Shortly after taking office, President Nixon moved to end the nation’s involvement in the Vietnam War. The final years of the conflict, however, yielded more bloodshed and turmoil, as well as a growing cynicism in the minds of Americans about the honesty and effectiveness of the United States government.

**Nixon Moves to End the War**

**MAIN Idea** While unrest and suspicion of the government grew, the United States finally withdrew its troops from Vietnam.

**HISTORY AND YOU** Have you ever protested against something you felt was wrong? Read on to find out how college students reacted to what they viewed as a widening of the Vietnam War.

As a first step to fulfilling his campaign promise to end the war, Nixon appointed Harvard professor Henry Kissinger as special assistant for national security affairs and gave him wide authority to use diplomacy to end the conflict. Kissinger embarked upon a policy he called linkage, which meant improving relations with the Soviet Union and China—suppliers of aid to North Vietnam—so that he could persuade them to cut back on their aid.

Kissinger also rekindled peace talks with the North Vietnamese. In August 1969 Kissinger entered into secret negotiations with North Vietnam’s negotiator, Le Duc Tho. In their talks, which dragged on for four years, Kissinger and Le Duc Tho argued over a possible cease-fire, the return of American prisoners of war, and the ultimate fate of South Vietnam.

Meanwhile, Nixon reduced the number of American troops in Vietnam. Known as Vietnamization, this process involved the gradual withdrawal of U.S. troops while the South Vietnamese assumed more of the fighting. On June 8, 1969, Nixon announced the withdrawal of 25,000 soldiers, but he was determined to keep a strong American presence in Vietnam to ensure bargaining power during peace negotiations. In support of that goal, the president increased air strikes against North Vietnam and—without informing Congress or the public—began secretly bombing Vietcong sanctuaries in neighboring Cambodia.

**Turmoil at Home Continues**

Even though the United States had begun scaling back its involvement in Vietnam, the American home front remained divided and volatile, as Nixon’s war policies stirred up new waves of protest.

---

**Guide to Reading**

**Big Ideas**

**Trade, War, and Migration**

The Vietnam War changed the way Americans viewed the government and the military, and led them to question how the armed forces were deployed.

**Content Vocabulary**
- linkage (p. 670)
- Vietnamization (p. 670)

**Academic Vocabulary**
- generation (p. 671)
- unresolved (p. 675)

**People and Events to Identify**
- Henry Kissinger (p. 670)
- Pentagon Papers (p. 672)
- War Powers Act (p. 675)

**Reading Strategy**

**Organizing** Complete a graphic organizer similar to the one below by listing the steps that President Nixon took to end American involvement in Vietnam.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps Nixon Took</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

---
Massacre at My Lai  In late 1969 Americans learned that, in the spring of 1968, an American platoon under the command of Lieutenant William Calley had massacred unarmed South Vietnamese civilians in the hamlet of My Lai. Most of the victims were old men, women, and children. Calley eventually went to prison for his role in the killings.

Most American soldiers acted responsibly and honorably during the war. The actions of a small group, however, convinced many people that the war was brutal and senseless. Jan Barry, a founder of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War, viewed My Lai as a symbol of the dilemma his generation faced in the conflict:

"To kill on military orders and be a criminal, or to refuse to kill and be a criminal is the moral agony of America’s Vietnam war generation. It is what has forced upward of sixty thousand young Americans, draft resisters and deserters to Canada, and created one hundred thousand military deserters a year..."

—quoted in Who Spoke Up?

The Invasion of Cambodia Sparks Protest  Americans heard more startling news when Nixon announced in April 1970 that American troops had invaded Cambodia. The troops were ordered to destroy Vietcong military bases there.

Many viewed the Cambodian invasion as a widening of the war, and it set off many protests. At Kent State University on May 4, 1970, Ohio National Guard soldiers, armed with tear gas and rifles, fired on demonstrators without an order to do so. The soldiers killed four students. Ten days later, police killed two African American students during a demonstration at Jackson State College in Mississippi.
In addition to sparking violence on campuses, the invasion of Cambodia cost Nixon significant congressional support. Numerous legislators expressed outrage over the president’s failure to notify them of the action. In December 1970 an angry Congress repealed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which had given the president nearly complete power in directing the war in Vietnam.

**The Pentagon Papers** Support for the war weakened further in 1971 when Daniel Ellsberg, a disillusioned former Defense Department worker, leaked what became known as the *Pentagon Papers* to the *New York Times*. The documents revealed that many government officials during the Johnson administration privately questioned the war while publicly defending it.

The documents contained details of decisions that were made by the presidents and their advisers to expand the war without the consent of Congress. They also showed how the various administrations had tried to convince Congress, the press, and the public that the situation in Vietnam was better than it really was. The Pentagon Papers confirmed what many Americans had long believed: the government had not been honest with them.

**The United States Pulls Out**

By 1971, polls showed that nearly two-thirds of Americans wanted to end the Vietnam War as quickly as possible. In April 1972 President Nixon dropped his longtime insistence that North Vietnamese troops had to withdraw from South Vietnam before any peace treaty could be signed. In October, less than a month before the presidential election, Kissinger emerged from his secret talks with Le Duc Tho to announce that “peace is at hand.”

A month later, Americans went to the polls to decide on a president. Senator George McGovern, the Democratic candidate, was an outspoken critic of the war. He did not appeal to many middle-class Americans, however, who were tired of antiwar protesters. Nixon was reelected in a landslide, winning 60.7 percent of the popular vote.

Just weeks after the presidential election, the peace negotiations broke down. South Vietnam’s president, Nguyen Van Thieu, refused to agree to any plan that left North Vietnamese troops in the South. Henry Kissinger tried to win additional concessions from the Communists, but talks broke off on December 16, 1972.

The next day, to force North Vietnam to resume negotiations, the Nixon administration began the most destructive air raids of the entire war. In what became known as the “Christmas bombings,” American B-52s dropped thousands of tons of bombs on North Vietnamese targets for 11 straight days, pausing only on Christmas Day.

In the wake of the bombing campaign, the United States and North Vietnam returned to the bargaining table. Thieu finally gave in to American pressure and allowed North Vietnamese troops to remain in the South. On January 27, 1973, the warring sides signed an agreement “ending the war and restoring the peace in Vietnam.”

The United States promised to withdraw its troops, and both sides agreed to exchange prisoners of war. The parties did not resolve the issue of South Vietnam’s future, however. After almost eight years of war—the longest war in American history—the nation ended its direct involvement in Vietnam.

**South Vietnam Falls**

Two years after the United States pulled its troops out of Vietnam, the peace agreement collapsed. In March 1975 the North Vietnamese army launched a full-scale invasion of the South. Thieu desperately appealed to Washington, D.C., for help.

President Nixon had assured Thieu during the peace negotiations that the United States “[would] respond with full force should the settlement be violated by North Vietnam.” Nixon, however, had resigned under pressure following Watergate, a scandal that broke as the war was winding down. The new president, Gerald Ford, asked for funds to aid the South Vietnamese, but Congress refused.

Without American assistance, the South Vietnamese Army was unable to stop the invasion. On April 30, the North Vietnamese captured Saigon, South Vietnam’s capital, and united Vietnam under Communist rule. They then renamed the city Ho Chi Minh City.

**Evaluating** What did the Pentagon Papers confirm for many Americans?
Background to the Case

In 1971 Daniel Ellsberg leaked classified documents, known as the Pentagon Papers, to the New York Times and the Washington Post. When the newspapers attempted to publish these documents, the Nixon administration argued that publication would threaten national security. The case centered on the First Amendment guarantee of a free press.

How the Court Ruled

In a 6-to-3 per curiam opinion—per curiam meaning that the decision was issued by the whole Court and not specific justices—the Court found that the Nixon administration had failed to prove that publication of the Pentagon Papers would imperil the nation in any way. The New York Times and the Washington Post could publish the Pentagon Papers.

Primary Source

Concurring View

“The Government’s power to censor the press [via the First Amendment] was abolished so that the press would remain forever free to censure the Government... And paramount among the responsibilities of a free press is the duty to prevent any part of the government from deceiving the people and sending them off to distant lands to die of foreign fevers and foreign shot and shell. In my view, far from deserving condemnation for their courageous reporting, the New York Times, the Washington Post, and other newspapers should be commended for serving the purpose that the Founding Fathers saw so clearly. In revealing the workings of government that led to the Vietnam War, the newspapers did precisely that which the Founders hoped and trusted they would do.”

—Justice Hugo Black in New York Times v. United States

Dissenting View

“The First Amendment, after all, is only one part of an entire Constitution. Article II of the great document vests in the Executive Branch primary power over the conduct of foreign affairs and places in that branch the responsibility for the Nation’s safety... What is needed here is a weighing, upon properly developed standards, of the broad right of the press to print and of the very narrow right of the Government to prevent. Such standards are not yet developed. The parties here are in disagreement as to what those standards should be. But even the newspapers concede that there are situations where restraint is in order and is constitutional.”

—Justice Harry Blackmun, dissenting in New York Times v. United States

DBQ Document-Based Questions

1. Explaining Why did Justice Black agree with the Court’s decision? What did he imply about the government’s actions?
2. Contrasting Why did Justice Blackmun disagree with the Court’s decision?
3. Assessing Do you think the government can ever justify media censorship, even based on national security concerns? Explain.
The Legacy of Vietnam

**MAIN Idea** The Vietnam War made a negative impact on the way in which Americans viewed international conflicts, as well as their own government.

**HISTORY AND YOU** Do you think that leaders at the highest levels of the federal government are trustworthy? Read on to find out how the Vietnam War and other events led Americans to lose some trust in their leaders.

“The lessons of the past in Vietnam,” President Ford declared in 1975, “have already been learned—learned by Presidents, learned by Congress, learned by the American people—and we should have our focus on the future.” Vietnam had a deep and lasting impact on American society.

**The War’s Human Toll**

The United States paid a heavy price for its involvement in Vietnam. The war had cost the nation over $170 billion in direct costs and much more in indirect economic expenses. It had also resulted in the deaths of approximately 58,000 young Americans and the injury of more than 300,000. In Vietnam, around one million North and South Vietnamese soldiers died in the conflict, as did countless civilians.

---

**The War Powers Act**

- Requires the president in all cases to consult with Congress before making any troop commitments
- Requires the president to inform Congress of any commitment of troops abroad within 48 hours
- Requires the president to withdraw troops in 60 to 90 days, unless Congress explicitly approves the troop commitment

---

**Analyzing VISUALS**

1. **Explaining** How did the War Powers Act seek to curb the power of the president?
2. **Assessing** Do you think that the legacy of Vietnam has been a lasting one? Why or why not?

---

▲ The Vietnam Veterans Memorial is inscribed with the names of the 58,249 people killed or missing in Vietnam.

▲ Along with returning troops, many freed prisoners of war, or POWs, such as Lt. Colonel Robert Stirm, were joyfully greeted by their families. Sadly, some did not come home and were labeled as MIA, or “missing in action,” and remain so to this day.
Even after they returned home from fighting as in other wars, soldiers found it hard to escape the war’s psychological impact. Army Specialist Doug Johnson recalled the problems he faced:

**Primary Source**

“It took a while for me to recognize that I did suffer some psychological problems in trying to deal with my experience in Vietnam. The first recollection I have of the effect took place shortly after I arrived back in the States. One evening . . . I went to see a movie on post. I don’t recall the name of the movie or what it was about, but I remember there was a sad part, and that I started crying uncontrollably. It hadn’t dawned on me before this episode that I had . . . succeeded in burying my emotions.”

—quoted in *Touched by the Dragon*

One reason why it may have been harder for some Vietnam veterans to readjust to civilian life was that many considered the war a defeat. Many Americans wanted to forget the war. Thus, the sacrifices of many veterans often went unrecognized. There were relatively few welcome-home parades and celebrations after the war.

The war also remained unresolved for the American families whose relatives and friends were classified as prisoners of war (POWs) or missing in action (MIA). Despite many official investigations, these families were not convinced that the government had told the truth about POW/MIA policies.

The nation finally began to come to terms with the war almost a decade later. In 1982 the nation dedicated the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., a large black granite wall inscribed with the names of those killed and missing in action in the war. “It’s a first step to remind America of what we did,” veteran Larry Cox of Virginia said at the dedication of the monument.

**The War’s Impact on the Nation**

The war also left its mark on the nation as a whole. In 1973 Congress passed the **War Powers Act** as a way to reestablish some limits on executive power. The act required the president to inform Congress of any commitment of troops abroad within 48 hours, and to withdraw them in 60 to 90 days, unless Congress explicitly approved the troop commitment. No president has recognized this limitation, and the courts have tended to avoid the issue as a strictly political question. Nonetheless, every president since the law’s passage has asked Congress to authorize the use of military force before committing ground troops to combat. In general, the war shook the nation’s confidence and led some to embrace isolationism, while others began to question the policy of containing communism and instead urged more negotiation with the Soviet Union.

On the domestic front, the Vietnam War increased Americans’ cynicism about their government. Many felt the nation’s leaders had misled them. Together with Watergate, Vietnam made Americans more wary of their leaders.

**Describing** How did the Vietnam War affect Americans’ attitudes toward international conflicts?
**Causes of the Vietnam War**

- During World War II, the United States helps the people of Indochina fight the Japanese, who had invaded the region.
- After World War II, France refuses to give independence to the people of Indochina and sends troops to reestablish control.
- Led by Ho Chi Minh, the Vietminh fight the French. Ho Chi Minh wants Vietnam to be independent but also wants to build a Communist society in Vietnam.
- Concerned about the spread of communism, President Eisenhower sends aid to help the French retain control in Vietnam.
- Ho Chi Minh becomes the leader of North Vietnam and makes it a Communist nation allied with the USSR and China. North Vietnam begins arming guerrillas to fight the South Vietnamese government.
- American leaders become worried that a "domino effect" might cause all of Southeast Asia to fall to communism if South Vietnam falls.
- President Kennedy sharply increases military aid to South Vietnam.
- President Johnson escalates U.S. involvement and gains war powers after the Gulf of Tonkin incident.

**Effects of the Vietnam War**

- Americans applaud President Johnson’s response to a Vietcong attack with aggressive air strikes.
- The United States commits over 380,000 ground troops to fighting in Vietnam by the end of 1966.
- American people question the government’s honesty about the war, creating the so-called "credibility gap."
- The war casualties and the unfair draft system cause civil unrest.
- The wartime economy hurts domestic spending for programs such as the Great Society.
- President Nixon is elected largely on promises to end the war and unite a divided country.
- Congress passes the War Powers Act to limit the power of the president during wartime.
Reviewing Vocabulary

Directions: Choose the word or words that best complete the sentence.

1. Eisenhower cited the _______ as the reason why the United States had to support South Vietnam.
   A credibility gap
   B self-determination theory
   C domino theory
   D Communist way

2. A person who supported the war effort in Vietnam might be called a
   A hawk.
   B dove.
   C guerrilla.
   D linkage.

3. As the war in Vietnam escalated, a _______ developed as Americans began to find it hard to believe what the Johnson administration said about the conflict.
   A linkage
   B credibility gap
   C domino theory
   D teach-in

4. The Vietcong were Communist _______ located in South Vietnam.
   A elected officials
   B generals
   C diplomats
   D guerrillas

Reviewing Main Ideas

Directions: Choose the best answer for each of the following questions.

Section 1 (pp. 654–661)

5. Who was the leader of the North Vietnamese?
   A Mao Zedong
   B Ho Chi Minh
   C Dien Bien Phu
   D Ngo Dinh Diem

6. One reason why President Johnson did not order a full-scale attack on North Vietnam was because
   A he did not think that the United States could win.
   B the military lacked the manpower to launch an assault.
   C he did not want to bring China into the war.
   D he did not want to lose the 1968 election.

7. Which of the following temporarily established North and South Vietnam and recognized Cambodia’s independence?
   A the Treaty of Paris
   B Gulf of Tonkin Resolution
   C the Truman Doctrine
   D the Geneva Accords

Section 2 (pp. 664–669)

8. Many Americans objected to the draft because they believed it
   A forced young men to flee to Canada.
   B unfairly targeted the poor and minorities.
   C did not include women.
   D did not raise the necessary number of troops.
9. Which of the following events was significant in turning American public opinion against the war in Vietnam?
   A the National Teach-in
   B the 1968 Democratic National Convention
   C the assassination of President Kennedy
   D the Tet Offensive

Section 3 (pp. 670–675)

10. The gradual removal of U.S. troops from Vietnam was known as
   A Agent Orange.
   B containment.
   C linkage.
   D Vietnamization.

11. Which of the following was part of the legacy of the Vietnam War?
   A Americans’ increased cynicism about their government
   B Americans’ belief that the policy of containment worked
   C Americans’ confidence that the United States would win the Cold War
   D Americans’ paranoia about the intentions of the North Vietnamese government

12. The purpose of the War Powers Act was to ensure that the president would
   A have greater authority over the military.
   B consult Congress before committing troops in extended conflicts.
   C have the authority to sign treaties without Senate approval.
   D have a freer hand in fighting the spread of communism.

Critical Thinking

Directions: Choose the best answers to the following questions.

13. Why is the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution important?
   A It authorized the use of force in Vietnam.
   B It ordered U.S. forces to withdraw from Vietnam.
   C It divided Vietnam into two countries.
   D It required the president to consult Congress before committing troops.

Base your answer to question 14 on the map below and on your knowledge of Chapter 19.

14. The Ho Chi Minh trail ran through which two nations?
   A Laos and Japan
   B Laos and Thailand
   C Laos and China
   D Laos and Cambodia
15. On which idea is the Twenty-sixth Amendment based?
A. Women should be allowed to serve in the armed forces.
B. The president, not Congress, should decide where and when troops will fight.
C. A person who is old enough to fight is old enough to vote.
D. A draft is an old-fashioned and unworkable system for selecting soldiers.

Analyse the cartoon and answer the questions that follow. Base your answers on the cartoon and your knowledge of Chapter 19.

16. In this cartoon, the Vietnam War is represented by Johnson and his aide walking through
A. a dark jungle.
B. a minefield.
C. a blinding storm.
D. a dark tunnel.

17. The cartoonist is expressing the opinion that
A. the Johnson administration has no idea of how to get out of Vietnam.
B. President Johnson is being pulled back by his cabinet to stay in the conflict.
C. Vietnam is a conflict with an easy solution.
D. President Johnson is a great leader with a solution to the problems in Vietnam.

Document-Based Questions
Directions: Analyze the document and answer the short-answer questions that follow the document.

In the 1960s many young Americans enlisted or were drafted for military service. Some believed that they had a duty to serve their country. Many had no clear idea of what they were doing or why. In the following excerpt, a young man expresses his thoughts about going to war:

"I read a lot of pacifist literature to determine whether or not I was a conscientious objector. I finally concluded that I wasn’t.…

The one clear decision I made in 1968 about me and the war was that if I was going to get out of it, I was going to get out in a legal way. I was not going to defraud the system in order to beat the system. I wasn’t going to leave the country, because the odds of coming back looked real slim.…

With all my terror of going into the Army … there was something seductive about it, too. I was seduced by World War II and John Wayne movies. … I had been, as we all were, victimized by a romantic, truly uninformed view of war."

—quoted in Nam

18. What options did the young man have regarding the war?
19. Do you think World War II movies gave him a realistic view of what fighting in Vietnam would be like?

Extended Response
20. The conflict in Vietnam has been called the first “television war.” Americans could watch scenes of death and destruction unfold in front of them from their living rooms. Write an expository essay about how television changed the way Americans view war in general and how it contributed to the unpopularity of the Vietnam War specifically. Your essay should include an introduction and at least three paragraphs that explore this issue.