

## The Vietnam Era

### Lesson 2 The Vietnam War

#### ESSENTIAL QUESTION

*Why does conflict develop?*

#### GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. *How did Vietnam become a divided country?*
2. *Why did the United States become involved in the war in Vietnam?*

#### Terms to Know

**regime** a form of government, government in power, or period of time

**search-and-destroy mission** mission by American forces to seek out and destroy North Vietnamese forces

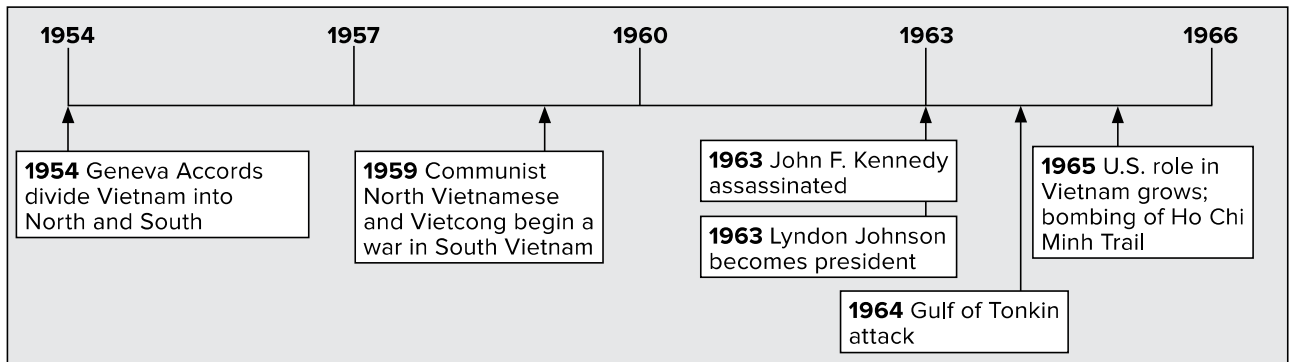
**napalm** an intensely burning explosive used to destroy jungle growth

**Agent Orange** a chemical herbicide used to clear out forests and tall grasses

#### Where in the world?



#### When did it happen?



## The Vietnam Era

### Lesson 2 The Vietnam War, *Continued*

#### The Conflict Begins

In the early 1960s, the United States became more involved in a war in Vietnam. The United States wanted to prevent the spread of communism in the region. This conflict became known as the Vietnam War. It did not go as Americans hoped.

During World War II, the Japanese captured the French colony of Indochina. It included the modern nations of Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. Communist forces fought against the Japanese. Their leader was Ho Chi Minh (HOH • CHEE • MIHN).

After World War II, Vietnam declared independence from France. But France did not want to give up Indochina because it had many natural resources. Ho Chi Minh led troops against France in a long and bloody war. They finally defeated France in 1954.

The United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, China, and Vietnam reached a peace agreement in 1954. It was called the Geneva Accords because they met in Geneva, Switzerland. It divided Vietnam into two parts. North Vietnam was ruled by Communists led by Ho Chi Minh. South Vietnam was controlled by a leader named Ngo Dinh Diem who was supported by the United States. There would be elections in 1956 to decide the government for all of Vietnam. The United States and South Vietnam did not sign the agreement, but they did not oppose it. The United States made it clear that it would act if North Vietnam attacked South Vietnam.

The Diem **regime**, or government, did not follow the Geneva Accords. It refused to hold elections. It also cracked down on Communists in South Vietnam. The Communists responded by forming a group called the Vietcong. In 1959, the Vietcong began a war against the Diem regime on orders from Ho Chi Minh.

The United States was worried the Communists would take over Vietnam. President Eisenhower predicted that if the Communists took control of Vietnam, they would soon control the other countries in Indochina, too. He said they would fall like a row of dominoes. This fear controlled American thinking about Vietnam for 20 years.

The United States sent billions of dollars of aid to support South Vietnam. It also sent a few hundred soldiers to act as advisers to the government and army.

The United States did not approve of the methods of the Diem government. But they supported it because it was not Communist.



#### Marking the Text

- Underline the sentence that describes the main reason the United States got involved in Vietnam.



#### Contrasting

- What was the main political difference between North Vietnam and South Vietnam?

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#### Identifying

- Who was Ngo Dinh Diem?

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#### Explaining

- In what way did South Vietnam refuse to follow the Geneva Accords?

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**Lesson 2** The Vietnam War, *Continued*

**? Analyzing**

5. Why did the United States support the Diem regime? Why did it later support its overthrow?

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**? Summarizing**

6. Why was the reported attack in the Gulf of Tonkin important?

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**✓ Describing**

7. How did the number of U.S. troops in Vietnam change from Kennedy's death in 1963 to 1968?

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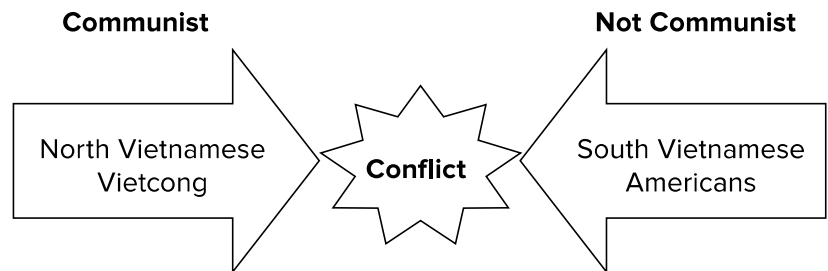
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The Diem government took away some of the people's freedoms, especially those of Buddhists. Hundreds of Buddhists were jailed and some were killed. The Buddhists protested. Some burned themselves in protest.

President Kennedy sent aid and special forces troops to train and advise the South Vietnamese. Some Americans were angry that Kennedy was helping Diem. Kennedy tried to get Diem to give more rights to people in South Vietnam.

In 1963, South Vietnam's army overthrew Diem and killed him. The United States supported the revolution but did not support killing Diem. A few days later, President Kennedy was assassinated. The new president, Lyndon Johnson, had to decide how to handle the Vietnam War.



**The Conflict Deepens**

At the time of Kennedy's death, there were about 16,000 U.S. troops in Vietnam. The U.S. Secretary of Defense told President Johnson that the Vietcong would win if the United States did not increase its support for South Vietnam. Johnson had doubts about the war. Privately, he said, "I don't think it's worth fighting for, but I don't think we can get out."

Johnson needed support from Congress to increase U.S. support. In 1964, it was reported that North Vietnamese boats attacked American ships in the Gulf of Tonkin. Because of this attack, Congress gave President Johnson more power to fight the war.

Johnson decided to send more soldiers to Vietnam. The numbers rose quickly. About 180,000 American soldiers were in Vietnam by the end of 1965, almost 400,000, by the end of 1966, and more than 500,000 by 1968.

The U.S. also bombed more enemy targets in Vietnam. Operation Rolling Thunder was a major plan of attack. U.S. planes

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**Lesson 2** The Vietnam War, *Continued*

bombed bridges, docks, factories, and military bases in the North. It also targeted an enemy supply route called the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The goal was to destroy the trail. This would cut off the enemy’s supply of food and weapons into South Vietnam. From 1965 through 1968, the United States dropped more bombs on Vietnam than they did in all of World War II.

Fighting in Vietnam was very hard for the military. They used **search-and-destroy missions** to hunt down the enemy. When ground troops found the enemy, they called in helicopters to help attack them.

The soldiers had to fight in wet, muddy fields and jungles. This was dangerous because the enemy could hide among the jungle plants and make surprise attacks. To clear out the jungles and make fighting easier, soldiers on both sides used an explosive called **napalm**. Napalm burned the trees and grasses. U.S. troops also used a chemical called **Agent Orange** to kill plants. It is believed that Agent Orange harmed many North and South Vietnamese and American troops, leaving them with serious health problems.

The bombing and fighting did not stop the North Vietnamese and Vietcong. Although thousands were killed, it seemed that they were quickly replaced. American soldiers became frustrated. The war went on for years.

Many Americans did not want the United States to fight in Vietnam. These people protested the war. As the Vietnam War went on, some U.S. leaders started to think that the war could not be won.

Glue Foldable here

**Check for Understanding**

**How did Vietnam become a divided country?**

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**Why did the United States get involved in Vietnam?**

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**?** **Drawing Conclusions**

**8.** Why might it be easier for U.S. soldiers to fight the enemy after they had cleared away all jungle plants?

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**9.** Label a one-tab Foldable *The Vietnam War*. Glue a two-tab Foldable under the one-tab along the anchor tab. Label the two tabs *North Vietnam* and *South Vietnam*. Place the Foldable along the dotted line to cover the Check for Understanding. List what you remember about the causes and effects of the Vietnam War on the one-tab. Write about the similarities and the differences of each country on the two-tab. Use your Foldable to help answer Check for Understanding.