The War in Vietnam

Indochina was still another Cold War battlefield. France had controlled Vietnam since the middle of the 19th century, only to be supplanted by Japan during the Second World War. Meanwhile, Ho Chi Minh, a Vietnamese communist, sought to liberate his nation from colonial rule and took the American War for Independence as his model. After the Allies defeated the Japanese in 1945, they still had to deal with Ho Chi Minh.

France, hoping to regain great-power status, insisted on returning to Vietnam. Ho refused to back down, and the war for liberation continued. The United States, eager to maintain French support for the policy of containment in Europe, provided France with economic aid that freed resources for the struggle in Vietnam. Even that assistance could not prevent French defeat in 1954. At an international conference in Geneva, Vietnam was divided, with Ho in power in the North and Ngo Dinh Diem, a Roman Catholic anti-communist in a largely Buddhist population, heading the government in the South. Elections were to be held two years later to unify the country.

Persuaded that the fall of Vietnam could lead to the fall of Burma, Thailand and Indonesia, Eisenhower backed Diem's refusal to hold elections in 1956 and began to increase economic and military aid. Kennedy increased assistance, and sent small numbers of military advisors, but still the struggle between North and South continued. Diem's unpopularity culminated in his overthrow and death in 1963.

The situation was more unstable than ever before. Guerrillas in the South, known as Viet Cong, challenged the South Vietnamese government, sometimes covertly, sometimes through the National Liberation Front, their political arm. Aided by North Vietnam, they gained ground, especially among the peasants in the countryside. Determined to halt communist advances in South Vietnam, Johnson made the Vietnam War his own. After a North Vietnamese naval attack on two American destroyers, Johnson won from Congress on August 7, 1964, passage of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which allowed the president to "take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression." After his re-election in November 1964, he embarked on a policy of escalation. From 25,000 troops at the start of 1965, the number of soldiers -- both volunteers and draftees -- rose to 500,000 by 1968. A massive bombing campaign wrought havoc in both North and South Vietnam.

With grisly battles shown on television, Americans began to protest their country's involvement in the war. Such foreign policy specialists as George Kennan found fault with U.S. policies. Others argued that the U.S had no strategy for ending the war. Americans watched as the massive military campaign seemed to have no effect on the course of the war. Public dissatisfaction with U.S. policy, especially among the young, pressured Johnson to begin negotiating for peace.
Anti-war sentiment in 1968 led Johnson to renounce any intention of seeking another term. At the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, Illinois, protesters fought street battles with police. The chaos in the Democratic Party, especially after the murder of Robert Kennedy in June; white opposition to the civil rights measures of the 1960s; and the third-party candidacy of Alabama Governor George Wallace (who won his home state, Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana and Georgia) helped elect Republican Richard Nixon, who ran on a plan to extricate the United States from the war and to increase "law and order" at home.

While slowly withdrawing American troops, Nixon ordered some of the most fearful bombing in the war. He also invaded Cambodia in 1970 to cut off North Vietnamese supply lines, which passed through there to South Vietnam. This led to another round of protests and demonstrations, as students in many universities took to the streets. In one such demonstration, at Kent State in Ohio, national guard troops who had been called in to restore order panicked and killed four students.

A cease-fire, negotiated for the United States by Nixon's national security adviser, Henry Kissinger, was finally signed in 1973. Although American troops departed, the war lingered on into the spring of 1975, when North Vietnam consolidated its control over the entire country.

The war had a tremendous price. It left Vietnam devastated, with millions maimed or killed. The United States spent over $150 billion in a losing effort that cost 58,000 American lives. The war also ended the Cold War foreign policy consensus. The public found that certain American military units had engaged in atrocities in Vietnam and that the government had lied about the circumstances surrounding the Gulf of Tonkin incident in 1964. Many Americans were horrified at the invasion of Cambodia. The war led many young Americans to question the actions of their own nation and the values it sought to uphold.

GUIDED READING  Moving Toward Conflict

Section 1

A. As you read this section, take notes to answer questions about how the United States slowly became involved in a war in Vietnam.

1. What did the Vietminh declare as its main goal?
   Vietnam's independence from foreign rule.

2. What did Ho Chi Minh declare after Japan was forced out?
   That Vietnam was an independent nation.

3. How did Ho Chi Minh respond to the return of the French?
   Vowed to fight from North Vietnam to 'liberate' the South.

4. Whom did the U.S. support?
   France

5. What aid did the U.S. provide?
   Economic (for military purposes)

6. Why did the U.S. get involved in the struggle?
   To maintain an ally against USSR, prevent another Asian country from going communist

7. What did Eisenhower compare to a row of dominoes?
   Countries on the brink of communism

8. What did this Vietminh victory cause the French to do?
   Surrendered and pulled out of Vietnam

9. How did the Geneva Accords change Vietnam?
   Divided it along 17th parallel

10. Who canceled the Vietnamese elections? Why?
    Ngo Dinh Diem - w/ US support, feared Ho Chi Minh + communists would 'win'

11. What authority did the Tonkin Gulf Resolution grant to the U.S. president?
    Broad military powers in Vietnam

12. What did Operation Rolling Thunder do in North Vietnam?
    Bombed the north

B. On the back of this paper, explain the importance of the Ho Chi Minh Trail in the Vietnam War.
A. As you read about the escalation of the war, take notes to answer the questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. What role did each of the following play in the decision to escalate U.S. military involvement in Vietnam?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lyndon B. Johnson    - Made the decision to escalate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert McNamara      - Advised Johnson on escalation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dean Rusk            -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Westmoreland - Requested more troops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Congress        - Approved of Johnson's policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American public opinion -</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

U.S. military strategies result in a bloody stalemate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. What military advantages did the Americans have over the Vietcong?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superior weaponry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. What military advantages did the Vietcong have over the Americans?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of jungle terrain, blend w/ civilians, willingness to pay any price for victory</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4. What military strategies did the Americans use against the Vietcong?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bombings, war of attrition, use of napalm + Agent Orange, search &amp; destroy missions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5. What military strategies did the Vietcong use against the Americans?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hit &amp; run ambushes, booby traps, land mines, surprise attacks, guerrilla warfare</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Public support for the war begins to waver as a "credibility gap" grows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6. What role did each of the following play in this change of public support?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The U.S. economy Costs of war led to an increase in inflation and taxes, as well as to a reduction in funding for Great Society programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television Brought the war into U.S. living rooms, contradicted Johnson's optimistic war scenario</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Fulbright hearings Contributed to average American's growing ambivalence about the war.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Guided Reading: A Nation Divided

### Section 3

As you read this section, take notes to answer the questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Avoiding the War</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What were some of the ways that young American men avoided military service in Vietnam?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Found sympathetic doctors to give them medical deferments,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Looked for more lenient draft boards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Joined national guard or coast guard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Enrolled in college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. In what sense was the Vietnam War a “working class” war? How did it become one?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Nearly 80% of U.S. soldiers came from lower economic levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Common deferment was college which required $</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opposing the War</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. What organizations and groups of Americans tended to oppose the war?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• New Left organizations: Students for Democratic Society (SDS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free Speech Movement (FSM) college students, young</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What were some of the reasons that “doves” opposed the war?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• LBJ revoking college deferment for those not in good academic standing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Belief that the war was a civil war</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Not the U.S.’s business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• War was draining U.S. strength</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Immoral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. In what ways did they show their opposition to the war?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Antiwar demonstrations in public areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Publicly burned draft cards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Fled to Canada and Sweden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Marched on Washington</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Defending the War</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. By 1967, how did most Americans feel about U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Supported U.S. involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Why did “hawks” criticize the Johnson administration’s policies in Vietnam?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Felt that LBJ should escalate the war more quickly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Causes

- The Vietnam War
  - Vietcong's push to capture cities in South Vietnam

- Tet offensive
  - Growing popularity of Eugene McCarthy's anti-war message

- Racism
  - Hatred
  - Atmosphere of violence

- Hatred
  - Atmosphere of violence in country

- Disagreements among Democrats over Vietnam
  - 10,000 demonstrators at Democratic National Convention
  - Chicago Police demonstrators and different goals

- Democratic National Convention
  - Peace desired by many Americans
  - George Wallace as third party candidate

### Events of 1968

1. Tet offensive
2. Johnson's poor showing in the New Hampshire primary
3. Assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
4. Assassination of Robert Kennedy
5. Disorder at the Democratic National Convention
6. Richard M. Nixon's presidential election victory

### Effects

- Military defeat for VC
- Dramatic fall in popularity of LBJ's war
- LBJ changed VN policy and did not run for reelection
- Robert Kennedy's decision to run for president
- Feels of anger and despair among his followers
- Riots in 130 US cities
- Hopelessness and despair
- Negative image of Democratic party
- Republican presidential victory

B. On the back of this paper, note the political party of each of the following men and describe the position that each held or sought in 1968: Clark Clifford, Eugene McCarthy, Hubert Humphrey, and George Wallace.
GUIDED READING  The End of the War 
and Its Legacy

A. As you read about President Nixon’s Vietnam policy and the end of the war, note 
one or more reasons for each of the following developments during the war.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Nixon adopts a policy of Vietnamization.</td>
<td>To end U.S. involvement in Vietnam, replace U.S. troops w/ South Vietnamese troops “peace w/ honor”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Nixon orders invasion of Cambodia.</td>
<td>To remove Vietnamese &amp; VC supply centers from Cambodia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. First student strike in U.S. history occurs.</td>
<td>To protest invasion of Cambodia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Congress repeels the Tonkin Gulf Resolution.</td>
<td>To protest Nixon’s bombing &amp; invasion of Cambodia w/o notifying Congress, [Regain Congressional control]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The “Christmas bombings” take place.</td>
<td>To force a negotiated peace settlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. South Vietnam surrenders to North Vietnam.</td>
<td>N. Vietnam’s full scale invasion of S. Vietnam &amp; capture of Saigon no U.S. troops there...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Vietnam veterans receive a cold homecoming.</td>
<td>Americans very torn &amp; bitter about the war.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Cambodia erupts in civil war.</td>
<td>U.S. invasion of Cambodia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. The draft is abolished.</td>
<td>Extremely unpopular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Many Americans lose faith in their government.</td>
<td>lying about war</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Pentagon papers = LBJ admin. lying about Vietnam</td>
<td>*Nixon’s Sec. of State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- My Lai massacre</td>
<td>*Nixon admin lying about war</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Gov’t response to campus turmoil @ Kent State &amp; Jackson State</td>
<td>*Watergate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B. On the back of this paper, explain the significance of each of the following in terms of the Vietnam War:

- silent majority
- Pentagon Papers
- Henry Kissinger
- Khmer Rouge —> Cambodian communist regime
- majority of Am. citizens who weren’t protesting war of LBJ + flouting gov’t authority + Vietnam policy
MISSION OF THE SPECIAL UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE IN VIET-NAM: Statement Issued by the White House, November 3, 1954

The President on November 3 designated Gen. J. Lawton Collins as Special United States Representative in Viet-Nam with the personal rank of Ambassador, to undertake a diplomatic mission of limited duration. He will coordinate the operations of all U.S. agencies in that country.

General Collins will proceed immediately to Saigon, where he will confer with Ambassador Donald R. Heath prior to the latter's already scheduled return to the United States for reassignment following 4\(\frac{1}{2}\) years of distinguished service in Indochina. For the duration of this assignment General Collins will relinquish his other duties, including that of U.S. representative on the Military Committee of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Since the conclusion of hostilities in Indochina, the U.S. Government has been particularly concerned over developments in Viet-Nam, a country ravaged by 8 years of war, artificially divided into armistice zones, and confronted by dangerous forces threatening its independence and security.

The U.S. Government is fully aware of the immense tasks facing the Government of Viet-Nam in its effort to achieve solidarity, internal security, and economic rehabilitation. The United States has already played an important role in the evacuation of hundreds of thousands of refugees from Communist rule in North Viet-Nam.

Moreover, as the President told Prime Minister Ngo Dinh Diem in his letter of October 23d, U.S. representatives in Viet-Nam have been instructed to consider with the Vietnamese authorities how a program of American aid given directly to Viet-Nam can best assist that country. General Collins will explore this matter with Prime Minister Ngo Dinh Diem and his Government in order to help them resolve their present critical problems and to supplement measures adopted by the Vietnamese themselves.

In executing his temporary mission, General Collins will maintain close liaison with the French Commissioner General, Gen. Paul Ely, for the purpose of exchanging views on how best, under existing circumstances, the freedom and welfare of Viet-Nam can be safeguarded.

The Vietnam War - a war with its own terminology

GLOSSARY

Abercrombie and Fitch — sporting and hunting store in New York

AK-47 — NVA/VC assault rifle

APC — armored personnel carrier

ARVN — Army of the Republic of Vietnam

AWOL — Absent without leave

bayonet — knife fitted onto the muzzle end of a rifle for use in close combat

betel — seed of the fruit of the betel palm, chewed by many people of Southeast Asia

body count — number of casualties in a firefight

boonlerat — infantryman

Bravo — military phonetic for the letter B

Bunker — a fortified shelter, often below ground, built of reinforced concrete and sand bags

Cration — combat ration, canned food for use in the field

CA — combat assault

CAV — Air Cavalry, an elite army unit relying heavily on aircraft for transportation

Charlile — the Vietcong

Chartile — military phonetic for the letter C

cherry — new recruit

chopper — helicopter

claymore — anti-personnel mine used for defense and ambush

clicks (klicks) — kilometers

CO — commanding officer

Cochin China — former name for the southernmost region of Vietnam

contact — exchange of fire with an enemy force

dexadrine — an amphetamine drug, an "upper"

dlink — derogatory term for the Vietnamese

fire base — artillery firing position

flak — bursting shells from artillery

gook — derogatory term for Vietnamese person

greased — wasted, zapped; killed or died

grunt — infantryman

gunship — heavily armed helicopter used to support infantry troops

honcho — person with power who throws his weight around

hootch — any small hut, office, or building

In-country — being in Vietnam

KIA — killed in action

KP — kitchen patrol; kitchen duty in the Army

Lifer — career soldier
LRRP or LURP — long range reconnaissance patrol

LZ — helicopter landing zone

M-16 — automatic/semi-automatic assault rifle

Mamasan — slang word used by GI’s referring to older Asian women

medevac — medical evacuation by helicopter

MIA — missing in action

MP — military police

napalm — jellied petroleum substance used in flame throwers and bombs

NCO — non-commissioned officer

NLF — National Liberation Front; political arm of the Vietcong

NVA — North Vietnamese Army

Papasan — slang word used by GI’s referring to older Asian men

perimeter — fortified boundary protecting a position

PFC — Private First Class

point blank canister rounds — a type of close range, ground level artillery

purple heart — decoration awarded to a soldier wounded in action

recon — reconnaissance unit

Romeo — military phonetic for the letter R

round — ammunition for a single shot; cartridge

RPG — rocket propelled grenade

R & R — rest and rehabilitation; a two-week leave given GI’s

short-timer — person with a short time left to serve in Vietnam

Special Forces — “Green Berets;” specially trained troops used for a variety of irregular combat and political missions

starlight scope — infrared telescope for seeing in the dark

straight-leg grunts — infantry who are not airborne, airmobile, or carried in APCs

tanker bar — tool used on tanks and tracked vehicles

TC — track or tank commander

tiger suit — camouflage clothing in tiger-like striped patterning

track — tracked vehicle; APC

VC — Vietcong; soldiers of the National Liberation Front

WIA — wounded in action

World — the United States

ya-hoo — crude person (from Gulliver’s Travels)
The Tonkin Gulf Resolution was drafted as the result of reports of unprovoked North Vietnamese attacks on two United States naval vessels in the Gulf of Tonkin. Congress approved the resolution on August 7, 1964, authorizing a significant expansion of United States involvement in the Vietnam War. The reports were later believed to be false, and many Americans came to believe that President Johnson had misled Congress in order to gain support.

**THINK THROUGH HISTORY:** Analyzing Issues

How did this resolution justify the use of armed force in Southeast Asia? Were there any contradictions within those justifications? Explain.

---

Whereas naval units of the Communist regime in Vietnam, in violation of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and of international law, have deliberately and repeatedly attacked United States naval vessels lawfully present in international waters, and have thereby created a serious threat to international peace; and

Whereas those attacks are part of a deliberate and systematic campaign of aggression that the Communist regime in North Vietnam has been waging against its neighbors and the nations joined with them in the collective defense of their freedom; and

Whereas the United States is assisting the peoples of Southeast Asia to protect their freedom and has no territorial, military or political ambitions in that area, but desires only that these peoples should be left in peace to work out their own destinies in their own way: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the Congress approves and supports the determination of the President, as Commander in Chief, to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.

SEC. 2. The United States regards as vital to its national interest and to world peace the maintenance of international peace and security in southeast Asia. Consonant with the Constitution of the United States and the Charter of the United Nations and in accordance with its obligations under the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty, the United States is, therefore, prepared, as the President determines, to take all necessary steps, including the use of armed
force, to assist any member [Britain, France, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Thailand and Pakistan] or protocol state [South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia] of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty requesting assistance in defense of its freedom.

SEC. 3. This resolution shall expire when the President shall determine that the peace and security of the area is reasonably assured by international conditions created by action of the United Nations or otherwise, except that it may be terminated earlier by concurrent resolution of the Congress.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY: ANSWER

Some may answer that this resolution justifies the use of force in Southeast Asia by asserting that world peace and U.S. national interests require the maintenance of peace in Southeast Asia. They may also note that force was necessary to respond to alleged North Vietnamese attacks on U.S. naval vessels. Students may note that the contradiction involves the assertion that “the United States is assisting the peoples of Southeast Asia to protect their freedom and . . . desires only that these peoples should be left in peace to work out their destinies in their own way.” Students may point out that the use of force by the United States does not allow the peoples of Southeast Asia to work out their destinies, at least in the near future.
June 17, 1965

"OUR POSITION HASN'T CHANGED AT ALL"

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UNDERSTANDING POLITICAL CARTOONS
Study the political cartoon and then answer the questions below.

1. Why is the U.S. involvement in Vietnam likened to a maze?

2. Why is Uncle Sam shown being lifted out of “Vietnam” by helicopter?

3. Where does the cartoonist lay the blame for the American failure in Vietnam?

ACTIVITY
Draw up a brief history of the French military experience in Indochina after World War II and compare it to the American experience in the region. What lessons can be learned from these experiences?
CHAPTER 33  SKILL APPLICATION WORKSHEET 1

Using Public Opinion Polls: The 1960s and 1970s

Directions: In this worksheet you will examine the most troubling issues for the public in the 1960s and 1970s. The table below shows what the public thought was the most important problem facing the country in the year shown. Read the table carefully. Then answer the questions that follow.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>Civil rights</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Foreign affairs</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Crime</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High cost of living</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Civil rights</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other international</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Crime</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>Energy crisis</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High cost of living</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of trust in government</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Watergate</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The Gallup Poll

1. What question does the table show answers to?

2. For what years does the table show answers?

3. What was the most important problem in 1965? Can you suggest why this problem was chosen that year?

4. What was the most important problem in 1966? Can you suggest why this problem became most important that year?

5. Did more or fewer people think Vietnam was the most important problem in 1971 than in 1966? Why do you think there was a change?

**Document-Based Questions (continued)**

**Public Opinion of U.S. Involvement in Vietnam**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Approve</th>
<th>Disapprove</th>
<th>No opinion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>December 1965</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 1966</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1967</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1967</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 1967</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 1968*</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*During Tet Offensive*

**In view of the developments since we entered the fighting in Vietnam, do you think the United States made a mistake sending troops to fight in Vietnam?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Yes, made mistake</th>
<th>No, did not</th>
<th>No opinion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May 1966</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1967</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1967</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 1968**</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**“In view of the developments since we entered the fighting in Vietnam, do you think the United States made a mistake sending troops to fight in Vietnam?”**

5. According to the chart above, what happened to the American public’s belief that the Vietnam conflict was necessary to the “common defense” of the country?
Impact of the Tet Offensive

TET OFFENSIVE

PARIS

Peace talks begin after the halt to bombing of North Vietnam

Talks make no progress

SOUTH VIETNAM

Hué destroyed; ARVN retakes cities and towns, but government loses support

Increased bombing in South Vietnam by Americans

Vietcong appear to be everywhere

General Westmoreland asks for more troops

USA

Johnson criticized by hawks and doves

Johnson decides not to run again

Democratic Party splinters

Riots in Chicago during Democratic Party convention

Nixon wins 1968 presidential election
August 1, 1967

"THERE'S MONEY ENOUGH TO SUPPORT BOTH OF YOU .... NOW, DOESN'T THAT MAKE YOU FEEL BETTER?"
PRIMARY SOURCE  Protest Buttons

These protest buttons from the antiwar movement in the 1960s were worn by Americans who opposed the war in Vietnam. What different views do the images and slogans on these buttons express?

Activity Options

1. With a small group of classmates, discuss the slogans and symbols used in these buttons. Then choose two buttons that you think are most effective and explain your choices to the class.

2. Design your own protest button to express your view on the war in Vietnam, on war in general, or on a more recent controversial issue. Borrow symbols and slogans from those depicted on this page or invent your own.
28-11 Vietnamization (1969)

By 1969 Nixon had to recognize that America was in an untenable situation in Vietnam. To stay in the war sapped American resources and prestige, and devastated morale at home. To leave the war would acknowledge that the forces of Communism had prevailed. It appeared that the only honorable way out of the conflict was to force the South Vietnamese to assume responsibility for their own defense.


...Tonight I want to talk to you on a subject of deep concern to all Americans and to many people in all parts of the world—the war in Vietnam.

I believe that one of the reasons for the deep division about Vietnam is that many Americans have lost confidence in what their Government has told them about our policy. The American people cannot and should not be asked to support a policy which involves the overriding issues of war and peace unless they know the truth about that policy...

In January I could only conclude that the precipitate withdrawal of American forces from Vietnam would be a disaster not only for South Vietnam but for the United States and for the cause of peace.

For the South Vietnamese, our precipitate withdrawal would inevitably allow the Communists to repeat the massacres which followed their takeover in the North fifteen years before...

For the United States, this first defeat in our nation's history would result in a collapse of confidence in American leadership not only in Asia but throughout the world.

Three American Presidents have recognized the great stakes involved in Vietnam and understood what had to be done...

For the future of peace, precipitate withdrawal would thus be a disaster of immense magnitude.

—A nation cannot remain great if it betrays its allies and lets down its friends.

—Our defeat and humiliation in South Vietnam without question would promote recklessness in the councils of those great powers who have not yet abandoned their goals of world conquest.

—This would spark violence wherever our commitments help maintain the peace—in the Middle East, in Berlin, eventually even in the Western Hemisphere.

Ultimately, this would cost more lives. It would not bring peace; it would bring more war.

For these reasons I rejected the recommendation that I should end the war by immediately withdrawing all our forces. I chose instead to change American policy on both the negotiating front and the battlefield.

In order to end a war fought on many fronts, I initiated a pursuit for peace on many fronts.

In a television speech on May 14, in a speech before the United Nations, and on a number of other occasions, I set forth our peace proposals in great detail.

—We have offered the complete withdrawal of all outside forces within one year.

—We have proposed a cease-fire under international supervision.

—We have offered free elections under international supervision, with the Communists participating in the organization and conduct of the elections as an organized political force. The Saigon Government has pledged to accept the result of the elections.

We have not put forth our proposals on a take-it-or-leave-it basis. We have indicated that we are willing to discuss the proposals that have been put forth by the other side. We have declared that anything is negotiable, except the right of the people of South Vietnam to determine their own future. At the Paris peace conference, Ambassador Lodge has demonstrated our flexibility and good faith in forty public meetings.

Hanoi has refused even to discuss our proposals. They demand our unconditional acceptance of their terms, which are that we withdraw all American forces immediately and unconditionally and that we overthrow the Government of South Vietnam as we leave.
We have not limited our peace initiatives to public forums and public statements. I recognized in January that a long and bitter war like this usually cannot be settled in a public forum. That is why, in addition to the public statements and negotiations, I have explored every possible private avenue that might lead to a settlement. . . . But the effect of all the public, private, and secret negotiations which have been undertaken since the bombing halt a year ago and since this administration came into office on January 20 can be summed up in one sentence: No progress whatever has been made except agreement on the shape of the bargaining table. Now, who is at fault?

It has become clear that the obstacle in negotiating an end to the war is not the President of the United States. It is not the South Vietnamese Government.

The obstacle is the other side's absolute refusal to show the least willingness to join us in seeking a just peace. It will not do so while it is convinced that all it has to do is to wait for our next concession, and our next concession after that one, until it gets everything it wants.

There can now be no longer any question that progress in negotiation depends only on Hanoi's deciding to negotiate seriously. . . .

Now let me turn, however, to a more encouraging report on another front.

At the time we launched our search for peace, I recognized we might not succeed in bringing an end to the war through negotiation.

I therefore put into effect another plan to bring peace—a plan which will bring the war to an end regardless of what happens on the negotiating front. It is in line with a major shift in U. S. foreign policy which I described in my press conference at Guam on July 25.

Let me briefly explain what has been described as the Nixon doctrine—a policy which not only will help end the war in Vietnam but which is an essential element of our program to prevent future Vietnams. . . .

I laid down in Guam three principles as guidelines for future American policy toward Asia:

—First, the United States will keep all of its treaty commitments.
—Second, we shall provide a shield if a nuclear power threatens the freedom of a nation allied with us or of a nation whose survival we consider vital to our security.
—Third, in cases involving other types of aggression, we shall furnish military and economic assistance when requested in accordance with our treaty commitments. But we shall look to the nation directly threatened to assume the primary responsibility of providing the manpower for its defense.

After I announced this policy, I found that the leaders of the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, South Korea, and other nations which might be threatened by Communist aggression welcomed this new direction in American foreign policy.

The defense of freedom is everybody's business—not just America's business. And it is particularly the responsibility of the people whose freedom is threatened. In the previous administration we Americanized the war in Vietnam. In this administration we areVietnamizing the search for peace.

The policy of the previous administration not only resulted in our assuming the primary responsibility for fighting the war but, even more significantly, did not adequately stress the goal of strengthening the South Vietnamese so that they could defend themselves when we left. . . .

Let me now turn to our program for the future.

We have adopted a plan which we have worked out in cooperation with the South Vietnamese for the complete withdrawal of all U. S. combat ground forces and their replacement by South Vietnamese forces on an orderly scheduled timetable. This withdrawal will be made from strength and not from weakness. As South Vietnamese forces become stronger, the rate of American withdrawal can become greater.

I have not and do not intend to announce the timetable for our program. There are obvious reasons for this decision, which I am sure you will understand. As I have indicated on several occasions, the rate of withdrawal will depend on developments on three fronts.

One of these is the progress which can be, or might be, made in the Paris talks. An announcement of a fixed timetable for our withdrawal would completely remove any incentive for the enemy to negotiate an agreement. They would simply wait until our forces had withdrawn and then move in.
Part Twenty-Eight: The Changing Liberal State

The other two factors on which we will base our withdrawal decisions are the level of enemy activity and the progress of the training program of the South Vietnamese forces. I am glad to be able to report tonight progress on both of these fronts has been greater than we anticipated when we started the program in June for withdrawal. As a result, our timetable for withdrawal is more optimistic now than when we made our first estimates in June.

This clearly demonstrates why it is not wise to be frozen in on a fixed timetable. We must retain the flexibility to base each withdrawal decision on the situation as it is at that time rather than on estimates that are no longer valid.

Along with this optimistic estimate, I must in all candor leave one note of caution: If the level of enemy activity significantly increases, we might have to adjust our timetable accordingly.

However, I want the record to be completely clear on one point. At the time of the bombing halt just a year ago, there was some confusion as to whether there was an understanding on the part of the enemy that if we stopped the bombing of North Vietnam, they would stop the shelling of cities in South Vietnam. I want to be sure that there is no misunderstanding on the part of the enemy with regard to our withdrawal program.

We have noted the reduced level of infiltration, the reduction of our casualties, and are basing our withdrawal decisions partially on those factors.

If the level of infiltration or our casualties increase while we are trying to scale down the fighting, it will be the result of a conscious decision by the enemy.

Hanoi could make no greater mistake than to assume that an increase in violence will be to its advantage. If I conclude that increased enemy action jeopardizes our remaining forces in Vietnam, I shall not hesitate to take strong and effective measures to deal with that situation.

This is not a threat. This is a statement of policy which as Commander in Chief of our Armed Forces I am making in meeting my responsibility for the protection of American fighting men wherever they may be.

My fellow Americans, I am sure you can recognize from what I have said that we really only have two choices open to us if we want to end this war:

— I can order an immediate, precipitate withdrawal of all Americans from Vietnam without regard to the effects of that action.
— Or we can persist in our search for a just peace, through a negotiated settlement if possible or through continued implementation of our plan for Vietnamization if necessary—a plan in which we will withdraw all of our forces from Vietnam on a schedule in accordance with our program, as the South Vietnamese become strong enough to defend their own freedom.

I have chosen this second course. It is not the easy way. It is the right way. It is a plan which will end the war and serve the cause of peace, not just in Vietnam, but in the Pacific and in the world.

In speaking of the consequences of a precipitate withdrawal, I mentioned that our allies would lose confidence in America.

Far more dangerous, we would lose confidence in ourselves. Oh, the immediate reaction would be a sense of relief that our men were coming home. But as we saw the consequences of what we had done, inevitable remorse and divisive recrimination would scar our spirit as a people.

We have faced other crises in our history and have become stronger by rejecting the easy way out and taking the right way in meeting our challenges. Our greatness as a nation has been our capacity to do what had to be done when we knew our course was right.

I recognize that some of my fellow citizens disagree with the plan for peace I have chosen. . . . I would be untrue to my oath of office if I allowed the policy of this nation to be dictated by the minority who hold that point and who try to impose it on the Nation by mounting demonstrations in the street.

For almost two hundred years, the policy of this nation has been made under our Constitution by those leaders in the Congress and in the White House elected by all of the people. If a vocal minority; however fervent its cause, prevails over reason and the will of the majority, this nation has no future as a free society.
Part Twenty-Eight: The Changing Liberal State

And now I would like to address a word, if I may, to the young people of this nation who are particularly concerned—and I understand why they are concerned—about this war.

I respect your idealism.
I share your concern for peace.
I want peace as much as you do.
I have chosen a plan for peace. I believe it will succeed.
If it does succeed, what the critics say now won't matter. If it does not succeed, anything I say then won't matter.
I know it may not be fashionable to speak of patriotism or national destiny these days. But I feel it is appropriate to do so on this occasion.

Two hundred years ago this nation was weak and poor. But even then, America was the hope of millions in the world. Today we have become the strongest and richest nation in the world. The wheel of destiny has turned so that any hope the world has for the survival of peace and freedom will be determined by whether the American people have the moral stamina and the courage to meet the challenge of free-world leadership.

Let historians not record that when America was the most powerful nation in the world we passed on the other side of the road and allowed the last hopes for peace and freedom of millions of people to be suffocated by the forces of totalitarianism.

1. How did Nixon set up the premise of Vietnamization?
2. Since the United States, and therefore the forces of democracy, was losing the war, how was the Communist regime of North Vietnam portrayed as an ignoble and undeserving victor?
3. What type of action did Nixon propose?
Moment to remember

STEP BY STEP INTO A QUAGMIRE

Lyndon Baines Johnson had been pushed, pulled and driven, step by step, ever deeper into the swamp that was South Vietnam. The American presence had risen from hundreds during the Eisenhower era to more than 150,000 under President Johnson. Now, in December 1965, Johnson faced the ultimate choice: Cut and run, or march half a million Americans into a war that his experts told him he could not win.

LBJ had approved a troop buildup from 15,000 in July to 157,000 by late October 1965. The North Vietnamese responded with a river of People's Army regulars flowing down the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The forces met in a shocking collision in mid-November in the Ia Drang Valley. The helicopter-borne Americans of the 1st Cavalry Division prevailed, but only just. Some 1,100 Americans had died in Vietnam since 1959. Now, 234 had been killed in just four days.

Top-secret memo. Mortuaries ran out of coffins; field hospitals ran short of beds and erected tents over wounded GIs as they arrived. Back home, no one had given thought to creating Army casualty notification teams; Western Union gave the death-notice telegrams to taxi drivers to deliver to the families.

LBJ's cool secretary of defense, Robert McNamara, hurried to Vietnam; there would be no talk of an early victory. On the plane home, he dictated a top-secret memo to LBJ: "We have but two options, it seems to me. One is to go now for a compromise solution and hold further deployments to a minimum. The other is to stick with our stated objectives and with the war and provide what it takes in men and materiel," an additional 200,000 U.S. troops during 1966 and 200,000 more during 1967. He added that even numbers like those—600,000 American troops and a combat casualty toll he estimated at 1,000 dead Americans a month—could not guarantee success.

The gloom over the White House was deep. "Vietnam was a fungus, slowly spreading its suffocating crust over the great plans of the president, both here and overseas," said LBJ's closest aide, Jack Valenti. "No matter what we turned our hands and minds to, there was Vietnam."

Johnson summoned his advisers to a two-day session, December 17 and 18. Johnson quizzed McNamara: "What are you saying is, no matter what we do militarily, there is no sure victory?" McNamara replied: "That's right." During a break, Johnson confessed his utter bewilderment to Valenti. He could not read his opponent, Ho Chi Minh. "I don't know him. I don't know his ancestry or his customs or his beliefs."

In the end, Johnson and his advisers unanimously chose Option 2—escalation. The decision committed the United States irrevocably to a war that would drag on for nine more years, take some 3 million Americans to Vietnam, cost the lives of 58,000 of them and deeply divide and embitter the country. Will Bundy, then an assistant secretary of state, noted that McNamara's Option 1—"which alone amongst the papers of this period suggested any possible alternative to the basic course of carrying on with the war"—was never really considered because of the war's "sheer momentum" and because it was clear that South Vietnam would fall without the help of American troops.

Lyndon Johnson strongly believed he never really had a choice. If South Vietnam was lost, he later told biographer Doris Kearns, "there would be Robert Kennedy, telling everyone that I had betrayed John Kennedy's commitment. That I had let a democracy fall into the hands of the communists . . . Oh, I could see it coming all right. Every night when I fell asleep I would see myself tied to the ground in the middle of a long, open space. In the distance I could hear the voices of thousands of people. They were all shouting at me and running toward me: 'Coward! Traitor! Weakling!'"

BY JOSEPH L. GALLOWAY

The decision to put more troops into Vietnam hung heavy on President Johnson, who visited there in 1968.
Robert S. McNamara, "Our Government Lacked Experts...on Vietnam"

--a brief excerpt from *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (Random House, 1995)

Two developments after I became secretary of defense reinforced my way of thinking about Vietnam: the intensification of relations between Cuba and the Soviets, and a new wave of Soviet provocations in Berlin. Both seemed to underscore the aggressive intent of Communist policy. In that context, the danger of Vietnam's loss and, through falling dominoes, the loss of all Southeast Asia made it seem reasonable to consider expanding the U.S. effort in Vietnam.

None of this made me anything close to an East Asian expert, however. I had never visited Indochina, nor did I understand or appreciate its history, language, culture, or values. The same must be said, to varying degrees, about President Kennedy, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy, military adviser Maxwell Taylor, and many others. When it came to Vietnam, we found ourselves setting policy for a region that was terra incognita.

Worse, our government lacked experts for us to consult to compensate for our ignorance. When the Berlin crisis occurred in 1961 and during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, President Kennedy was able to turn to senior people like Llewellyn Thompson, Charles Bohlen, and George Kennan, who knew the Soviets intimately. There were no senior officials in the Pentagon or State Department with comparable knowledge about Southeast Asia. I knew of only one Pentagon officer with counterinsurgency experience in the region--Col. Edward Lansdale, who had served as an advisor to Ramon Magaysay in the Philippines and Diem in South Vietnam. But Lansdale was relatively junior and lacked broad geopolitical expertise.

The irony of this gap was that it existed largely because the top East Asian and China experts in the State Department--John Paton Davies, Jr., John Stewart Service, and John Carter Vincent (and Edmund Clubb)--had been purged during the McCarthy hysteria of the 1950s. Without men like these to provide sophisticated, nuanced insights, we--certainly I--badly misread China's objectives and mistook its bellicose rhetoric to imply a drive for regional hegemony. We also totally underestimated the nationalist aspect of Ho Chi Minh's movement. We saw him first as a Communist and only second as a Vietnamese nationalist....

Such ill-founded judgments were accepted without debate by the Kennedy Administration, as they had been by its Democratic and Republic predecessors. We failed to analyze our assumptions critically, then or later. The foundations of our decision making were gravely flawed.

from pp. 32-33

- *Stilwell & the American Experience in China* - an annotated bibliographical note.
- *MacGeorge Bundy remembered* (September 1996)
- Robert Carl Cohen's documentary film, "Inside Red China" (1957)