

## Vietnam War

**FL** SS.912.A.6.14 Analyze causes, course, and consequences of the Vietnam War.

**Vocabulary Builder:** **intensify** (in TEN suh fahy) *v.* to increase or make more intense; **assert** (uh SURT) *v.* to state positively or to declare; **secure** (si KYOOR) *v.* to protect against attack

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In the 1950s, the Southeast Asian country of Vietnam was also divided into two countries: communist North Vietnam and non-communist South Vietnam. The United States provided economic and military aid to the South Vietnamese government led by Ngo Dinh Diem. This was a continuation of the Cold War policy of containment. President Eisenhower believed that if South Vietnam fell to the Communists, other countries in Southeast Asia would also fall to communism, like a row of dominoes. This idea was called the "domino theory."

However, Ngo Dinh Diem was unpopular with many of the South Vietnamese people. Some of them wanted to overthrow the Diem government and unite South Vietnam with North Vietnam. They formed the National Liberation Front (NLF), a communist rebel group. The NLF's fighters were called the Vietcong. Supplied by North Vietnam, the Vietcong used guerilla, or hit-and-run, tactics.

### U.S. Involvement Increases

After President John Kennedy was elected, he increased U.S. involvement in the Vietnamese conflict. In 1961, he began sending Special Forces troops to South Vietnam. After Kennedy's assassination in 1963, the new President, Lyndon Johnson, intensified the buildup of military forces in Vietnam. In 1964, an American destroyer was fired upon by the North Vietnamese. In response, Congress authorized Johnson "to take all necessary measures" to prevent further aggression in Southeast Asia. The United States began bombing North Vietnam and committed more and more troops to the conflict. However, compared with World War II, the Vietnam War was a limited war. The United States was afraid of drawing the Chinese and Soviets into the war, so it did not invade North Vietnam.

By 1968, there were more than half a million U.S. troops in South Vietnam. Although the Americans had large numbers and powerful air support, most of the battles were not fought on their terms. The Vietcong and North Vietnamese soldiers tried to fight only those battles that they could win. They continued to use guerillas tactics, and their knowledge of the Vietnamese landscape gave them an advantage. American troops won many battles, but they could not achieve a successful end to the war.

## Vietnam War (continued)

### War Protest

By 1968, more than 30,000 Americans had died in Vietnam, and there was no end in sight. Many American citizens and political leaders questioned the wisdom of staying in the war. President Johnson continued to assert that the war was nearly won, but again and again, this proved untrue. The United States became divided over the war. Although many people continued to support the war, others became more and more vocal about their opposition to it. College campuses, in particular, became centers of antiwar protest. With so many people opposed to the war, Johnson announced in 1968 that he would not run for reelection.

### The War Ends

Richard Nixon became President in 1969. In his campaign, he had promised to bring "peace with honor." When peace talks failed, he began to gradually withdraw American forces and replace them with South Vietnamese troops. He called this policy "Vietnamization." Nixon continued to provide the South Vietnamese with military aid and hoped that the South Vietnamese army would be able to fight its own battles to secure South Vietnam. The policy was not effective, however, and American troops remained in Vietnam for four more years.

Meanwhile, war protests increased at home. By 1971, public opinion polls showed that two thirds of Americans favored withdrawing U.S. troops. Finally, in January 1973, the Paris Peace Accords were signed by the United States, South Vietnam, North Vietnam, and the Vietcong. The peace agreement included the withdrawal of all U.S. troops from South Vietnam and the return of American POWs.

For the United States, the war was over. However, fighting continued in Vietnam. In the spring of 1975, the Soviet-supplied North Vietnamese Army invaded South Vietnam. Without American aid, the South Vietnamese army was unable to resist the invasion. By that time, Nixon had resigned from office because of the Watergate scandal. By the end of April, South Vietnam's capital of Saigon fell to the Communists. North and South Vietnam were reunited as a single communist country.

**Check for Understanding** Why was the United States unable to win the war in Vietnam?

## The Legacy of Vietnam and Watergate



**SS.912.A.7.10** Analyze the significance of Vietnam and Watergate on the government and people of the United States.

**Vocabulary Builder:** internal (in tuh nl) *adj.* relating to affairs within a country; undermine (uhn der MAHYN) *v.* to damage or weaken

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### The End of Innocence

On November 22, 1963, President Kennedy was shot and killed in Dallas, Texas. His assassination horrified the nation and shook its confidence. It was the beginning of a period of division and internal conflict in the United States. U.S. involvement in Vietnam, in particular, divided American society between “hawks” (those who supported the war) and “doves” (those who opposed it).

### The Legacy of Vietnam

World War II veterans like Kennedy had been received back home as heroes. They marched in parades to the adoration of a grateful nation. However, Vietnam veterans came home to a very different reception. In some cases, they were met with outright hostility from persons who opposed the war.

The war in Vietnam left scars on both American soldiers and American society. Over 58,000 soldiers gave their lives in the war. Others left the war with wounds, both physical and emotional. It was many years before the wounds from the war began to heal. In 1982, the dedication of the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, D.C., finally recognized and honored the service and sacrifice of those who served in Vietnam.

The Vietnam War also undermined Americans’ trust in their leaders. It made many Americans suspicious about U.S. involvement in overseas conflicts, or even peacekeeping missions. However, the United States and American ideals of democracy and freedom finally prevailed in the Cold War struggle with Soviet communism.

### The Legacy of Watergate

On June 17, 1972, police were called to the Watergate hotel-office complex in Washington, D.C. The police found five men in the offices of the Democratic National Committee involved in installing or checking sophisticated eavesdropping equipment. From this simple burglary arrest followed a series of investigations which eventually led to the resignation of President Richard Nixon in August, 1974. Although Nixon had not ordered the break-in, his involvement in covering up and attempting to block the investigation were serious crimes. As the trail of lies moved closer to the president, the American people lost confidence and trust in their government and its representatives.

**Check for Understanding** In what ways did the Vietnam War leave scars on American society?

