

SECTION 3 Limits of Power



THE BIG IDEA
Fears of Communist expansion in Southeast Asia led to the United States' involvement in the Vietnam War. During this period

- President Johnson escalated the war.
- student protests became part of the anti-war movement.
- the political and social upheaval of the 1960s divided Americans.
- President Nixon oversaw a cease fire agreement that allowed for U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam.



KEY TERMS
Gulf of Tonkin Resolution
hawks
doves
Vietnamization
War Powers Act

SECTION OVERVIEW

The fear of communist expansion led the United States to become increasingly involved in Southeast Asia. This involvement led to the Vietnam War—the longest war in United States history. As the war dragged on, American support began to erode. The combination of negative public opinion and the inability of the military to achieve clear-cut victory led to a gradual withdrawal from the war. Meanwhile, great social and cultural changes were taking place in many parts of American society.

KEY THEMES AND CONCEPTS

As you review this section, take special note of the following key themes and concepts:

Foreign Policy Why did the United States become involved in Vietnam?

Presidential Decisions and Actions How did the decisions made by Presidents Johnson and Nixon affect how the Vietnam War was conducted?

Change What social and cultural changes developed in the 1960s?

Constitutional Principles How did Congress limit the power of the President in wartime?

KEY PEOPLE

Lyndon B. Johnson
Richard Nixon
Henry Kissinger

Fear of communist expansion led the United States to become deeply involved in Southeast Asia. Review the chart below to learn about the growing involvement of the United States in this region.

Unrest in Asia, 1945–1960

Date	Event
September 1945	World War II ends in Asia; Ho Chi Minh, a member of the Communist party since 1920, proclaims the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.
1946–1949	France, which had controlled Vietnam since the nineteenth century, appoints a “puppet leader” named Bao Dai, who is ineffective against the power of Ho Chi Minh.
1949	Mao Zedong declares the (Communist) People’s Republic of China; recognizes the Vietnamese government of Ho Chi Minh in 1950.
1950–1953	United States fights the Korean War and provides the French with financial aid in their struggle to hang onto Vietnam.
1953–1954	President Eisenhower debates how far the United States should go in backing the French.
1954	The forces of Ho Chi Minh defeat the French at Dienbienphu; Geneva Accords divide Vietnam at the 17th parallel; North and South Vietnam agree to hold elections in 1956 to reunite the country; the United States joins with seven Asian and European nations in the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), an anticommunist pact which extends protection to Vietnam.
1955	United States under Eisenhower increases aid to South Vietnam.
1956	South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem, fearing the popularity of Ho Chi Minh, refuses to hold elections scheduled under the Geneva Accords.
1960	Ho Chi Minh recognizes the Vietcong, Communist guerrillas in South Vietnam, as the National Liberation Front (NLF) of Vietnam; President Kennedy sends Vice President Johnson to study the crisis in Vietnam.

KENNEDY AND VIETNAM

President Kennedy shared Eisenhower’s belief in the domino theory. He, therefore, continued to support the Diem regime. By 1963, the number of United States “advisers” in South Vietnam totaled about 17,000. That year, 489 Americans died in the fighting in Vietnam.

Debate Over Involvement

American advisers urged Diem to adopt reforms to broaden his support. Diem, however, brutally suppressed all opponents and ruled as a dictator. On November 2, 1963, the South Vietnamese military overthrew Diem, with the knowledge and approval of the United States. Around the same time, the White House announced that it intended to withdraw all United States military personnel from

GEOGRAPHY IN HISTORY

Laos shares a long border with North Vietnam. During the Vietnam War, the dense jungle terrain made it difficult for U.S. and South Vietnamese forces to cut off the supply lines that ran between Laos and North Vietnam.

- How might this role as supplier have an impact on Laos later in the war?

KEY THEMES AND CONCEPTS

Presidential Decisions and Actions

Without a formal declaration of war by Congress, Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson all sent U.S. military forces to Vietnam.

- What authorized these Presidents to take these actions?

Vietnam, 1968



Vietnam by 1965. Kennedy was unable to keep this promise, because he was assassinated in 1963.

JOHNSON AND ESCALATION

Under the Constitution, only Congress can declare war. However, by 1964, three Presidents—Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson—had sent United States aid and troops into Vietnam. Each did so by acting as the commander in chief of the nation's military forces.

The Tonkin Gulf Resolution

On August 4, 1964, President Johnson escalated the war dramatically. He announced on television that American destroyers had been the victim of an unprovoked attack by North Vietnamese gun boats. (It later appeared that the ships might have been protecting South Vietnamese boats headed into North Vietnamese waters.) The next day, Johnson asked Congress for the authority to order air strikes against North Vietnam. With only two dissenting votes, Congress

passed the **Gulf of Tonkin Resolution**. The resolution empowered “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.” Johnson used the resolution to justify expansion of the war. By April 1965, U.S. planes regularly bombed North Vietnam.

A GUERRILLA WAR At first, United States military leaders expected that the nation’s superior technology would guarantee victory. However, they soon found themselves bogged down in a guerrilla war fought in the jungles of Southeast Asia. The enemy did not wear uniforms, and no clear battlefield emerged. Thousands of Vietnamese casualties occurred each month as the United States dropped more bombs on Vietnam, an area about twice the size of New York State, than it had used on Nazi Germany during the heaviest months of fighting during World War II.

REASONS FOR WAR The massive commitment in Vietnam raised questions in the minds of many Americans about why the United States got involved in Vietnam and why it stayed there. The administration argued that the United States was involved in Vietnam to prevent the fall of Vietnam to communism, to stop the rise of aggressor governments, and to protect the nation’s position as a superpower and defender of democracy. However, as the war dragged on, many Americans began to question these motives.

Resistance to the War

By late 1965, an antiwar movement had begun to take shape in the United States.

HAWKS AND DOVES In Congress, there were differences of opinion concerning the war. Some stood solidly behind the President and argued in favor of victory at any cost. These members were known as **hawks**. Those who favored immediate withdrawal and an end to the war were known as **doves**.

STUDENT PROTESTS College campuses became centers of political protest against the war. Students organized a new form of protest called teach-ins, or meetings in which speakers, usually promoting unconditional American withdrawal from Vietnam, held study sessions and rallies. The strongest antiwar group in the 1960s was Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), founded in 1960. SDS was antiestablishment, or against big business and government. It led demonstrations, sit-ins, draft-card burnings, and protests against universities with “pro-establishment” regulations.

By 1969, the organization had collapsed into a number of splinter groups. However, SDS’s legacy of protest against authority remained a strong force into the 1970s.

KEY THEMES AND CONCEPTS

Foreign Policy

In 1964, Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. The resolution, which empowered the President to “repel an armed attack against the forces of the United States,” was used to escalate U.S. bombings in North Vietnam.

- What obstacles did U.S. troops fighting in Vietnam face?



PREPARING FOR THE EXAM

On the examination, you will need to have a thorough understanding of U.S. foreign policy.

List three reasons President Johnson’s administration used to justify U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

KEY THEMES AND CONCEPTS

Reform Movements

College campuses became centers of the antiwar movement in the United States. Students organized teach-ins and other protests aimed at getting the Johnson administration to end U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Protest marches featuring people of all ages took place in major cities.

- In what different ways did young people respond to the draft?

PROTEST MARCHES People of all ages joined in protest marches against the war. The first huge march took place in Washington, D.C., in 1965. In 1967, some 300,000 Americans marched in New York City. That same year, another 50,000 tried to shut down the Pentagon.

DRAFT RESISTERS By 1968, about 10,000 draft resisters, people unwilling to serve in the military after being drafted, had fled the country for Canada. The nation's youth became increasingly divided as some chose to fight for the United States in Vietnam, while others sought deferments to go to college. A large number of minorities, who could not afford the cost of college, responded to the draft and went to Vietnam. The attitude of American youth became increasingly hostile toward the Johnson administration and all war-related issues.

THE 1960S—POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPHEAVAL

Some political analysts who studied the events of 1968 believed the nation had survived one of the biggest tests to its political institutions since the Civil War. The 1960s had been shaped by two movements: the civil rights movement and the antiwar movement. The political turmoil of the decade helped produce great social upheaval, especially among the nation's youth.

Cultural Changes

Some young people became disillusioned with traditional American values. For the first time in United States history, thousands of Americans flaunted the use of illegal drugs, often popularized in rock music.

Many young Americans referred to themselves as hippies or flower children. They claimed to be searching for a freer, simpler way of life. Communal living attracted thousands of youths who adopted lifestyles foreign to older Americans. Some spoke of a generation gap between youth and people over 30.

The civil rights movement and the Vietnam War also divided Americans. The assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., heightened emotions.

NIXON AND VIETNAM

By 1969, President Nixon faced a national crisis. The Vietnam War had turned into the nation's most costly war. American support for the war was at an all-time low.

Winding Down the War

Nixon did not bring an end to the war right away. In fact, for a time, he widened American military activities, attacking North Vietnamese supply routes out of Laos and Cambodia.

Key Events of 1968

Month	Event
January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> North Vietnam launches the Tet (New Year's) offensive, using Soviet-made jets and weapons for the first time.
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eugene McCarthy, a peace candidate and leading "dove," wins the Democratic presidential primary in New Hampshire. Robert Kennedy announces his candidacy for the presidency. President Johnson announces that he will not seek reelection and that he will devote the remainder of his term to trying to end the war.
April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> American forces in Vietnam reach 549,000; combat deaths climb to 22,951. North Vietnam announces its willingness to enter into peace talks. An assassin claims the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preliminary peace talks with the North Vietnamese begin, but serious negotiations do not take place for several years.
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An assassin claims the life of Robert Kennedy shortly after his victory in the California Democratic presidential primary.
August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Democratic National Convention nominates Hubert Humphrey amid the worst political rioting and demonstrations any convention has ever experienced; Humphrey (Johnson's Vice President) inherits a divided party and seeks election in a divided nation. The Republican National Convention nominates Richard Nixon, whose only serious challenger is Ronald Reagan. The American Independent party nominates Governor George Wallace of Alabama, showing that a third party could attract white-backlash voters who opposed the civil rights movement.
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nixon wins the 1968 election with 43.4% of the popular vote; Humphrey claims 42.7%; Wallace takes 13.5%.

VIETNAMIZATION Nixon called for **Vietnamization** of the war, or a takeover of the ground fighting by Vietnamese soldiers. Both Kennedy and Johnson had favored this approach, but neither had been able to make it work. While Nixon promoted Vietnamization, he also bombed neighboring Cambodia, which he claimed served as a base for North Vietnamese guerrillas.

The bombings triggered a large student protest at Kent State University in Ohio. By the time the National Guard broke up the demonstration, four students lay dead and nine others wounded. More

KEY THEMES AND CONCEPTS

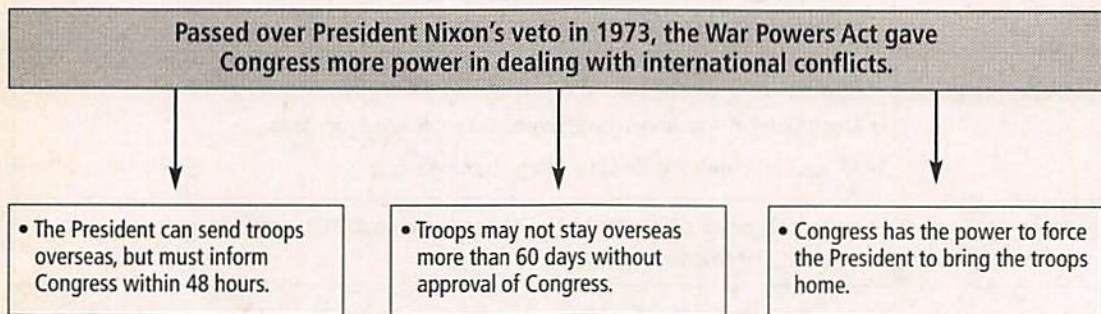
Presidential Decisions and Actions

What impact did President Nixon's decision to bomb Cambodia have on student protests?

and more Americans were questioning the role of the United States in Vietnam, yet President Nixon increased bombing raids on North Vietnam throughout 1970.

PEACE WITH HONOR Henry Kissinger, Nixon's chief foreign policy adviser, met in Paris with North Vietnamese officials seeking an end to the war. For several years, negotiations remained deadlocked. Finally, on January 15, 1973, Nixon announced that "peace with honor" had been reached and that a cease-fire would soon take effect.

The War Powers Act



READING STRATEGY

Problem Solving

Why do you think Congress passed the War Powers Act over President Nixon's veto?

The War Powers Act

In November 1973, Congress passed the War Powers Act over Nixon's veto. This law helped reverse the precedent set by the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which gave the President sweeping powers in Vietnam. The **War Powers Act** included the following provisions:

- The President had to notify Congress within 48 hours of sending troops into a foreign country. At that time, the President would have to give Congress a full accounting of the decision.
- The President had to bring the troops home within 60 days unless both houses voted for them to stay.

Vietnam and Limits on United States Power

When the United States finally withdrew from Vietnam, the North Vietnamese overran South Vietnam. For two years, the United States poured billions of dollars of aid into South Vietnam. However, on April 30, 1975, the government in Saigon collapsed. Bitterness over the war still persisted. When the President asked for funds to evacuate the South Vietnamese who had helped the United States, Congress refused. In the end, some 100,000 people fled the country.

The United States had tried for 20 years to guarantee freedom to the people of South Vietnam. However, the United States ultimately could not count its efforts as a success. In the conflict, some 58,000 Americans died, and another 300,000 were wounded. The United States spent over \$150 billion on the war effort. Not only did Vietnam

fall to communism, but so did its neighbors Cambodia (Kampuchea) and Laos. Throughout the late 1970s and 1980s, the United States sought to understand the Vietnam experience. It was the subject of films, books, and national monuments such as the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C.

Conclusions Drawn from U.S. Involvement in Vietnam

The following is a list of conclusions drawn from the Vietnam War era.

- The American political system acts in response to a variety of public pressures.
- Modern war technology is not always powerful enough if an opponent is armed with a determined spirit of nationalism.
- Successful military efforts require a well-prepared and supportive public. (Compare, for example, the differing experiences in Vietnam and World War II.)
- The United States was committed to a foreign policy that supported the global nature of United States involvement in foreign affairs.

PREPARING FOR THE EXAM

For the examination, it will be important to understand the *significance* of historical events, not just the dates of and participants in those events.

- Overall, was the Vietnam War a success or a failure? Why?
- What enduring lessons were learned from the war?
- How has the Vietnam War continued to be remembered in American society?