.S. combat troops arrive in Vietnam



United States

PRESIDENTS

Eisenhower  
1953–1961



1955

Kennedy  
1961–1963



1960

L. Johnson  
1963–1969



1965

1955

- Khrushchev is dominant leader in USSR

1958

- De Gaulle heads France's Fifth Republic

1964

- Japan introduces first high-speed passenger train



World



The dedication ceremony for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., November 13, 1982

**1967**

- March on the Pentagon takes place

**1968**

- Tet offensive
- Students protest at Democratic National Convention in Chicago

*Nixon*  
1969–1974



**1970**

- National Guard troops kill students at Kent State University



**1973**

- Cease-fire signed with North Vietnam



*Ford*  
1974–1977



**1975**

- Evacuation of last Americans from Vietnam

**HISTORY**  
*Online*

**Chapter Overview**

Visit the *American Vision* Web site at [tav.glencoe.com](http://tav.glencoe.com) and click on **Chapter Overviews—Chapter 30** to preview chapter information.

**CLICK HERE**

1970

1975

**1967**

- First heart transplant performed

**1968**

- Soviets repress Czechoslovakia's rebellion

**1971**

- Pakistani civil war leads to independent Bangladesh

**1975**

- Civil war breaks out in Angola



# The United States Focuses on Vietnam

## Guide to Reading

### Main Idea

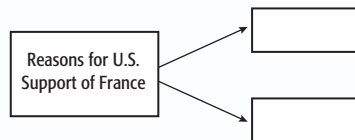
American efforts to stop the spread of communism led to U.S. involvement in the affairs of Vietnam.

### Key Terms and Names

Ho Chi Minh, domino theory, guerrilla, Dien Bien Phu, Ngo Dinh Diem

### Reading Strategy

**Organizing** As you read about the increasing involvement of the United States in Vietnam, complete a graphic organizer similar to the one below by providing reasons that the United States aided France in Vietnam.



### Reading Objectives

- **Describe** the nationalist motives of Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh.
- **Explain** the origins of American involvement in Vietnam during the 1950s.

### Section Theme

**Government and Democracy** American involvement in Vietnam was a reflection of Cold War strategy.

### Preview of Events



## ★ An American Story ★



Lieutenant Joe Marm

In 1965 the first major battle between American and North Vietnamese soldiers took place in the Ia Drang Valley in South Vietnam. During the battle, a platoon of American soldiers was cut off and surrounded. Lieutenant Joe Marm's platoon was among those sent to rescue the trapped Americans. When his men came under heavy fire, Marm acted quickly: "I told the men to hold their fire. . . . Then I ran forward. . . . That's the principle we use in the infantry, 'Lead by your own example.'" Marm raced across open ground and hurled grenades at the enemy, and although he was shot in the jaw, he managed to kill the troops firing at his men. For his extraordinary bravery, Lieutenant Marm received the Medal of Honor:

“I feel I'm the recipient of the medal for the many, many brave soldiers whose deeds go unsung. . . . [T]he medal is as much theirs as it is mine. It's always tough to get men to go into battle, but we were a tight unit, and there were Americans out there that we were trying to get to. We're all in it together, and we were fighting for each other and for our guys. . . . I had the best soldiers. . . . They were fearless, and they were just great Americans and they're going to go down in history.”

—quoted in *The Soldiers' Story*

## Early American Involvement in Vietnam

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, most Americans knew little about Vietnam. During this time, however, American officials came to view the nation as increasingly important in the campaign to halt the spread of communism.

**The Growth of Vietnamese Nationalism** When the Japanese seized power in Vietnam during World War II, it was one more example of foreigners ruling the Vietnamese people. China had controlled the region off and on for hundreds of years. From the late 1800s until World War II, France ruled Vietnam and neighboring Laos and Cambodia—a region known collectively as French Indochina.

By the early 1900s, nationalism had become a powerful force in Vietnam. The Vietnamese formed several political parties to push for independence or reform of the French colonial government. One of the leaders of the nationalist movement was Nguyen Tat Thanh—better known by his alias, **Ho Chi Minh**, or “Bringer of Light.” He was born in 1890 in central Vietnam. As a young man, Ho Chi Minh taught at a village school. At the age of 21, he sailed for Europe on a French freighter, paying his passage by working in the galley. During his travels abroad, including a stay in the Soviet Union, Ho Chi Minh became an advocate of communism. In 1930 he returned to Southeast Asia, where he helped found the Indochinese Communist Party and worked to overthrow French rule.

Ho Chi Minh’s activities made him a wanted man. He fled Indochina and spent several years in exile in the Soviet Union and China. In 1941 he returned to Vietnam. By then Japan had seized control of the country. Ho Chi Minh organized a nationalist group called the **Vietminh**. The group united both Communists and non-Communists in the struggle to

expel the Japanese forces. Soon afterward, the United States began sending military aid to the Vietminh.

**The United States Supports the French** With the Allies’ victory over Japan in August 1945, the Japanese surrendered control of Indochina. Ho Chi Minh and his forces quickly announced that Vietnam was an independent nation. He even crafted a Vietnam Declaration of Independence. Archimedes Patti, an American officer stationed in Vietnam at the time, helped the rebel leader write the document. When a translator read aloud the opening—“All men are created equal; they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; among these are liberty, life, and the pursuit of happiness”—Patti suddenly sat up, startled, recognizing the words as very similar to the American Declaration of Independence.

**Picturing History**

**Rural Economy** Most of Vietnam’s people live in the country’s low-lying fertile lands near the Red River delta in the north and the Mekong River delta in the south. *What does the image below suggest about the use of human labor in the country’s agricultural economy?*



**Geography Skills**

- Interpreting Maps** What three countries border North and South Vietnam?
- Applying Geography Skills** A mountain chain extends nearly 800 miles (1,290 km) from North to South Vietnam. How do you think this terrain aided the Vietnamese guerrillas who were fighting U.S. troops?



“I stopped him and turned to Ho in amazement and asked if he really intended to use it in his declaration. . . . Ho sat back in his chair, his palms together with fingertips touching his lips ever so lightly, as though meditating. Then, with a gentle smile he asked softly, ‘Should I not use it?’ I felt sheepish and embarrassed. Of course, I answered, why should he not?”

—quoted in *The Perfect War*

France, however, had no intention of seeing Vietnam become independent. Seeking to regain their colonial empire in Southeast Asia, French troops returned to Vietnam in 1946 and drove the Vietminh forces into hiding in the countryside. By 1949 French officials had set up a new government in Vietnam.

The Vietminh fought back against the French-dominated regime and slowly increased their control over large areas of the countryside. As fighting between the two sides escalated, France appealed to the United States for help.

The request put American officials in a difficult position. The United States opposed colonialism. It had pressured the Dutch to give up their empire in Indonesia, and it supported the British decision to give India independence in 1947. In Vietnam, however, the independence movement had become entangled with the Communist movement. American officials did not think France should control Vietnam, but they did not want Vietnam to be Communist either.

Two events convinced the Truman administration to help France—the fall of China to communism, and the outbreak of the Korean War. Korea, in particular, convinced American officials that the Soviet Union had begun a major push to impose communism on East Asia. Shortly after the Korean War began, Truman authorized a massive program of military aid to French forces fighting in Vietnam.

On taking office in 1953, President Eisenhower continued to support the French military campaign against the Vietminh. By 1954 the United States was paying roughly three-fourths of France’s war costs. During a news conference that year, Eisenhower defended United States policy in Vietnam by stressing what became known as the **domino theory**—the belief that if Vietnam fell to communism, so too would the other nations of Southeast Asia:

“You have a row of dominoes set up, you knock over the first one, and what will happen to the last one is the certainty that it will go over very quickly. . . . Asia, after all, has already lost 450 million of its peoples to the Communist dictatorship, and we simply can’t afford greater losses. . . .”

—quoted in *America in Vietnam*

 **Reading Check** **Summarizing** Why did Ho Chi Minh lead a resistance movement against France?

## The Vietminh Drive Out the French

Despite significant amounts of aid from the United States, the French struggled against the Vietminh, who consistently frustrated the French with hit-and-run and ambush tactics. These are the tactics of **guerrillas**, irregular troops who usually blend into the civilian population and are often difficult for regular armies to fight. The mounting casualties and the inability of the French to defeat the Vietminh made the war very unpopular in France. Finally, in 1954, the struggle reached a turning point.

### **TURNING POINT**

**Defeat at Dien Bien Phu** In 1954 the French commander ordered his forces to occupy the mountain town of **Dien Bien Phu**. Seizing the town would interfere with the Vietminh’s supply lines and force them into open battle.

Soon afterward, a huge Vietminh force surrounded Dien Bien Phu and began bombarding the town. “Shells rained down on us without stopping like a hailstorm on a fall evening,” recalled one

### **Picturing History**

**Nationalist Leader** Ho Chi Minh was already involved in fighting for Vietnam’s independence when this photograph was taken in 1946. [What foreign country was he opposing at that time?](#)



French soldier. “Bunker after bunker, trench after trench collapsed, burying under them men and weapons.” On May 7, 1954, the French force at Dien Bien Phu fell to the Vietminh. The defeat convinced the French to make peace and withdraw from Indochina.

**Geneva Accords** Negotiations to end the conflict were held in Geneva, Switzerland. The **Geneva Accords** temporarily divided Vietnam along the 17th parallel, with Ho Chi Minh and the Vietminh in control of North Vietnam and a pro-Western regime in control of the South. In 1956 elections were to be held to reunite the country under a single government. The Geneva Accords also recognized Cambodia’s independence. (Laos had gained independence the previous year.)

Shortly after the Geneva Accords partitioned Vietnam, the French finally left. The United States almost immediately stepped in and became the principal protector of the new government in the South, led by a nationalist leader named **Ngo Dinh Diem** (NOH DIHN deh·EHM). Like Ho Chi Minh, Diem had been educated abroad, but unlike the North Vietnamese leader, Diem was pro-Western and fiercely anti-Communist. A Catholic, he welcomed the roughly one million North Vietnamese Catholics who migrated south to escape Ho Chi Minh’s rule.

When the time came in 1956 to hold countrywide elections, as called for by the Geneva Accords, Diem refused. He knew that the Communist-controlled



**Picturing History**

**Last Stand** French troops assemble a tank near the Dien Bien Phu airfield shortly before their defeat by the Vietminh. [How did this defeat influence French policy in Indochina?](#)

north would not allow genuinely free elections, and that Ho Chi Minh would almost certainly have won as a result. Eisenhower supported Diem and increased American military and economic aid to South Vietnam. In the wake of Diem’s actions, tensions between the North and South intensified. The nation seemed headed toward civil war, with the United States caught in the middle of it.

**Reading Check** **Examining** What was the effect of the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu?

**SECTION 1 ASSESSMENT**

**Checking for Understanding**

- Define:** *domino theory, guerrilla.*
- Identify:** Ho Chi Minh, Dien Bien Phu, Ngo Dinh Diem.
- Explain** the goals of the Vietminh.

**Reviewing Themes**

- Government and Democracy** Why did Ngo Dinh Diem refuse to hold countrywide elections in Vietnam in 1956?

**Critical Thinking**

- Interpreting** Why do you think the United States supported the government of Ngo Dinh Diem?
- Organizing** Use a graphic organizer like the one below to list provisions of the Geneva Accords.

Geneva Accords Provisions

**Analyzing Visuals**

- Analyzing Photographs** Study the Vietnam scene on page 893. How would you describe the contrast between American and Vietnamese societies? How do you think this contrast influenced American thinking toward the war?

**Writing About History**

- Descriptive Writing** Take on the role of a Vietnamese peasant in the 1940s. Write a journal entry on your feelings toward the French.

# Going to War in Vietnam

## Guide to Reading

### Main Idea

After providing South Vietnam with much aid and support, the United States finally sent in troops to fight as well.

### Key Terms and Names

Vietcong, Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, napalm, Agent Orange, Ho Chi Minh trail

### Reading Strategy

**Taking Notes** As you read about the beginnings of the Vietnam War, use the major headings of the section to create an outline similar to the one below.

Going to War in Vietnam  
I. American Involvement Deepens  
A.  
B.  
II.  
A.  
B.

### Reading Objectives

- **Describe** how President Johnson deepened American involvement in Vietnam.
- **Discuss** how the Vietcong and the North Vietnamese were able to frustrate the American military.

### Section Theme

**Science and Technology** American military procedures differed significantly from those of the Vietcong troops.

### Preview of Events



## ★ An American Story ★



Marlene Kramel

Marlene Kramel joined the Army Nurse Corps in 1965 when she was 21, and she went to Vietnam the following year. She was working in a makeshift hospital on what was a particularly quiet night. Most of the patients who filled the beds that evening were suffering from malaria.

Suddenly, a row of helicopters roared in from over the horizon, carrying wounded from a nearby battle. As the casualties came in on stretchers, the hospital turned chaotic. Doctors ran about the facility screaming orders and frantically trying to treat patients.

The only nurse on duty at the time, Kramel felt overwhelmed by the confusion. "Every one of the doctors is yelling for me," she recalled. "I didn't know what to do next. 'Start this. Do that.' Everybody's yelling at me. I couldn't do enough." Things happened so quickly that night, she insisted, that she could not remember most of it. "I can't remember blood, even. I can only remember, 'What am I going to do?' And the doctors moving at tremendous speed. And I'm there. And I'm not able to move fast enough. . . . That's all I remember."

—adapted from *The Living and the Dead*

## American Involvement Deepens

The steps that led to the chaos and casualties Marlene Kramel experienced in 1966 began in the mid-1950s when American officials decided to support the government of South Vietnam in its struggle against North Vietnam. After Ngo Dinh Diem refused to



hold national elections, Ho Chi Minh and his followers began an armed struggle to reunify the nation. They organized a new guerrilla army, which became known as the **Vietcong**. As fighting began between the Vietcong and South Vietnam's forces, President Eisenhower increased American aid, and sent hundreds of military advisers to train South Vietnam's army.

Despite the American assistance, the Vietcong continued to grow more powerful, in part because many Vietnamese opposed Diem's government, and in part because of the Vietcong's use of terror. By 1961 the Vietcong had assassinated thousands of government officials and established control over much of the countryside. In response Diem looked increasingly to the United States to keep South Vietnam from collapsing.

**Kennedy Takes Over** On taking office in 1961, President Kennedy continued the nation's policy of support for South Vietnam. Like presidents Truman and Eisenhower before him, Kennedy saw the Southeast Asian country as vitally important in the battle against communism.

In political terms, Kennedy needed to appear tough on communism, since Republicans often accused Democrats of having lost China to communism during the Truman administration. Kennedy's administration sharply increased military aid and sent more advisers to Vietnam. From 1961 to late 1963, the number of American military personnel in South Vietnam jumped from about 2,000 to around 15,000.

American officials believed the Vietcong continued to grow because Diem's government was unpopular and corrupt. They urged him to create a more democratic government and to introduce reforms to help Vietnam's peasants. Diem introduced some limited reforms, but they had little effect.

One program Diem introduced, at the urging of American advisers, made the situation worse. The South Vietnamese created special fortified villages, known as **strategic hamlets**. These villages were protected by machine guns, bunkers, trenches, and barbed wire. Vietnamese officials then moved villagers to the



### **Picturing History**

**Self-Immolation** On June 11, 1963, flames erupted around a Buddhist monk as he set himself on fire to protest government religious policies. [What policies did Ngo Dinh Diem take toward Buddhism?](#)

strategic hamlets, partly to protect them from the Vietcong, and partly to prevent them from giving aid to the Vietcong. The program proved to be extremely unpopular. Many peasants resented being uprooted from their villages, where they had worked to build farms and where many of their ancestors lay buried.

**The Overthrow of Diem** Diem made himself even more unpopular by discriminating against Buddhism, one of the country's most widely practiced religions. In the spring of 1963, Diem, a Catholic, banned the traditional religious flags for Buddha's birthday. When Buddhists took to the streets in protest, Diem's police killed 9 people and injured 14 others. In the demonstrations that followed, a Buddhist monk set himself on fire, the first of several to do so. The photograph of his self-destruction appeared on television and on the front pages of newspapers around the world. It was a stark symbol of the opposition to Diem.

In August 1963, American ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge arrived in Vietnam. He quickly learned that Diem's unpopularity had so alarmed several Vietnamese generals that they were plotting to overthrow him. When Lodge expressed American sympathy for their cause, the generals launched a military coup. They seized power on November 1, 1963, and executed Diem shortly afterward.

Diem's overthrow only made matters worse. Despite his unpopularity with some Vietnamese, Diem had been a respected nationalist and a capable administrator. After his death, South Vietnam's



government grew increasingly weak and unstable. The United States became even more deeply involved in order to prop up the weak South Vietnamese government. Coincidentally, three weeks after Diem's death, President Kennedy was also assassinated. The presidency, as well as the growing problem of Vietnam, now belonged to Kennedy's vice president, Lyndon Johnson.

**Reading Check** **Examining** What was the main goal of the Vietcong?

## Johnson and Vietnam

Initially President Johnson exercised caution and restraint regarding the conflict in Vietnam. "We seek no wider war," he repeatedly promised. At the same time, Johnson was determined to prevent South Vietnam from becoming Communist. "The battle against communism," he declared shortly before becoming president, "must be joined . . . with strength and determination."

Politics also played a role in Johnson's Vietnam policy. Like Kennedy, Johnson remembered that many Republicans blamed the Truman administration for the fall of China to communism in 1949. Should the Democrats also "lose" Vietnam, Johnson feared, it might cause a "mean and destructive debate that would shatter my Presidency, kill my administration, and damage our democracy."

### **TURNING POINT**

**The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution** On August 2, 1964, President Johnson announced that North Vietnamese torpedo boats had fired on two American destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin. Two days later, the president reported that another similar attack had taken place. Johnson was campaigning for the presidency and was very sensitive to accusations of being soft on communism. He insisted that North Vietnam's attacks were unprovoked and immediately ordered American aircraft to attack North Vietnamese ships and naval facilities. Johnson

# Different Viewpoints

## The Vietnam War

As the war in Vietnam dragged on, a clear division of American opinion emerged. In January 1966, George W. Ball, undersecretary of state to President Johnson, delivered an address to indicate "how we got [to Vietnam] and why we must stay." George F. Kennan, former ambassador to Russia, testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that same year, arguing that American involvement in Vietnam was "something we would not choose deliberately if the choice were ours to make all over again today."



### George W. Ball:

"[T]he conflict in Vietnam is a product of the great shifts and changes triggered by the Second World War. Out of the war, two continent-wide powers emerged—the United States and the Soviet Union. The colonial systems through which the nations of Western Europe had governed more than a third of the people of the world were, one by one, dismantled.

. . . [E]ven while the new national boundaries were still being marked on the map, the Soviet Union under Stalin exploited the confusion to push out the perimeter of its power and influence in an effort to extend the outer limits of Communist domination by force or the threat of force.

The bloody encounters in [Vietnam] are thus in a real sense battles and skirmishes in a continuing war to prevent one Communist power after another from violating internationally recognized boundary lines fixing the outer limits of Communist dominion.

. . . The evidence shows clearly enough that, at the time of French withdrawal . . . the Communist regime in Hanoi never intended that South Vietnam should develop in freedom.

. . . In the long run our hopes for the people of South Vietnam reflect our hopes for people everywhere. What we seek is a world living in peace and freedom."

did not reveal that the American warships had been helping the South Vietnamese conduct electronic spying and commando raids against North Vietnam.

Johnson then asked Congress to authorize the use of force to defend American forces. Congress agreed to Johnson's request with little debate. Most members of Congress agreed with Republican Representative Ross Adair of Indiana, who defiantly declared, "The American flag has been fired upon. We will not and cannot tolerate such things."

On August 7, 1964, the Senate and House passed the **Gulf of Tonkin Resolution**, authorizing the president to "take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression." With only two dissenting votes, Congress had, in effect, handed its war powers over to the president. 📖 (See page 1079 for more on the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution.)

**The United States Sends in Troops** Shortly after Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, the Vietcong began to attack bases where American

advisers were stationed in South Vietnam. The attacks began in the fall of 1964 and continued to escalate. After a Vietcong attack on a base at Pleiku in February 1965 left 7 Americans dead and more than 100 wounded, President Johnson decided to respond. Less than 14 hours after the attack, American aircraft assaulted North Vietnam.

After the airstrikes, one poll showed that Johnson's approval rating on his handling of Vietnam jumped from 41 percent to 60 percent. The president's actions also met with strong approval from his closest advisers, including Secretary of Defense **Robert McNamara** and National Security Adviser **McGeorge Bundy**.

There were some dissenters in the White House, chief among them Undersecretary of State George Ball, a long-time critic of U.S. policy in Vietnam. He warned that if the United States got too deeply involved in Vietnam, it might become difficult to get out. "Once on the tiger's back," he warned, "we cannot be sure of picking the place to dismount."

Most of the advisers who surrounded Johnson, however, firmly believed the nation had a duty to halt communism in Vietnam, both to maintain stability in Southeast Asia and to ensure the United States's continuing power and prestige in the world. In a memo to the president, Bundy argued:

“The stakes in Vietnam are extremely high. The American investment is very large, and American responsibility is a fact of life which is palpable in the atmosphere of Asia, and even elsewhere. The international prestige of the U.S. and a substantial part of our influence are directly at risk in Vietnam.”

—quoted in *The Best and the Brightest*

In March 1965, Johnson expanded American involvement by shifting his policy to a sustained bombing campaign against North Vietnam. The campaign was named **Operation Rolling Thunder**. That month the president also ordered the first combat troops into Vietnam. American soldiers were now fighting alongside the South Vietnamese troops against the Vietcong.

**Reading Check** **Describing** How did politics play a role in President Johnson's Vietnam policy?

## A Bloody Stalemate Emerges

By the end of 1965, more than 180,000 American combat troops were fighting in Vietnam. In 1966 that number doubled. Since the American military was

### George F. Kennan:

"Vietnam is not a region of major military and industrial importance. It is difficult to believe that any decisive developments of the world situation would be determined in normal circumstances by what happens on that territory. . . . Even a situation in which South Vietnam was controlled exclusively by the Vietcong, while regrettable . . . would not, in my opinion, present dangers great enough to justify our direct military intervention.

. . . To attempt to crush North Vietnamese strength to a point where [it] could no longer give any support for Vietcong political activity in the South, would . . . have the effect of bringing in Chinese forces at some point.

. . . Our motives are widely misinterpreted, and the spectacle emphasized and reproduced in thousands of press photographs and stories . . . produces reactions among millions of people throughout the world profoundly detrimental to the image we would like them to hold of this country."

### Learning From History

- 1. Recognizing Ideologies** How do the two speakers assess the value of Vietnam and its people to the United States?
- 2. Making Inferences** Why does George Kennan believe that the United States government got involved in Vietnam when it did? How does he feel about this involvement?



## **MOMENT in HISTORY**

### **AMERICA'S LONGEST WAR**

Clinging to his M-16 rifle, a wounded American Marine is shown after being pulled to safety by a fellow soldier. In the late 1950s, American military advisers were sent to help the South Vietnamese army fight guerrillas known as the Vietcong, who were receiving weapons, supplies, and training from Communist North Vietnam. The dense jungles of Vietnam made fighting the guerrillas very difficult. By 1968 about 500,000 U.S. troops were fighting in the increasingly unpopular war. American forces finally withdrew in March 1973.



extremely strong, it marched into Vietnam with great confidence. “America seemed omnipotent then,” said Philip Caputo, one of the first marines to arrive. “We saw ourselves as the champions of a ‘cause that was destined to triumph.’”

**Frustrating Warfare** Lacking the firepower of the Americans, the Vietcong used ambushes, booby traps, and guerrilla tactics. Ronald J. Glasser, an American army doctor, described the devastating effects of one booby trap:

“Three quarters of the way through the tangle, a trooper brushed against a two-inch vine, and a grenade slung at chest high went off, shattering the right side of his head and body. . . . Nearby troopers took hold of the unconscious soldier and, half carrying, half dragging him, pulled him the rest of the way through the tangle.”

—quoted in *Vietnam, A History*

The Vietcong also frustrated American troops by blending in with the general population in the cities and the countryside and then quickly vanishing. “It

was a sheer physical impossibility to keep the enemy from slipping away whenever he wished,” one American general said. Journalist Linda Martin noted, “It’s a war where nothing is ever quite certain and nowhere is ever quite safe.”

To counter the Vietcong’s tactics, American troops went on “search and destroy” missions. They tried to find enemy troops, bomb their positions, destroy their supply lines, and force them out into the open for combat.

American forces also sought to take away the Vietcong’s ability to hide in the thick jungles by literally destroying the landscape. American planes dropped **napalm**, a jellied gasoline that explodes on contact. They also used **Agent Orange**, a chemical that strips leaves from trees and shrubs, turning farmland and forest into wasteland.

**A Determined Enemy** United States military leaders underestimated the Vietcong’s strength. They also misjudged the enemy’s stamina. American generals believed that continuously bombing and killing large numbers of Vietcong would destroy the enemy’s morale and force them to give up. The guerrillas,

however, had no intention of surrendering, and they were willing to accept huge losses in human lives.

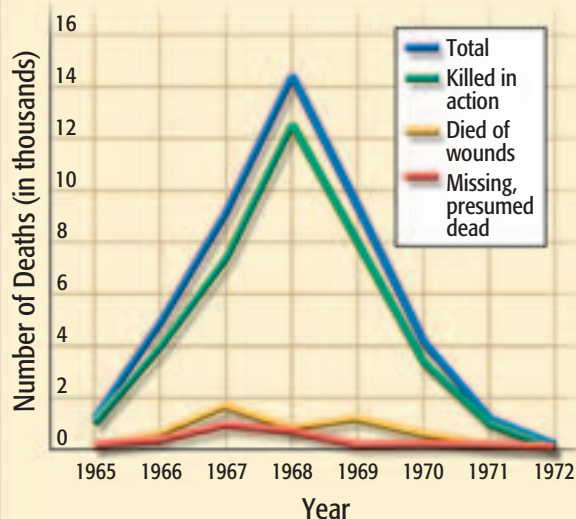
In the Vietcong's war effort, North Vietnamese support was a major factor. Although the Vietcong forces were made up of many South Vietnamese, North Vietnam provided arms, advisers, and significant leadership. Later in the war, as Vietcong casualties mounted, North Vietnam began sending regular North Vietnamese Army units to fight in South Vietnam.

North Vietnam sent arms and supplies south by way of a network of jungle paths known as the **Ho Chi Minh trail**. The trail wound through the countries of Cambodia and Laos, bypassing the border between North and South Vietnam. Because the trail passed through countries not directly involved in the war, President Johnson refused to allow a full-scale attack on the trail to shut it down.

North Vietnam itself received military weapons and other support from the Soviet Union and China. One of the main reasons President Johnson refused to order a full-scale invasion of North Vietnam was his fear that such an attack would bring China into the war, as had happened in Korea. By placing limits on the war, however, Johnson made it very difficult to win. Instead of conquering enemy territory, American troops were forced to fight a war of attrition—a strategy of defeating the enemy forces by slowly wearing them down. This strategy led troops to conduct grisly body counts after battles to determine how many enemy soldiers had been killed.

Bombing from American planes killed as many as 220,000 Vietnamese between 1965 and 1967. Nevertheless, the Vietcong and North Vietnamese troops showed no sign of surrendering. Meanwhile, American

## Vietnam War Deaths, 1965–1972



Source: *Statistical Abstract of the United States*.

### Graph Skills

- Interpreting Graphs** How many American soldiers were killed in action in 1968?
- Generalizing** By 1970, how much had the total number killed dropped from the peak number of deaths in 1968?

casualties continued to mount. By the end of 1966, more than 6,700 American soldiers had been killed.

As the number of Americans killed and wounded continued to grow, the notion of a quick and decisive victory grew increasingly remote. As a result, many citizens back home began to question the nation's involvement in the war.

- Reading Check** **Describing** What tactics did the United States adopt to fight the Vietcong?

## SECTION 2 ASSESSMENT

### Checking for Understanding

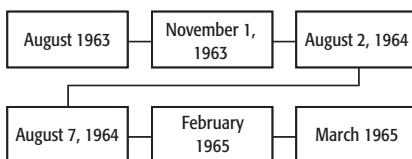
- Define:** Vietcong, napalm.
- Identify:** Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, Agent Orange, Ho Chi Minh trail.
- Explain** how the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution affected the powers of Congress and the presidency.

### Reviewing Themes

- Science and Technology** Why did the United States use napalm and Agent Orange in its fight against the Vietcong?

### Critical Thinking

- Analyzing** Why did fighting in Vietnam turn into a stalemate by the mid-1960s?
- Sequencing** Complete a time line similar to the one below to fill in events leading to American involvement in Vietnam.



### Analyzing Visuals

- Analyzing Photographs** Look closely at the photograph on page 897 of Buddhist monk Reverend Quang Duc. What in it suggests that this event was planned by Buddhists to protest their treatment in South Vietnam?

### Writing About History

- Persuasive Writing** Imagine that you are a member of Congress in August 1964. Write a statement supporting or opposing the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution.



# You're *the* Historian

## Incident in the Gulf of Tonkin



President Lyndon Johnson

In 1964 the Vietcong in South Vietnam were trying to topple the government and unite the country under communism. To prevent this, the United States had already committed money, supplies, and advisers. President Johnson asked Congress to authorize using force after reports that North Vietnam had made unprovoked attacks on U.S. warships in the Gulf of Tonkin. Congress responded with the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. Had the warship USS *Maddox* provoked the attack? Was Johnson fully informed of events in the Gulf? You're the historian.

Read the following excerpts, then answer the questions and complete the activities that follow.

### From accounts of an unprovoked attack

The sources advising President Johnson on the Gulf of Tonkin incident included the navy and the Defense Department. These excerpts suggest how difficult it was to know what had happened—and also how tension influenced the American interpretation.

#### U.S. Navy Commander John Herrick of the USS *Maddox*:

I am being approached by high-speed craft with apparent intention of torpedo attack. I intend to open fire in self-defense if necessary.

—from a cable of August 2, 1964

#### U.S. Defense Department:

While on routine patrol in international waters . . . the U.S. destroyer *Maddox* underwent an unprovoked attack by three PT-type boats in . . . the Tonkin Gulf.

The attacking boats launched three torpedoes and used 37-millimeter gunfire. The *Maddox* answered

with 5-inch gunfire. . . . The PT boats were driven off, with one seen to be badly damaged and not moving. . . .

No casualties or damage were sustained by the *Maddox* or the aircraft.

—from a press release of August 2, 1964

#### National Security Council Meeting:

**Secretary McNamara:** The North Vietnamese PT boats have continued their attacks on the two U.S. destroyers in international waters in the Gulf of Tonkin. . . .

**Secretary Rusk:** An immediate and direct action by us is necessary. The unprovoked attack on the high seas is an act of war for all practical purposes. . . .

**CIA Director McCone:** The proposed U.S. reprisals will result in sharp North Vietnamese military action, but such actions would not represent a deliberate

decision to provoke or accept a major escalation of the Vietnamese war.

**President Johnson:** Do they want a war by attacking our ships in the middle of the Gulf of Tonkin?

#### U.S. Intelligence Agency Director

**Rowan:** Do we know for a fact that the North Vietnamese provocation took place?

**Secretary McNamara:** We will know definitely in the morning.

—August 2, 1964

#### Secretary Rusk:

We believe that present OPLAN 34-A activities are beginning to rattle Hanoi [capital of North Vietnam], and the *Maddox* incident is directly related to their effort to resist these activities. We have no intention of yielding to pressure.

—from a top secret telegram to Ambassador Maxwell Taylor (South Vietnam), August 3, 1964





Secretary McNamara

## From accounts of a possible mistake

Two days after the alleged attack, the Turner Joy joined the Maddox in the Gulf. On the night of August 4, 1964, the two destroyers experienced a series of events they interpreted as a second attack. However, Commander Herrick later revised this report. President Johnson referred to the “repeated” attacks later when he asked Congress for war powers.

### Commander Herrick:

Review of action makes many contacts and torpedoes fired appear doubtful. Freak weather effects on radar and overeager sonarmen may have accounted for many reports. No actual visual sightings by Maddox. Suggest complete evaluation before any further action. . . .

Turner Joy also reports no actual visual sightings or wake. . . . Entire action leaves many doubts

except for apparent attempt to ambush at beginning.

—from two cables of August 4, 1964

### President Johnson:

The initial attack on the destroyer Maddox, on August 2, was repeated today by a number of hostile vessels attacking two U.S. destroyers with torpedoes. The destroyers and supporting aircraft acted at once on the orders I gave after the initial act of aggression. . . . Repeated acts of violence against the Armed Forces of the United States must be met not only with alert defense, but with positive reply.

—in a television and radio address, August 4, 1964

In 1968 Senator William Fulbright opened an investigation into the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin incident. The following exchange took place between Senator Fulbright and Secretary McNamara.

**Secretary McNamara:** I don’t believe Commander Herrick in his cable stated that he had doubt that the attack took place. He questioned certain details of the attack. . . . Secondly, his doubts were resolved that afternoon before the retaliatory action was taken.

**Senator Fulbright:** I think he went further than that. He advised you not to do anything until it had been reevaluated. . . . It is a very strong statement.

**Secretary McNamara:** Nothing was done until it was reevaluated.

**Senator Fulbright:** He says “Suggest complete reevaluation before any further action.” Now that is a very strong recommendation from a man on the scene in charge of the operation. . . . Both committees, except for the Senator from Oregon [Morse], unanimously accepted your testimony then as the whole story, and I must say this raises very serious questions about how you make decisions to go to war.

## Understanding the Issue

1. What statement by Rusk suggests the United States may have provoked the attack on the Maddox?
2. Do you think President Johnson was misled by his advisers? Explain.
3. How soon after the alleged attacks did the president address the American people? Did the United States rush to judgment in this case? Explain.

## Activities

1. **Investigate** What were the conclusions of the Fulbright investigations into the Gulf of Tonkin incident? Check sources, including the Internet.
2. **Discuss** Research and review American decisions to go to war in 1898, 1917, and 1941. What were the concerns? Do you think the nation made the right decisions?



Vietcong guerrillas



# Vietnam Divides the Nation

## Guide to Reading

### Main Idea

The experience of Vietnam produced sharp divisions between Americans who supported the war and those who did not.

### Key Terms and Names

William Westmoreland, credibility gap, teach-in, dove, hawk, Tet offensive

### Reading Strategy

**Organizing** As you read about Americans' reactions to the Vietnam War, complete a graphic organizer like the one below to list the reasons for opposition to the war.



### Reading Objective

- **Analyze** why support for the war began to weaken.
- **Describe** the motives of those in the antiwar movement.

### Section Theme

**Civic Rights and Responsibilities** Many Americans protested their country's involvement in the Vietnam War.

### Preview of Events



## ★ An American Story ★



*Antiwar activists burning draft cards at the Pentagon in 1972*

Martin Jezer, a 27-year-old copywriter living in New York City, had never considered himself a radical. "I campaigned for Lyndon Johnson in 1964," he recalled. As his opposition to the war in Vietnam grew, however, Jezer decided to stage a public protest.

On April 15, 1967, he and dozens of other young men gathered with their military draft cards in New York's Central Park. Before an audience of reporters, photographers, FBI officials, and citizens, the men pulled out matches and lighters and burned the cards.

“We began singing freedom songs and chanting, ‘Resist! Resist!’ and ‘Burn Draft Cards, Not People’ . . . People in the audience were applauding us, shouting encouragement. Then some guys began to come out of the audience with draft cards in hand. They burned them. Alone, in pairs, by threes they came. Each flaming draft card brought renewed cheering and more people out of the crowd. . . . Some of the draft card burners were girls, wives, or girlfriends of male card burners. . . . It lasted this way for about half an hour.”

—quoted in *The Vietnam War: Opposing Viewpoints*

## A Growing Credibility Gap

Jezer's protest was just one of many, as American opposition to the Vietnam War grew in the late 1960s. When American troops first entered the Vietnam War in the spring of 1965, many Americans had supported the military effort. A Gallup poll

published around that time showed that 66 percent of Americans approved of the policy in Vietnam. As the war dragged on, however, public support began to drop. Suspicion of the government's truthfulness about the war was a significant reason. Throughout the early years of the war, the American commander in South Vietnam, General **William Westmoreland**, reported that the enemy was on the brink of defeat. In 1967 he confidently declared that the "enemy's hopes are bankrupt" and added, "we have reached an important point where the end begins to come into view."

Contradicting such reports were less optimistic media accounts, especially on television. Vietnam was the first "television war," with footage of combat appearing nightly on the evening news. Day after day, millions of people saw images of wounded and dead Americans and began to doubt government reports. In the view of many, a **credibility gap** had developed, meaning it was hard to believe what the Johnson administration said about the war.

Congress, which had given the president a nearly free hand in Vietnam, soon grew uncertain about the war. Beginning in February 1966, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee held "educational" hearings on Vietnam, calling in Secretary of State **Dean Rusk** and other policy makers to explain the administration's war program. The committee also listened to critics such as American diplomat George Kennan. Although Kennan had helped create the policy of containment, he argued that Vietnam was not strategically important to the United States.

**Reading Check** **Explaining** Why was the Vietnam War the first "television war"?

## An Antiwar Movement Emerges

As casualties mounted in Vietnam, many people began to protest publicly against the war and to demand that the United States pull out. Although many other Americans supported the war, opponents of the conflict received the most attention.

**Teach-Ins Begin** In March 1965, a group of faculty members and students at the University of Michigan abandoned their classes and joined together in a **teach-in**. Here, they informally discussed the issues surrounding the war and reaffirmed their reasons for opposing it. The gathering inspired teach-ins at many campuses. In May 1965, 122 colleges held a "National Teach-In" by radio for more than 100,000 antiwar demonstrators.

People who opposed the war did so for different reasons. Some saw the conflict as a civil war in which the United States had no business. Others viewed South Vietnam as a corrupt dictatorship and insisted that defending that country was immoral and unjust.

**Anger at the Draft** Young protesters especially focused on what they saw as an unfair draft system. At the beginning of the war, a college student was often able to defer military service until after graduation. By contrast, young people from low-income families were more likely to be sent to Vietnam because they were unable to afford college. This meant minorities, particularly African Americans, made up a disproportionately large number of the soldiers in Vietnam. By 1967, for example, African Americans accounted for about 20 percent of American combat deaths—about twice their proportion of the population within the United States. That number would decline to roughly match their population proportion by the war's end.



### Analyzing *Political Cartoons*

**Dark Passage** One particular phrase came to represent the government's claims that it was on the verge of ending the Vietnam War: "the light at the end of the tunnel." **Why did many people become skeptical about such government claims?**





## Picturing History

**Flower Power** Student antiwar protests ranged from violent confrontation to this peaceful but dramatic demonstration near the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. **What were some reasons many people opposed the war?**

The high number of African Americans and poor Americans dying in Vietnam angered African American leaders, including Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Early on, King had refrained from speaking out against the war for fear that it would draw attention from the civil rights movement. In April 1967, however, he broke his silence and publicly condemned the conflict:

“Somehow this madness must cease. I speak as a child of God and brother to the suffering poor of Vietnam and the poor of America who are paying the double price of smashed hopes at home and death and corruption in Vietnam. I speak as a citizen of the world, for the world as it stands aghast at the path we have taken. I speak as an American to the leader of my own nation. The great initiative in this war is ours. The initiative to stop must be ours.”

—quoted in *A Testament of Hope*

As the war escalated, American officials increased the draft call, putting many college students at risk. An estimated 500,000 draftees refused to go. Many publicly burned their draft cards or simply did not

report when called for induction. Some fled the country, moving to Canada, Sweden, or other nations. Others stayed and went to prison rather than fight in a war they opposed.

Between 1965 and 1968, officials prosecuted more than 3,300 Americans for refusing to serve. The draft became less of an issue in 1969 when the government introduced a lottery system, in which only those with low lottery numbers were subject to the draft.

Protests against the war were not confined to college campuses. Demonstrators held public rallies and marches in towns across the country. In April 1965, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), a left-wing student organization, organized a march on Washington, D.C., that drew more than 20,000 participants. Two years later, in October 1967, a rally at Washington’s Lincoln Memorial drew tens of thousands of protesters as well.

Anger over the draft also fueled discussions of voting age. Many draftees argued that if they were old enough to fight, they were old enough to vote. In 1971 the Twenty-sixth Amendment to the Constitution was ratified, giving all citizens age 18 and older the right to vote in all state and federal elections.



**Hawks and Doves** In the face of growing opposition to the war, President Johnson remained determined to continue fighting. He assailed his critics in Congress as “selfish men who want to advance their own interests.” As for the college protesters, Johnson viewed them as naive and unable to appreciate the importance of resisting communism.

The president was not alone in his views. Although the antiwar protesters became a vocal group, they did not represent majority opinion on Vietnam. In a poll taken in early 1968, 53 percent of the respondents favored stronger military action in Vietnam, compared to only 24 percent who wanted an end to the war. Of those Americans who supported the policy in Vietnam, many openly criticized the protesters for a lack of patriotism.

By 1968 the nation seemed to be divided into two camps. Those who wanted the United States to withdraw from Vietnam were known as **doves**. Those who insisted that the United States stay and fight came to be known as **hawks**. As the two groups debated, the war took a dramatic turn for the worse, and the nation endured a year of shock and crisis.

 **Reading Check** **Explaining** What led to the passage of the Twenty-sixth Amendment?

## 1968: The Pivotal Year

The most turbulent year of the chaotic 1960s was 1968. The year saw a shocking political announcement, a pair of traumatic assassinations, and a violent political convention. First, however, the nation endured a surprise attack in Vietnam.

### **TURNING POINT**

**The Tet Offensive** On January 30, 1968, during Tet, the Vietnamese New Year, the Vietcong and North Vietnamese launched a massive surprise attack. In this **Tet offensive**, the guerrilla fighters attacked virtually all American airbases in South Vietnam and most of the South’s major cities and provincial capitals. Vietcong commandos even blasted their way into the American embassy in Saigon.

Militarily, Tet turned out to be a disaster for the Communist forces. After about a month of fighting, the American and South Vietnamese soldiers repelled the enemy troops, inflicting heavy losses on them. General Westmoreland boasted that the Communists’ “well-laid plans went afoul,” while President Johnson triumphantly added that the enemy’s effort had ended in “complete failure.”

In fact, the North Vietnamese had scored a major political victory. The American people were shocked that an enemy supposedly on the verge of defeat could launch such a large-scale attack. When General Westmoreland requested 209,000 troops in addition to the 500,000 already in Vietnam, it seemed to be an admission that the United States could not win the war.

To make matters worse, the mainstream media, which had tried to remain balanced in their war coverage, now openly criticized the effort. “The American people should be getting ready to accept, if they haven’t already, the prospect that the whole Vietnam effort may be doomed,” the *Wall Street Journal* declared. Walter Cronkite, then the nation’s most respected television newscaster, announced after Tet that it seemed “more certain than ever that the bloody experience in Vietnam is to end in a stalemate.”

Public opinion no longer favored the president. In the weeks following the Tet offensive, the president’s approval rating plummeted to a dismal 35 percent, while support for his handling of the war fell even lower, to 26 percent. The administration’s credibility gap now seemed too wide to repair.

**Johnson Leaves the Presidential Race** With the war growing increasingly unpopular and Johnson’s credibility all but gone, some Democrats began looking for an alternative candidate to nominate for president in 1968. In November 1967, even before the Tet disaster, a little-known liberal senator from Minnesota, Eugene McCarthy, became the first dove to announce his candidacy against Johnson. In March 1968, McCarthy stunned the nation by winning more than 40 percent of the votes in the New Hampshire primary

Fact

Fiction

Folklore

**The Peace Symbol** This familiar symbol of the 1960s was originally designed to stand for the fight for nuclear disarmament. Created by British artist Gerald Holtom in 1958, the symbol was first used at a British demonstration against a research center for the development of nuclear weapons. It combined the semaphore for the letters “N” and “D,” standing for nuclear disarmament. Semaphore is a system of visual signaling using two flags, one held in each hand. N is two flags held in an upside-down V, and D is one flag pointed straight up and the other pointed straight down.



CONTENTS





*A view of the U.S. embassy in Saigon after it was bombed during the Tet offensive*



**Geography Skills**

- 1. Interpreting Maps** Most of the Ho Chi Minh Trail lies within which countries?
- 2. Applying Geography Skills** How broad was the Tet offensive, and why did this shock Americans?

and almost defeating the president. Realizing that Johnson was vulnerable, Senator Robert Kennedy, who also opposed the war, quickly entered the race for the Democratic nomination.

With the division in the country and within his own party growing, Johnson addressed the public on television on March 31, 1968. He stunned viewers by stating, "I have concluded that I should not permit the presidency to become involved in the partisan divisions that are developing in this political year. Accordingly, I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your President."

**A Season of Violence** Following Johnson's announcement, the nation endured even more shocking events. In April James Earl Ray was arrested for killing Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., an event which led to riots in several major cities. Just two months later, another assassination rocked the country—that of Robert Kennedy. Kennedy, who appeared to be on his way to winning the Democratic nomination, was

gunned down on June 5 in a California hotel just after winning the state's Democratic primary. The assassin was Sirhan Sirhan, an Arab nationalist apparently angry over the candidate's pro-Israeli remarks a few nights before.

The violence that seemed to plague the country at every turn in 1968 culminated with a chaotic and well-publicized clash between protesters and police at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. Thousands of protesters descended on the August convention, demanding that the Democrats adopt an antiwar platform.

On the third day of the convention, the delegates chose Hubert Humphrey, President Johnson's vice president, as their presidential nominee. Meanwhile, in a park not far from the convention hall, the protesters and police began fighting. A full-scale riot soon engulfed the streets of downtown Chicago. As officers tried to disperse demonstrators with tear gas and billy clubs, demonstrators taunted the authorities with the chant, "The whole world is watching!"



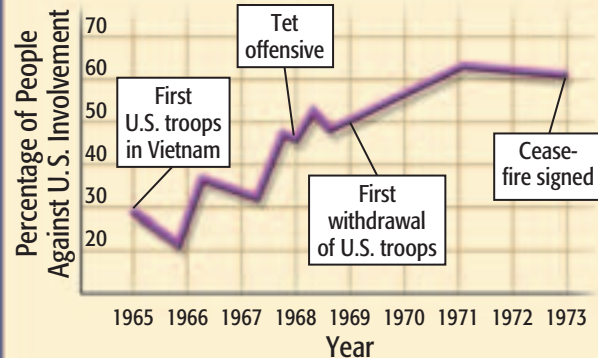
**Nixon Wins the Presidency** The violence and chaos now associated with the Democratic Party benefited the 1968 Republican presidential candidate, Richard Nixon. Although defeated in the 1960 election, Nixon had remained active in national politics. A third candidate, Governor George Wallace of Alabama, also decided to run in 1968 as an independent. Wallace, an outspoken segregationist, sought to attract those Americans who felt threatened by the civil rights movement and urban social unrest.

Public opinion polls gave Nixon a wide lead over Humphrey and Wallace. Nixon's campaign promise to unify the nation and restore law and order appealed to Americans who feared their country was spinning out of control. Nixon also declared that he had a plan for ending the war in Vietnam, although he did not specify how the plan would work.

At first Humphrey's support of President Johnson's Vietnam policies hurt his campaign. After Humphrey broke with the president and called for a complete end to the bombing of North Vietnam, he began to move up in the polls. A week before the election, President Johnson helped Humphrey by announcing that the bombing of North Vietnam had halted and that a cease-fire would follow.

Johnson's announcement had come too late. In the end, Nixon's promises to end the war and restore order at home were enough to sway the American people. On Election Day, Nixon defeated Humphrey by more than 100 electoral votes, although he won the popular vote by a slim margin of 43 percent to 42. Wallace helped account for the razor-thin margin by winning 46 electoral votes and more than 13 percent of the popular vote.

## Opposition to the Vietnam War



Source: *Statistical Abstract of the United States.*

### Graph Skills

- Interpreting Graphs** During what two years was opposition to the war lowest? What event occurred around that time?
- Generalizing** In what year did opposition to the Vietnam War peak? How was this sentiment logically related to the withdrawal of American troops?

Speaking to reporters after his election, Nixon recalled seeing a young girl carrying a sign at one of his rallies that said: "Bring Us Together." This, he promised, would be his chief goal as president. Nixon also vowed to implement his plan to end the Vietnam War.

**Reading Check** **Explaining** Why did President Johnson not run for re-election in 1968?

## SECTION 3 ASSESSMENT

### Checking for Understanding

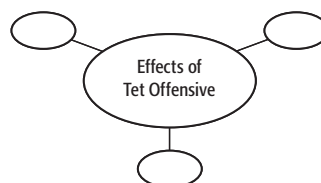
- Define:** *credibility gap, teach-in, dove, hawk.*
- Identify:** William Westmoreland, Tet offensive.
- Summarize** three important events that occurred in 1968.

### Reviewing Themes

- Civic Rights and Responsibilities** Why did many people believe that the Vietnam War reflected racial and economic injustices in the United States?

### Critical Thinking

- Synthesizing** Why did support of the Vietnam War begin to dwindle by the late 1960s?
- Organizing** Use a graphic organizer similar to the one below to list the effects of the Tet offensive.



### Analyzing Visuals

- Analyzing Photographs** Study the photograph on page 906. The phrase "flower power" was a slogan of the hippie movement. Explain what you think the phrase meant and how the slogan was used to express opposition to the war.

### Writing About History

- Expository Writing** Imagine that you are living in 1968. Write a paragraph for the local newspaper in which you explain your reasons for either supporting or opposing the Vietnam War.



# SECTION 4 The War Winds Down

## Guide to Reading

### Main Idea

After nearly eight years of fighting in Vietnam, the United States withdrew its forces.

### Key Terms and Names

Henry Kissinger, linkage, Vietnamization, Pentagon Papers, War Powers Act

### Reading Strategy

**Organizing** As you read about the end of the Vietnam War, complete a graphic organizer similar to the one below by listing the steps that President Nixon took to end American involvement in Vietnam.

Steps Nixon Took

### Reading Objectives

- **Explain** the events of Nixon's first administration that inspired more antiwar protests.
- **Summarize** the major lessons the United States learned from the Vietnam War experience.

### Section Theme

**Government and Democracy** The Vietnam War led to changes in the way the U.S. military is deployed.

### Preview of Events



## ★ An American Story ★



Frank Snepp

On the evening of April 29, 1975, Frank Snepp, a young CIA officer, scrambled up to the American embassy rooftop to catch one of the last helicopters out of Saigon. Throughout that day, Snepp had witnessed the desperation of the South Vietnamese people as they besieged the embassy grounds in an effort to escape the approaching Communist army. Now he was leaving. Later, he recalled the scene:

“The roof of the Embassy was a vision out of a nightmare. In the center of the dimly lit helo-pad a CH-47 was already waiting for us, its engines setting up a roar like a primeval scream. The crew and controllers all wore what looked like oversized football helmets, and in the blinking under-light of the landing signals they reminded me of grotesque insects rearing on their hindquarters. Out beyond the edge of the building a Phantom jet streaked across the horizon as tracers darted up here and there into the night sky.”

—quoted in *Decent Interval*

## Nixon Moves to End the War

Frank Snepp was one of the last Americans to leave Vietnam. Shortly after taking office, President Nixon had taken steps to end the nation's involvement in the war, but the final years of the conflict would yield much more bloodshed and turmoil.

As a first step, Nixon appointed Harvard professor **Henry Kissinger** as special assistant for national security affairs and gave him wide authority to use diplomacy to end the conflict. Kissinger embarked upon a policy he called **linkage**, which meant improving

relations with the Soviet Union and China—suppliers of aid to North Vietnam—so he could persuade them to cut back on their aid.

Kissinger also rekindled peace talks with the North Vietnamese. In August 1969, Kissinger entered into secret negotiations with North Vietnam’s negotiator, Le Duc Tho. In their talks, which dragged on for four years, Kissinger and Le Duc Tho argued over a possible cease-fire, the return of American prisoners of war, and the ultimate fate of South Vietnam.

Meanwhile, Nixon cut back the number of American troops in Vietnam. Known as **Vietnamization**, this process involved the gradual withdrawal of U.S. troops while South Vietnam assumed more of the fighting. On June 8, 1969, Nixon announced the withdrawal of 25,000 soldiers. Nixon refused to view this troop withdrawal as a form of surrender. He was determined to maintain a strong American presence in Vietnam to ensure bargaining power during peace negotiations. In support of that goal, the president increased air strikes against North Vietnam and began bombing Vietcong sanctuaries in neighboring Cambodia.

 **Reading Check** **Identifying** When did secret negotiations with the North Vietnamese begin?

## Turmoil at Home Continues

Even though the United States had begun scaling back its involvement in Vietnam, the American home front remained divided and volatile as Nixon’s war policies stirred up new waves of protest.

**Massacre at My Lai** In November 1969, Americans learned of a horrifying event. That month, the media reported that in the spring of 1968, an American platoon under the command of Lieutenant William Calley had massacred possibly more than 200 unarmed South Vietnamese civilians in the hamlet of **My Lai**. Most of the victims were old men, women, and children. Calley eventually went to prison for his role in the killings.

Most American soldiers acted responsibly and honorably throughout the war. The actions of one soldier, however, increased the feeling among many citizens that this was a brutal and senseless conflict. Jan Barry, a founder of the Vietnam Veterans Against the

War, viewed the massacre at My Lai as a symbol of the dilemma his generation faced in the conflict:

“To kill on military orders and be a criminal, or to refuse to kill and be a criminal is the moral agony of America’s Vietnam war generation. It is what has forced upward of sixty thousand young Americans, draft resisters and deserters to Canada, and created one hundred thousand military deserters a year in this country and abroad.”

—quoted in *Who Spoke Up?*

## The Invasion of Cambodia Sparks Protest

Americans heard more startling news when Nixon announced in April 1970 that American troops had invaded Cambodia. The troops wanted to destroy Vietcong military bases there.

Many viewed the Cambodian invasion as a widening of the war, and it set off many protests. At **Kent State University** on May 4, 1970, Ohio National Guard soldiers, armed with tear gas and rifles, fired on demonstrators without an order to do so. The soldiers killed four students and wounded at least nine others. Ten days later, police killed two African American students during a demonstration at Jackson State College in Mississippi.

### Picturing History

**National Trauma** When members of the Ohio National Guard fired on Kent State University demonstrators, the event triggered a nationwide student strike that forced hundreds of colleges and universities to close. [How does this image connect with the phrase “the war at home”?](#)





**The Pentagon Papers** In addition to sparking violence on campuses, the invasion of Cambodia cost Nixon significant congressional support. Numerous legislators expressed outrage over the president's failure to notify them of the action. In December 1970, an angry Congress repealed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which had given the president near complete power in directing the war in Vietnam.

Support for the war weakened further in 1971 when Daniel Ellsberg, a disillusioned former Defense Department worker, leaked what became known as the **Pentagon Papers** to the *New York Times*. The documents revealed that many government officials during the Johnson administration privately questioned the war while publicly defending it.

The documents contained details of decisions that were made by the presidents and their advisers without the consent of Congress. They also showed how the various administrations acted to deceive Congress, the press, and the public about the situation in Vietnam. The Pentagon Papers confirmed what many Americans had long believed: The government had not been honest with them.

 **Reading Check** **Evaluating** What did the Pentagon Papers confirm for many Americans?

## The United States Pulls Out of Vietnam

By 1971 polls showed that nearly two-thirds of Americans wanted to end the Vietnam War as quickly as possible. In April 1972, President Nixon dropped his longtime insistence that North Vietnamese troops had to withdraw from South Vietnam before any peace treaty could be signed. In October, less than a month before the 1972 presidential election, Henry Kissinger emerged from his secret talks with Le Duc Tho to announce that "peace is at hand."

A month later, Americans went to the polls to decide on a president. Senator George McGovern, the

## Profiles IN HISTORY

**Roy P. Benavidez**  
1935–1998

Roy P. Benavidez received the Medal of Honor, the nation's highest award for heroism, for his actions in the Vietnam War. Growing up, Benavidez worked on the streets selling empty soda bottles and cleaning a local stockyard. His father's family had been *vaqueros* (cowboys from Mexico), immigrating in the 1830s during the Texas War for Independence. His mother, a Yaqui Native American, was born in northern Mexico. Both parents died by the time Benavidez was seven, and



he was raised by his uncle. A tough life made Benavidez a fighter. In May 1968 while fighting in Vietnam, Benavidez rescued members of his Special Forces group who were surrounded by the enemy. Wounded three times while getting to the men by helicopter, he stayed with them some eight hours, preparing an evacuation. Then while carrying the men to the rescue helicopters, he was attacked from behind but managed to kill his attacker. Only after loading all the dead and wounded did Benavidez himself board a helicopter.

Democratic candidate, was an outspoken critic of the war. He did not appeal to many middle-class Americans, however, who were tired of antiwar protesters. When the votes were cast, Nixon won reelection in a landslide.

**The Two Sides Reach Peace** Just weeks after the presidential election, the peace negotiations broke down. South Vietnam's president, **Nguyen Van Thieu**, refused to agree to any plan that left North Vietnamese troops in the South. Kissinger tried to win additional concessions from the Communists, but talks broke off on December 16, 1972.

The next day, to force North Vietnam to resume negotiations, the Nixon administration began the most destructive air raids of the entire war. In what became known as the "Christmas bombings," American B-52s dropped thousands of tons of bombs on North Vietnamese targets for 11 straight days, pausing only on Christmas day.


In the wake of the bombing campaign, the United States and North Vietnam returned to the bargaining table. Thieu finally gave in to American pressure and allowed North Vietnamese troops to remain in the South. On January 27, 1973, the warring sides signed an agreement "ending the war and restoring the peace in Vietnam."

The United States promised to withdraw the rest of its troops, and both sides agreed to an exchange of prisoners of war. The parties did not resolve the issue of South Vietnam's future, however. After almost eight years of war—the longest war in American history—the nation ended its direct involvement in Vietnam.

**South Vietnam Falls** The United States had barely pulled out its last troops from Vietnam when the peace agreement collapsed. In March 1975, the North Vietnamese army launched a full-scale invasion of the South. Thieu desperately appealed to Washington, D.C., for help.

President Nixon had assured Thieu during the peace negotiations that the United States “[would] respond with full force should the settlement be violated by North Vietnam.” Nixon, however, had resigned under pressure following the Watergate scandal. The new president, Gerald Ford, asked for funds to aid the South Vietnamese, but Congress refused.

On April 30, the North Vietnamese captured Saigon, South Vietnam's capital, and united Vietnam under Communist rule. They then renamed Saigon Ho Chi Minh City.

 **Reading Check** **Explaining** Why did the peace talks break down in December 1972?

## The Legacy of Vietnam

“The lessons of the past in Vietnam,” President Ford declared in 1975, “have already been learned—learned by Presidents, learned by Congress, learned by the American people—and we should have our focus on the future.” Although Americans tried to put the war behind them, Vietnam left a deep and lasting impact on American society.

**The War's Human Toll** The United States paid a heavy price for its involvement in Vietnam. The war had cost the nation over \$170 billion in direct costs and much more in indirect economic expenses. More significantly, it had resulted in the deaths of approximately 58,000 young Americans and the injury of more than 300,000. In Vietnam, around one million North and South Vietnamese soldiers died in the conflict, as did countless civilians.

Even after they returned home from fighting, some American veterans, as in other wars, found it hard to escape the war's psychological impact. Army Specialist Doug Johnson recalled the problems he faced on returning home:

“It took a while for me to recognize that I did suffer some psychological problems in trying to deal with my experience in Vietnam. The first recollection I have of the effect took place shortly after I arrived back in the States. One evening . . . I went to see a movie on post. I don't recall the name of the movie or what it was about, but I remember there was a sad part, and that I started crying uncontrollably. It hadn't dawned on me before this episode that I had . . . succeeded in burying my emotions.”

—quoted in *Touched by the Dragon*

One reason it may have been harder for some Vietnam veterans to readjust to civilian life was that many considered the war a defeat. Many Americans wanted to forget the war. Thus, the sacrifices of many veterans often went unrecognized. There were relatively few welcome-home parades and celebrations after the war.

The war also lingered for the American families whose relatives and friends were classified as

### Picturing History

**Desperate Pleas** When President Ford ordered all Americans to leave Vietnam immediately in April 1975, many Saigon residents stormed the U.S. embassy pleading for rescue. [When did the North Vietnamese take control of Saigon?](#)





prisoners of war (POWs) or missing in action (MIA). Despite many official investigations, these families were not convinced that the government had told the truth about POW/MIA policies in the last years of the war.

The nation finally began to come to terms with the war almost a decade later. In 1982 the nation dedicated the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., a large black stone wall inscribed with the names of those killed and missing in action in the war. "It's a first step to remind America of what we did," veteran Larry Cox of Virginia said at the dedication of the monument.

### GOVERNMENT

**The War's Impact on the Nation** The war also left its mark on the nation as a whole. In 1973 Congress passed the **War Powers Act** as a way to reestablish some limits on executive power. The act required the president to inform Congress of any commitment of troops abroad within 48 hours and to withdraw them in 60 to 90 days unless Congress explicitly approved the troop commitment.

The legislation addresses the struggle between the executive and legislative branches over what checks and balances are proper in matters of war and foreign policy. No president has recognized this limitation,

## World Geography Connection



### The War's Refugees

Another of the Vietnam War's enduring legacies was the wave of human migration and resettlement it prompted. From the mid-1970s through the 1980s, between 1.5 and 2 million people fled the newly installed Communist regimes in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. These men, women, and children became known as "boat people" because their main route of escape was by sea. More than half of these refugees came to the United States. Between 1980 and 1990, the Vietnamese population of the United States more than doubled from about 245,000 to almost 615,000. **Why do you think the United States was willing to accept so many refugees from the Vietnam War?**

and the courts have tended to avoid the issue as a strictly political question. In general, the war shook the nation's confidence and led some to embrace a new kind of isolationism. In the years after the war, many Americans became more reluctant to intervene in the affairs of other nations.

On the domestic front, the Vietnam War increased Americans' cynicism about their government. Many felt the nation's leaders had misled them. Together with Watergate, a scandal that broke as the war was winding down, Vietnam made Americans more wary of their leaders.

**Reading Check** **Describing** How did the Vietnam War affect Americans' attitudes toward international conflicts?



### Student Web Activity

Visit the *American Vision* Web site at [tav.glencoe.com](http://tav.glencoe.com) and click on **Student Web Activities—Chapter 30** for an activity on the Vietnam War.

CLICK HERE

## SECTION 4 ASSESSMENT

### Checking for Understanding

- Define:** [linkage](#), [Vietnamization](#).
- Identify:** Henry Kissinger, Pentagon Papers, War Powers Act.
- Describe** what happened in Vietnam in 1975 after the United States withdrew.

### Reviewing Themes

- Government and Democracy** Why did Congress pass the War Powers Act? How did this act reflect a struggle between the legislative and executive branches?

### Critical Thinking

- Analyzing** Why did the invasion of Cambodia cost President Nixon congressional support?
- Organizing** Use a graphic organizer similar to the one below to list the effects of the Vietnam War on the nation.

Effects of Vietnam War


### Analyzing Visuals

- Analyzing Photographs** Study the photograph on page 913 of *South Vietnamese citizens attempting to enter the U.S. embassy*. How do you think this image affected American attitudes toward the war? Why do you think so?

### Writing About History

- Descriptive Writing** Imagine that you are a college student in 1970. Write a journal entry expressing your feelings about the events at Kent State University and Jackson State College.

# Social Studies SKILLBUILDER

## Conducting an Interview

### Why Learn This Skill?

Suppose that your friends went to see a concert, but you were unable to attend. How would you find out how the show was?

### Learning the Skill

You probably would not normally think of asking your friends questions about a concert as conducting an interview, but that is exactly what you are doing. Interviews are an excellent way of collecting important facts and opinions from people. Interviews allow you to gather information from people who witnessed or participated in an event firsthand. For example, William Prochnau interviewed many different people and used the results to write his book *Once Upon a Distant War*, which examines the way the press covered the Vietnam War. To conduct an interview with someone, follow these steps.

- **Make an appointment.** Contact the person and explain why you want to conduct the interview, what kinds of things you hope to learn, and how you will use the information. Discuss where and when you will conduct the interview, and ask if you may use a tape recorder.
- **Gather background information.** Find out about the education, career, and other accomplishments of the person you want to interview. Research the topics you wish to discuss.
- **Prepare questions.** Group questions into subject categories. Begin each category with general questions and move toward more specific questions. Formulate each question carefully. If the answer could be simply yes or no, rephrase the question.
- **Conduct the interview.** Introduce yourself and restate the purpose of the interview. Ask questions and record responses accurately. Ask follow-up questions to fill gaps in information.

- **Transcribe the interview.** Convert your written or tape-recorded notes into a *transcript*, a written record of the interview presented in a question-and-answer format.

### Practicing the Skill

Imagine you are assigned to interview someone who participated in or is old enough to remember the events that occurred during the Vietnam War.

- 1 What kind of background information might you gather?
- 2 What are some broad categories of questions you might ask based on what you know about the person you are interviewing and what you know about the war?
- 3 What are some general questions you might want to ask within these broad categories? Consider the responses you might get to these general questions, and formulate follow-up questions for each.

### Skills Assessment

Complete the Practicing Skills questions on page 917 and the Chapter 30 Skill Reinforcement Activity to assess your mastery of this skill.

### Applying the Skill

**Conducting an Interview** The Vietnam War probably included some people you know—your parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, or neighbors. Even if they were not directly involved with the conflict, they probably remember what the United States was like during the war. Use the questions you developed above to interview one or more of these people. Ask about their experiences regarding Vietnam, including their attitudes toward the war and its many related issues, past and present. Summarize your findings in a short report or in a comparison chart.



Glencoe's **Skillbuilder Interactive Workbook CD-ROM, Level 2**, provides instruction and practice in key social studies skills.



**Reviewing Key Terms**

On a sheet of paper, use each of these terms in a sentence.

- 1. domino theory
- 2. guerrilla
- 3. Vietcong
- 4. napalm
- 5. credibility gap
- 6. teach-in
- 7. dove
- 8. hawk
- 9. linkage
- 10. Vietnamization

**Reviewing Key Facts**

- 11. **Identify:** Ho Chi Minh, Tet offensive.
- 12. How did President Eisenhower defend American policy in Vietnam?
- 13. When did the number of American military personnel begin to increase in Vietnam?
- 14. How did Vietnamese peasants respond to the strategic hamlets program?
- 15. What actions made Ngo Dinh Diem an unpopular leader in South Vietnam?
- 16. What was the effect of the Tet offensive on Americans?
- 17. How did Richard Nixon benefit from the chaos in the nation in 1968?
- 18. What did the Pentagon Papers reveal?

**Chapter Summary**

**American Involvement in Vietnam**

**Roots of the Conflict**

- Eisenhower financially supported French war against Vietnam
- Geneva Accords established North and South Vietnam
- U.S.-backed leader of South Vietnam refused national elections, fearing defeat by Communist opponent
- Kennedy sharply increased military aid and presence in South Vietnam
- Johnson escalated U.S. involvement and gained war powers after the incident in the Gulf of Tonkin

**Full-Scale War**

- President Johnson responded to a Vietcong attack with aggressive air strikes; American people applauded his actions
- U.S. committed over 380,000 ground troops to fighting in Vietnam by the end of 1966

**Opposition to the War**

- American people questioned the government’s honesty about the war, creating the so-called “credibility gap”
- Wartime economy hurt domestic spending efforts
- President Nixon was elected largely on promises to end the war and unite the divided country

**The End of the War**

- Nixon withdrew troops but increased air strikes
- American troops pulled out after a 1973 peace agreement
- Congress passed the War Powers Act to limit the power of the president during times of war

**Critical Thinking**

- 19. **Analyzing Themes: Civic Rights and Responsibilities** How did Americans show their frustration with the direction the country was taking in 1968?
- 20. **Analyzing** How do you think the use of chemicals such as Agent Orange and napalm by the United States affected Vietnamese feelings toward Americans and the war?
- 21. **Organizing** Use a graphic organizer to list the reasons the United States became involved in Vietnam and the effects the war had on the nation.



- 22. **Interpreting Primary Sources** In the 1960s many young Americans enlisted or were drafted for military service. Some believed they had a duty to serve their country. Many had no clear idea of what they were doing or why. In the following excerpt, a young man interviewed for Mark Baker’s book *Nam* presents his thoughts about going to war.

“I read a lot of pacifist literature to determine whether or not I was a conscientious objector. I finally concluded that I wasn’t. . . .

The one clear decision I made in 1968 about me and the war was that if I was going to get out of it, I was going to get out in a legal way. I was not going to defraud the system in order to beat the system. I wasn’t going to leave the country, because the odds of coming back looked real slim. . . .



**Self-Check Quiz**

Visit the *American Vision* Web site at [tav.glencoe.com](http://tav.glencoe.com) and click on **Self-Check Quizzes—Chapter 30** to assess your knowledge of chapter content.

With all my terror of going into the Army . . . there was something seductive about it, too. I was seduced by World War II and John Wayne movies. . . . I had been, as we all were, victimized by a romantic, truly uninformed view of war. ☹☹

—quoted in *Nam*

- What options did the young man have regarding going to war?
- Do you think World War II movies gave him a realistic view of what fighting in Vietnam would be like?

**Practicing Skills**

- Conducting an Interview** Review the material on page 915 about interviewing. Then follow these steps to prepare for an interview with President Johnson on his Vietnam policies.
  - Study Section 2 of this chapter on the president’s Vietnam policies and conduct library or Internet research on this subject.
  - Prepare a list of 10 questions to ask the president.

**Geography and History**

- The map on this page shows supply routes and troop movements during the Vietnam War. Study the map and answer the questions below.
  - Interpreting Maps** What nations besides North and South Vietnam were the sites of battles or invasions?
  - Analyzing** Why did the Ho Chi Minh Trail pass through Laos and Cambodia instead of South Vietnam?

**Chapter Activity**

- Evaluating Bias** A person’s life experiences often influence his or her arguments one way or another, creating a biased opinion. Reread the speeches in *Different Viewpoints* on pages 898–899. What might have influenced the points of view of George Ball and George Kennan? Create a cause-and-effect chart showing possible reasons for their biases and effects their experiences have had on their political opinions.

**Writing Activity**

- Portfolio Writing** Many songs and pieces of literature have been written on the Vietnam War. Find examples, then write an original poem or song lyrics in which you present antiwar or pro-war sentiments about the Vietnam War. Include your work in your portfolio.



**Standardized Test Practice**

**Directions:** Choose the phrase that best completes the following statement.

- The purpose of the War Powers Act was to ensure that the president would
- have greater authority over the military.
  - consult Congress before committing troops to extended conflicts.
  - have the authority to sign treaties without Senate approval.
  - have a freer hand in fighting the spread of communism.

**Test-Taking Tip:** After Vietnam and Watergate, Congress wanted legislation to limit the president’s power during wartime. Three of the answers actually do the opposite, giving the president *more* power. You can eliminate these three answers.