

There's More Online!

- ✓ BIOGRAPHY Ngo Dinh Diem
- ✓ BIOGRAPHY Ho Chi Minh
- ✓ IMAGE Agent Orange
- ✓ IMAGE Soldiers and Helicopter
- ✓ VIDEO Going to War in Vietnam
- ✓ INTERACTIVE SELF-CHECK QUIZ



LESSON 1

Going to War in Vietnam

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS • How does military conflict divide people within cultures? • Should citizens support the government during wartime?

Reading HELPDESK



Academic Vocabulary

- strategic
- traditional

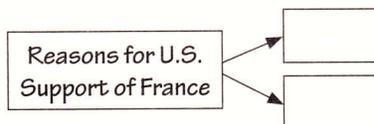
Content Vocabulary

- domino theory
- napalm
- guerrilla
- Agent Orange

TAKING NOTES:

Key Ideas and Details

Organizing Complete a graphic organizer similar to the one below by providing the reasons the United States aided France in Vietnam.



IT MATTERS BECAUSE

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, most Americans knew little about Indochina, France's colony in Southeast Asia. During the Cold War, however, American officials became concerned that the region might fall to communism.

American Involvement in Vietnam

GUIDING QUESTION Why did the United States provide military aid to the French in Indochina?

In 1940 Japan invaded Vietnam, becoming one of a series of foreign nations to rule the Asian country. The Chinese had controlled the region for hundreds of years. Then, from the late 1800s until World War II, the French ruled Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia—a region then known as French Indochina.

The Growth of Vietnamese Nationalism

By the early 1900s, nationalism had become a powerful force in Vietnam. Several political parties pushed for independence or for reform of French colonial rule. Among the leaders of the nationalist movement was Nguyen That Thanh—better known by his assumed name, Ho Chi Minh. After years in Europe, China, and the Soviet Union, he returned to Southeast Asia. There, he helped found the Indochinese Communist Party in 1930 and worked for independence.

Ho Chi Minh's activities forced him to flee Indochina and spend 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, which united Communists and non-Communists in the effort to expel the Japanese. Soon afterward, the United States began sending aid to the Vietminh.

America Aids the French

When Japan surrendered to the Allies in 1945, it gave up control of Indochina. Ho Chi Minh quickly declared Vietnam's independence. France had no intention of losing its former colony, however. French troops returned to Vietnam in 1946 and drove the Vietminh into hiding.

The Vietminh fought back against the French-dominated regime and slowly gained control of large areas of the country. As the fighting 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 supported the British decision to give India independence in 1947. American officials, however, did not want Vietnam to be Communist.

China's fall to communism and the outbreak of the Korean War helped convince President Truman to aid France. President Eisenhower continued Truman's policy and defended his decision with what became known as the **domino theory**—the idea that if Vietnam fell to communism, the rest of Southeast Asia would follow, like a line of dominoes falling over.

Defeat at Dien Bien Phu

Despite aid from the United States, the French continued to struggle against the Vietminh, who used hit-and-run and ambush tactics. These are the tactics of **guerrillas**, irregular troops who blend into the civilian population and are difficult for regular armies to fight. Rising casualties and a lack of victories made the war unpopular with the French public.

The turning point came in the mountain town of Dien Bien Phu. By seizing the town, the French planned to cut 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. On May 7, 1954, the French forces fell to the Vietminh. The defeat convinced the French to make peace and withdraw from Indochina.

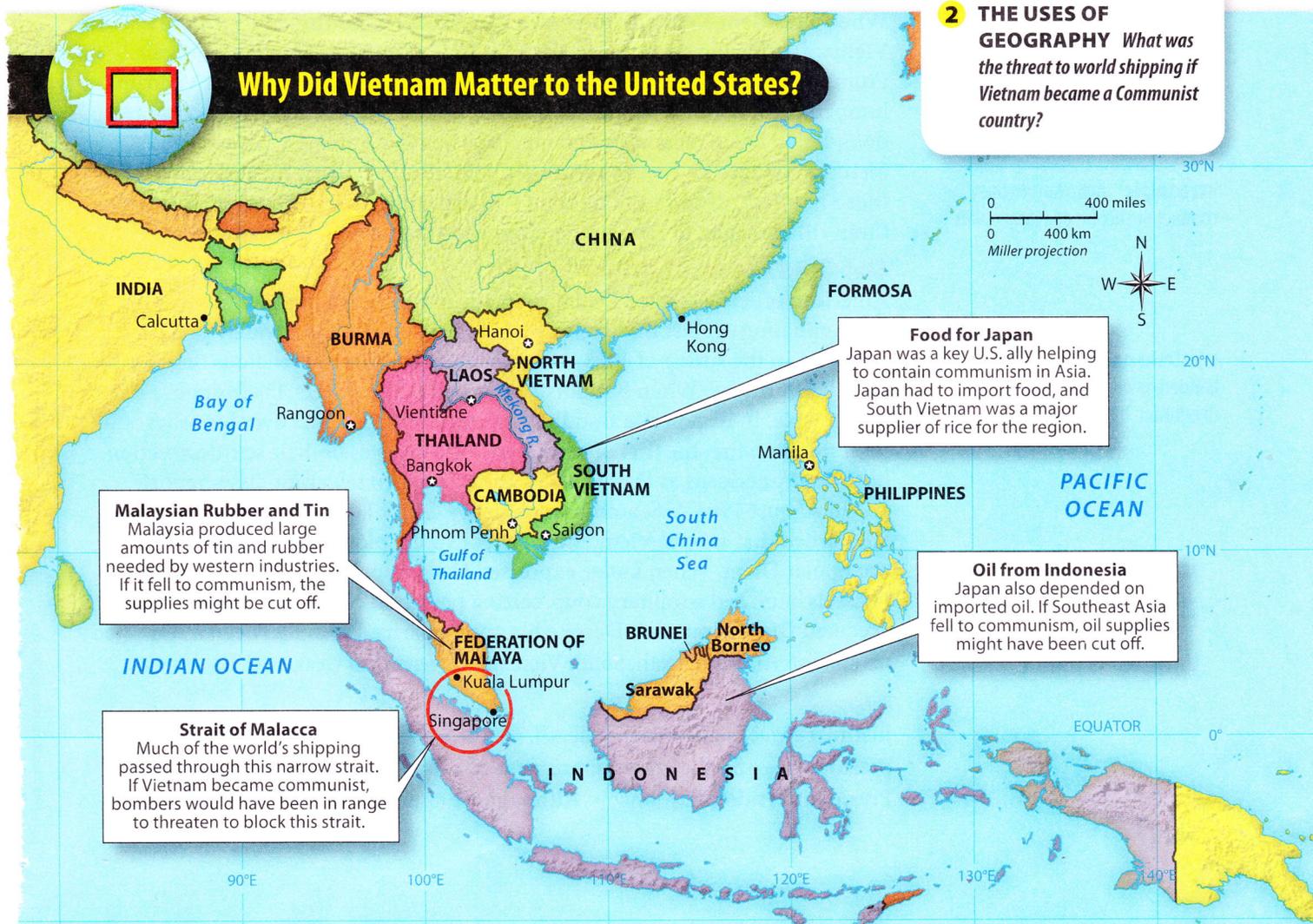
domino theory the belief that if one nation in Asia fell to the Communists, neighboring countries would follow

guerrilla member of an armed band that carries out surprise attacks and sabotage rather than open warfare

GEOGRAPHY CONNECTION

Several factors contributed to American involvement in Vietnam.

- 1 PLACES AND REGIONS**
What aspects of a Communist Vietnam threatened Japan's economy?
- 2 THE USES OF GEOGRAPHY**
What was the threat to world shipping if Vietnam became a Communist country?





Ho Chi Minh, Communist leader of North Vietnam, was determined to reunite Vietnam and began arming Vietcong guerrillas to seize power in South Vietnam.

► CRITICAL THINKING

Analyzing Why did American involvement in Vietnam grow after the Geneva Accords?

strategic important to the conduct or success of a larger plan

traditional set by custom; handed down from one generation to another

Geneva Accords

Negotiations to end the conflict were held in Geneva, Switzerland. The resulting Geneva Accords provided for a temporary division of Vietnam along the 17th parallel. Ho Chi Minh and the Vietminh controlled North Vietnam, and a pro-Western regime led by the fiercely anti-Communist Ngo Dinh Diem (eh•GOH DIHN deh•EHM) held the South. French troops soon left, and the United States became the principal protector of the new government in South Vietnam.

The accords called for elections to be held in 1956 to reunite the country under a single government. Diem refused to permit the elections, however, fearing Ho Chi Minh would win. Eisenhower approved of Diem's actions and increased American aid to South Vietnam.

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Analyzing Why did the United States protect South Vietnam?

American Involvement Deepens

GUIDING QUESTION How did American involvement in Vietnam change during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations?

After Ngo Dinh Diem refused to hold national elections, Ho Chi Minh and the Communists began an armed struggle to reunify the nation. They organized a new guerrilla army of South Vietnamese Communists, which became known as the Vietcong. Eisenhower sent hundreds of military advisers to train South Vietnam's army, but the Vietcong continued to grow more powerful because many Vietnamese opposed Diem's government. By 1961, the Vietcong had established control over much of the countryside.

Kennedy Takes Over

When President Kennedy took office in 1961, he continued to support South Vietnam, believing the country was vital in the battle against communism. From 1961 to late 1963, the number of U.S. military personnel in South Vietnam jumped from about 2,000 to around 15,000. Yet they failed to shore up the floundering Diem regime. For example, the South Vietnamese created special fortified villages known as **strategic** hamlets. They then moved villagers to these hamlets, despite the peasants' resentment at being uprooted from their villages. The program proved to be extremely unpopular.

The Overthrow of Diem

American officials blamed Diem. He made himself even more unpopular by discriminating against Buddhism, one of the country's most widely practiced religions. In the spring of 1963, he banned the **traditional** religious flags for the Buddha's birthday. When Buddhists protested in the streets, Diem's police killed nine people. In response, a Buddhist monk poured gasoline over his robes and set himself on fire, the first of several to do so. Images of their self-destruction horrified Americans as they watched the footage on television news reports.

In August 1963, U.S. ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge arrived in Vietnam. He learned that several Vietnamese generals were plotting to overthrow the unpopular Diem. When Lodge expressed U.S. sympathy for their cause, the generals launched a military coup, seizing power on November 1, 1963. They executed Diem soon after. Despite his unpopularity, Diem had been a respected nationalist. After his death, South Vietnam's government weakened.

Johnson and Vietnam

Just three weeks after Diem's death, Kennedy was assassinated. The presidency—and the growing problem of Vietnam—now belonged to President Lyndon B. Johnson. Although he approached Vietnam cautiously

at first, Johnson wanted to keep the country from falling to the Communists. Additionally, some had blamed Democrats when China became Communist in 1949. Should the Democrats “lose” Vietnam, Johnson feared, it might “shatter my Presidency, kill my administration, and damage our democracy.”

On August 2, 1964, Johnson announced that North Vietnamese torpedo boats had fired on two U.S. destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin. Two days later, he reported another attack. Insisting that these were unprovoked, he ordered American aircraft to attack North Vietnamese ships and naval facilities.

Johnson then asked Congress for the authority to defend American forces and allies in Southeast Asia. Congress readily agreed, and on August 7, 1964, it passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. This authorized the president to “take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.” Soon after, the Vietcong began to attack bases where American advisers were stationed in South Vietnam. After one particularly damaging attack, Johnson sent American aircraft to bomb North Vietnam.

ANALYZING PRIMARY SOURCES



Should America Fight in Vietnam?

As the war in Vietnam dragged on, Americans became increasingly divided about the nation's role in the conflict. In January 1966, George W. Ball delivered an address to indicate “how we got [into Vietnam] and why we must stay.” George F. Kennan, a former ambassador to the Soviet Union, argued that American involvement in Vietnam was “something we would not choose deliberately if the choice were ours to make all over again today.”

YES

“[T]he conflict in Viet-Nam is a product of the great shifts and changes triggered by the Second World War. . . . [T]he 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. . . .

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

—from a speech delivered January 30, 1966



George W. Ball
Undersecretary of State

NO

“Vietnam is not a region of major military-industrial importance. . . . [E]ven a situation in which South Vietnam was controlled exclusively by the Vietcong . . . would not present, in my opinion, dangers great enough to justify our direct military intervention.



George F. Kennan
Former diplomat

And to attempt to crush North Vietnamese strength to a point where Hanoi 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 of Americans inflicting grievous injury on the lives of a poor and helpless people . . . produces reactions among millions of people throughout the world profoundly detrimental to the image we would like them to hold of this country.”

—from testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee,
February 10, 1966

DBQ Analyzing Historical Documents

- 1 Identifying Central Ideas** Why does Ball believe that the United States is justified in fighting in Vietnam?
- 2 Comparing and Contrasting** What is the fundamental difference between the views of Ball and Kennan?

Both the American public and Johnson's advisers generally supported these actions. Some officials disagreed, however. Undersecretary of State George Ball initially supported involvement in Vietnam, but later turned against it. He warned that if the United States got too involved, it would be difficult to get out. "Once on the tiger's back," he warned, "we cannot be sure of picking the place to dismount."

Other advisers, such as National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy, believed that success in Vietnam was important to protect American interests and maintain stability in Southeast Asia. In a memo to the president, he argued:

PRIMARY SOURCE

“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*, 1972

In March 1965, Johnson again expanded American involvement by ordering a sustained bombing campaign against North Vietnam. That same month, he sent the first U.S. combat troops into Vietnam.

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Describing What event weakened the government of South Vietnam?

A Bloody Stalemate

GUIDING QUESTION *What military tactics were used by the Vietcong, and how did American troops respond?*

By the end of 1965, more than 180,000 U.S. combat troops were fighting in Vietnam. In 1966 that number doubled. The U.S. military entered Vietnam with great confidence. "America seemed omnipotent then," wrote one of the first marines to arrive, Philip Caputo, in his prologue to *A Rumor of War*. "[W]e saw ourselves as the champions of 'a cause that was destined to triumph.'"

Lacking the firepower of the American forces, the Vietcong used ambushes, booby traps, and other guerrilla tactics. These techniques could be greatly destructive. Ronald J. Glasser, an American army doctor, described the devastating effects of one booby trap:

PRIMARY SOURCE

“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*, 1997

The Vietcong also frustrated American troops by blending in with the general population and then quickly vanishing. "It was a sheer physical impossibility to keep the enemy from slipping away whenever he wished," explained one American general.

"Search and Destroy"

To counter these tactics, American troops tried to find enemy troops, bomb their positions, destroy their supply lines, and force them out into the open

Helicopters allowed U.S. troops to get in and out of jungles and mountainous areas in Vietnam.

CRITICAL THINKING

Determining Cause and Effect How did the Vietnamese landscape make troop movements difficult?



for combat. 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.

American military leaders underestimated the Vietcong's strength. They also misjudged the enemy's stamina and the support they had among the South Vietnamese. American generals believed that bombing and killing large numbers of Vietcong would destroy their morale and lead them to surrender. The guerrillas, however, had no intention of surrendering, and they were willing to accept huge losses to achieve their goals.



The Ho Chi Minh Trail

In the Vietcong's war effort, North Vietnamese support was a major factor. Although the Vietcong included many South Vietnamese, North Vietnam provided arms, advisers, and leadership. As Vietcong casualties mounted, North Vietnam began sending North Vietnamese Army units to fight. 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 Cambodia and Laos, bypassing the border between North Vietnam and South Vietnam.

North Vietnam itself received weapons and other support from the Soviet Union and China. Johnson feared directly attacking North Vietnam would bring China into the war, as had happened in Korea. Yet Johnson's limits made winning the war very difficult. Instead of conquering territory, American troops had to fight a war of attrition—defeating enemy forces by wearing them down. This strategy led troops to conduct grisly body counts after battles to determine how many enemy soldiers had been killed. The American military began measuring “progress” in the war by the number of enemy dead.

Bombing from American planes killed many thousands of Vietnamese. American soldiers were also dying in increasing numbers. 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 PROGRESS CHECK

Explaining What two chemical weapons did the United States use in Vietnam?

Chemicals such as napalm and Agent Orange devastated the landscape of Vietnam.

CRITICAL THINKING

Drawing Conclusions How might the use of chemical weapons have encouraged the South Vietnamese populace to support the Vietcong?

napalm a jellied gasoline used for bombs

Agent Orange a chemical defoliant used to clear Vietnamese jungles during the Vietnam War

PHOTO: Bertmann/CORBIS

LESSON 1 REVIEW



Reviewing Vocabulary

- Explaining** What are guerrilla tactics?
- Defining** What was the “domino theory”?

Using Your Notes

- Summarizing** Use the notes you completed during the lesson to summarize the reasons the United States aided France in Vietnam.

Answering the Guiding Questions

- Evaluating** Why did the United States provide military aid to the French in Indochina?

- Describing** How did U.S. involvement in Vietnam change during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations?

- Analyzing** What military tactics were used by the Vietcong, and how did U.S. troops respond?

Writing Activity

- ARGUMENT** Take on the role as a member of Congress in 1964. Write a statement supporting or opposing the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution.