

MILESTONES IN U.S. FOREIGN POLICY: THE VIETNAM WAR

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I. THE ROAD TO VIETNAM

A. POLICY OF CONTAINMENT

1. Following World War II, the United States adopted the policy of containment to halt the expansion of Communist influence.
2. American involvement in Vietnam grew out of the policy commitments and assumptions of containment.

B. THE FRENCH WITHDRAWAL

1. Following World War II, the French continued to exercise influence and control over Indochina.
2. The Viet Minh defeated the French at the pivotal Battle of Dienbienphu in 1954. Following their defeat, the French withdrew from Vietnam.
3. The United States refused to sign the Geneva Accords and soon replaced the French as the dominant Western power in Indochina.

C. THE DOMINO EFFECT

1. The United States believed that if one nation fell under Communist control, nearby nations would inevitably also fall under Communist influence.
2. Here is how Secretary of State Dean Rusk explained the domino effect:
"If Indo-China were to fall and if its fall led to the loss of all of Southeast Asia, then the United States might eventually be forced back to Hawaii, as it was before the Second World War."

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II. THE TONKIN GULF RESOLUTION, 1964

A. AN INCIDENT IN THE GULF OF TONKIN

1. The United States alleged that North Vietnamese torpedo boats launched an unprovoked attack against American destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin.
2. The facts of what actually happened have never been fully explained.

B. THE RESOLUTION

1. Congress responded to the unsubstantiated report of North Vietnamese aggression by overwhelmingly passing the Tonkin Gulf Resolution.
2. The resolution authorized President Lyndon Johnson to "take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression."
3. The Tonkin Gulf Resolution gave President Johnson a blank check to escalate the war in Vietnam.
4. Within a short time, President Johnson began to dramatically escalate the number of U.S. troops in Vietnam.



The Vietnam War was both long and complex. Despite the war's complexity, APUSH test writers only focus on a few key points. The Tonkin Gulf Resolution is a pivotal turning point that you absolutely, positively have to know. In essence, the resolution gave President Johnson a blank check to escalate the war.

III. THE TET OFFENSIVE, 1968

A. WHAT HAPPENED?

1. In late January 1968, the Viet Cong suddenly launched a series of attacks on 27 key South Vietnamese cities, including the capital, Saigon.
2. The Viet Cong were eventually forced to retreat after suffering heavy losses.

B. CONSEQUENCES

1. The Tet Offensive undermined President Johnson's credibility.
2. As a result of the Tet Offensive, public support for the war decreased and antiwar sentiment increased.

IV. HAWKS AND DOVES

A. HAWKS AND THE SILENT MAJORITY

1. Hawks supported the Vietnam War.
2. The Silent Majority was the name given by President Nixon to the moderate, mainstream Americans who quietly supported his Vietnam War policies. Members of the Silent Majority believed that the United States was justified in supporting South Vietnam.

B. DOVES

1. Doves opposed the Vietnam War.
2. Senator William Fulbright was a leading Dove. He wrote a critique of the war entitled *The Arrogance of Power*.

V. THE INVASION OF CAMBODIA AND KENT STATE, 1970

A. VIETNAMIZATION

1. Supported by the Silent Majority, Nixon began to slowly withdraw American troops from Vietnam and replace them with newly trained South Vietnamese troops.
2. Known as Vietnamization, the policy promised to preserve U.S. goals and bring "peace with honor."

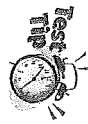
B. THE INVASION OF CAMBODIA

1. On April 29, 1970, President Nixon suddenly and without consulting Congress ordered American forces to join with the South Vietnamese army in cleaning out the Viet Cong sanctuaries in officially neutral Cambodia.

2. Nixon defended the action, saying that it was necessary to protect American forces and support Vietnamization.

C. KENT STATE

1. Angry students responded to the Cambodian invasion with demonstrations at campuses across the United States.
2. At Kent State University in Ohio, nervous members of the National Guard fired into a noisy crowd, killing four students and wounding many more.



Recent APUSH exams have included questions about the invasion of Cambodia and the shootings at Kent State. Remember, the invasion of Cambodia was motivated by a desire to destroy Viet Cong sanctuaries in neutral Cambodia, thus protecting Nixon's policy of Vietnamization. The shootings at Kent State were an unexpected consequence of the Cambodian invasion.

VI CONSEQUENCES OF THE VIETNAM WAR

A. THE WAR AND THE ECONOMY

1. The United States could not afford both President Johnson's Great Society programs and the Vietnam War.
2. The combination of spending on the war and social programs produced the high inflation rates of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

B. THE WAR AND INTERNATIONAL INVOLVEMENT

1. The Vietnam War increased public skepticism toward international involvement.
2. In 1973, Congress passed the War Powers Act, placing restrictions on a president's ability to wage wars.