

Vietnam's Struggle for Independence and U.S. Involvement 1945-1975

- 1945** (September 2) Japan surrenders aboard USS *Missouri*, ending World War II. Ho Chi Minh proclaims independence of Vietnam. War for Vietnamese independence against France begins (until 1954).
- 1950** Korean War begins; U.S. begins paying most of France's war expenses in Vietnam.
- 1954** French defeated at Dien Bien Phu; Geneva Conference meets and agrees to a temporary division of Vietnam until elections can be held in 1956 to reunite the country. U.S. "takes note of" and agrees "not to oppose," but does not formally sign Geneva Accords.
- 1955** U.S. installs Ngo Dinh Diem as President of South Vietnam; American advisers sent to train a South Vietnamese army.
- 1956** Diem, backed by U.S., refuses to hold elections promised at Geneva.
- 1960** National Liberation Front (Viet Cong) forms to overthrow Diem; guerrilla war against Diem regime escalates and intensifies during 1961, 1962 and first ten months of 1963.
- 1963** Diem assassinated in U.S.-approved military coup. Political instability in South Vietnam (until election of Thieu in 1967).
- 1964** Gulf of Tonkin incident: U.S. Senate, by vote of 91-2, approves resolution giving President Johnson broad military powers in Vietnam.
- 1965** American combat forces enter Vietnam in strength; 200,000 troops by year's end. North Vietnam under heavy bombing by U.S.
- 1966** U.S. troops increase to 400,000; fighting intensifies.
- 1967** U.S. troops number nearly 500,000; fighting intensifies further. General Thieu heads South Vietnam.
- 1968** Tet offensive: major political triumph for Viet Cong. Johnson halts bombing and seeks to end war through negotiation; U.S. forces peak at 550,000; request for 206,000 additional U.S. troops denied by Johnson.
- 1969** President Nixon announces policy of "Vietnamization"; U.S. troops begin to withdraw, but secret bombing of Cambodia begins.
- 1970** U.S. troop strength declines to 280,000, but Cambodia is invaded.
- 1971** Nixon, under pressure, signs repeal of Gulf of Tonkin resolution. Secret peace talks begin in Paris; U.S. troop strength down to 140,000.
- 1972** Last U.S. combat units leave Vietnam; bombing intensifies.
- 1973** Peace treaty signed allowing North Vietnamese forces to remain in South Vietnam; Congress forces bombing of Cambodia to stop.
- 1974** Full-scale war resumes between North and South Vietnam.
- 1975** Communist Khmer Rouge triumph in Cambodia. North Vietnam in all-out attack on South. Saigon falls on April 30; war in Vietnam ends.

Summary Statistics

U.S.	3,300,000 troops served in Vietnam. 303,713 were wounded and 58,022 died. Direct cost of war effort, approximately \$200 billion. \$5 billion worth of U.S. equipment captured by North Vietnam at war's end.
Vietnam	1,500,000 civilians and military killed. 9,000,000 refugees. 5.2 million acres defoliated.

30-6 The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution (1964)

In accepting the Gulf of Tonkin resolution from Congress, which passed against only two dissenting votes, President Johnson claimed that the Senate's unanimity reflected a

public consensus that stood behind administration policy. Yet the administration was unwilling to explain exactly what had happened in the Gulf of Tonkin, which suggests that Johnson knew no such public consensus existed (see text pp. 932-933). What is more impressive about the resolution is the ease with which the Senate surrendered its very important constitutional privilege of declaring war. Wayne Morse, one of the two dissenters, warned against this "historic mistake" that effectively subverted the Constitution. But the resolution passed nonetheless, and it permitted Johnson to conduct the war largely on his terms.

Source: Department of State Bulletin, August 29, 1964, p. 268.

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 the United States naval vessels present in international waters, and have thereby created a serious threat to international peace;

Whereas these 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;

Whereas the United States is assisting the peoples of southeast Asia to protect their political freedom and has not 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 interests and to world peace the maintenance of international peace and security in southeast Asia. . . . 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 or protocol state 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. . . .

Questions

1. What are the North Vietnamese accused of in this resolution?
 2. What are American interests in the region, according to the resolution?
 3. In what ways does the resolution grant a free hand to the president?
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