

of West Berliners and West Germans. At a conference in Vienna in June 1961, Kennedy and Khrushchev focused on Berlin as the key issue. Khrushchev called the present situation "intolerable."

He demanded that the United States recognize the formal division of Germany and end its military presence in West Berlin. Kennedy refused. He did not want to give up occupation rights he considered critical to defending Western Europe. In a tense atmosphere, Khrushchev said, "I want peace, but if you want war, that is your problem." Kennedy answered, "It is you, not I who wants to force a change." The meeting ended abruptly. The conference, meant to relax Cold War tensions, only increased them.

After returning home, both world leaders made moves that threatened the peace. Kennedy asked Congress to dramatically increase military spending. Khrushchev ordered the construction of a wall between East and West Berlin. The **Berlin Wall** became a visible symbol of the reality of the two Germanys and the gulf between the communist East and the democratic West. Kennedy responded by sending 1,500 U.S. troops to West Berlin. For a time, Russian and American tanks moved within sight of each other. Yet, neither side could fully claim a victory.

**? HYPOTHESIZE** For what reason might the Soviets have wanted to gain control of West Berlin?

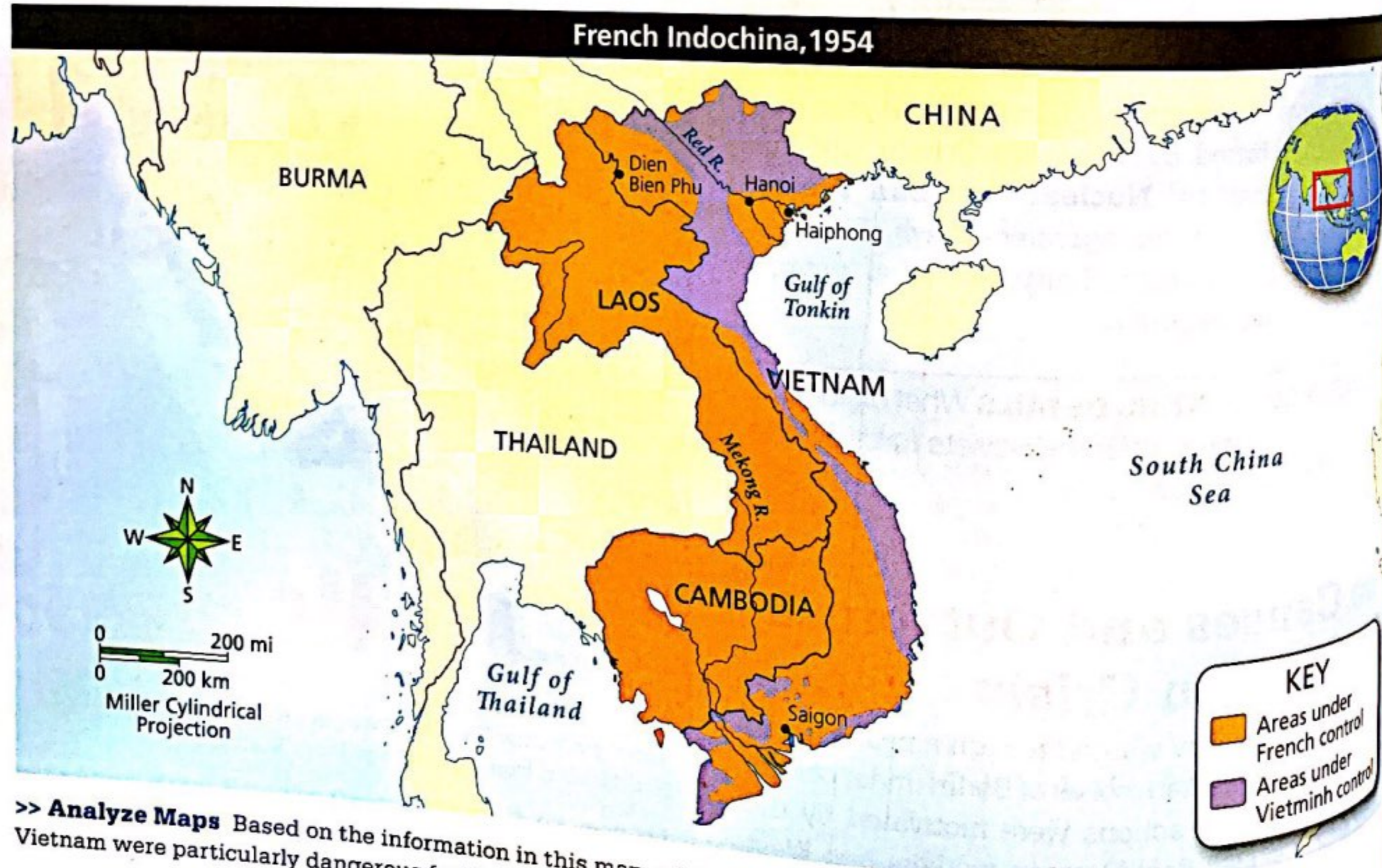
## Reasons for U.S. Involvement in Indochina

Presidents Kennedy and Johnson shared a vision for a better America in the 1960s. They also shared a vision for a better world in which America would emerge victorious from its Cold War struggle against communism. As part of this strategic and ideological battle, the United States established a new line of defense against communism in Vietnam. The conflict in Southeast Asia would grow to be one of the most costly wars in American history.

Situated far away in Southeast Asia, Vietnam did not attract significant American attention until the 1960s. Television news shows rarely mentioned it, and many Americans could not locate it on a map. But over a span of more than ten years, the United States sent several million soldiers to fight in Vietnam. American involvement in Vietnam had roots in European colonialism, Cold War politics, and Vietnamese calls for national independence.

### French Control of Indochina in Southeast Asia

During the 1800s, French military forces established control over Indochina, a peninsula in Southeast Asia that includes the modern countries of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. Slightly larger than the state of Texas, Indochina included almost 27 million people by the end



**>> Analyze Maps** Based on the information in this map, which regions of present-day Vietnam were particularly dangerous for French forces?

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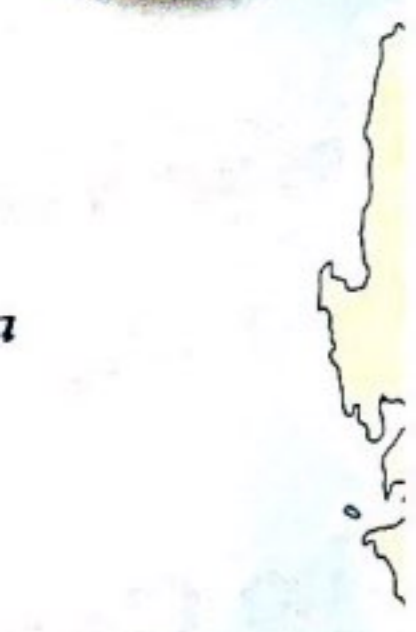
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of work... officials ruled Vietnam with an iron fist. They transplanted French laws into Vietnam and imposed high taxes. French business people acquired large rice and rubber plantations and controlled the mineral wealth of the country. Some Vietnamese, especially wealthier members of society, benefited from western culture and technology. Many others, however, were impoverished by colonialism.

Some Vietnamese rebelled against France's exploitative rule. **Ho Chi Minh** became the most important voice demanding independence for Vietnam. Born in 1890, Ho became involved in anti-French organizations as a young man and fled Vietnam in 1912.

He traveled the world, visiting American ports and living periodically in London, Paris, and Moscow. During his 30-year absence, Ho constantly thought and wrote about Vietnam, and he searched for westerners who would support his plans for Vietnamese independence. Ho embraced communism, and eventually Soviet communists rallied to his cause.

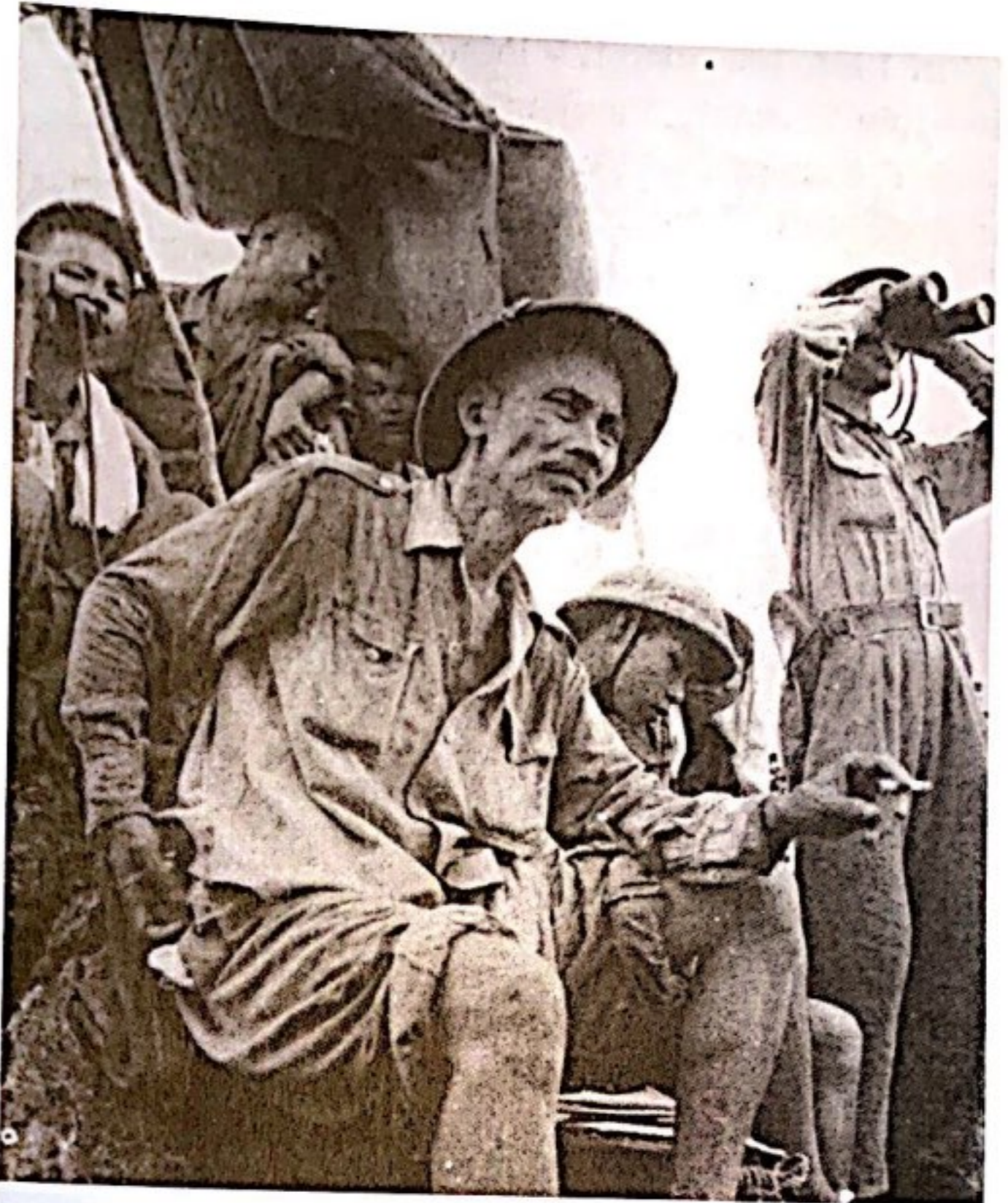
### The French Fight Nationalism and Communism

During World War II, Japan had undermined French control over Vietnam. But when the conflict ended, France reasserted its colonial claims there. France's problem, however, was that colonialism was a dying institution. World War II had strengthened nationalist movements while weakening the economic and military positions of traditional European powers. In Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh clamored for independence as France struggled to maintain its dwindling global power.

Meanwhile, the United States faced a difficult decision. On the one hand, it supported decolonization. On the other hand, America wanted France as an ally in its Cold War effort to contain the Soviet Union.

President Harry S. Truman believed that if he supported Vietnamese independence, he would weaken anticommunist forces in France. So, to ensure a strong, anticommunist Western Europe, Truman sacrificed his own anticolonial sentiments.

Vietnam thus became a pawn in Cold War politics. To ensure French support in the Cold War, Truman agreed to aid France's efforts to regain control over Vietnam. After communist forces won the civil war in China in 1949, America increased its aid to the French in Vietnam. Truman did not want to see another communist victory in Asia. Between 1950 and 1954, the United States contributed \$2.6 billion to France's war efforts. Containing Ho Chi Minh's communist Vietnam—an abbreviation of the League for the Independence of Vietnam—became a national priority.



>> Ho Chi Minh was a revolutionary leader who fought against French occupation. Later, he became the prime minister, then president of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam).

### The Domino Theory Spurs U.S. Involvement in Vietnam

When President Dwight D. Eisenhower took office in early 1953, he continued Truman's policies toward Vietnam. He sent monetary aid to the French, arguing that by battling Ho Chi Minh, they were containing the spread of communism.

Eisenhower told a journalist that the fight in Vietnam involved more than the future of just one country:

You have a row of dominoes set up, you knock over the first one, and what will happen to the last one is the certainty that it will go over very quickly. So you could have a beginning of a disintegration that would have the most profound influences.

—Dwight D. Eisenhower, April 7, 1954

The **domino theory** was the idea that if Vietnam fell to communism, its closest neighbors would follow. This in turn would threaten Japan, the Philippines, and Australia. In short, stopping the communists in Vietnam was important to the protection of the entire region.

In 1954, however, the French lost their eight-year struggle to regain Vietnam. The Vietminh trapped a large French garrison at Dien Bien Phu, a military base in northwest Vietnam, and laid siege to it for 55 days. During the siege, which one Frenchman described as "hell in a very small place," Vietminh troops destroyed the French airstrip, cut French supply lines, and dug trenches to attack key French positions. Finally, on May 7, 1954, after suffering some 15,000 casualties, the French surrendered.

The very next day at an international peace conference in Geneva, Switzerland, France sued for peace. According to the Geneva Accords, France granted independence to Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. The accords also divided Vietnam at the seventeenth parallel into two countries, North Vietnam and South Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh's communist forces ruled in North Vietnam, and an anticommunist government, supported by the United States, assumed power in South Vietnam. The accords also called for free elections in 1956 to unify Vietnam.

**?** **CHECK UNDERSTANDING** Why was supporting the French in Indochina problematic for President Truman?

## The United States Responds to Communism in Vietnam

During the Battle of Dien Bien Phu, France appealed to the United States for military support. President Eisenhower was willing to supply money but not soldiers. Ike would not commit American troops to defend colonialism in Asia. Nevertheless, the President firmly supported the new anticommunist government of South Vietnam.

**The U.S. Escalates Involvement in South Vietnam** America channeled aid to South Vietnam in different ways. In 1954, the United States and seven other countries formed the **Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO)**. Similar to NATO's goal in Europe, SEATO's goal was to contain the spread of communism in Southeast Asia.

The United States provided economic and military aid to the South Vietnamese government led by Ngo Dinh Diem. Diem was an ardent nationalist and anticommunist. Although he lacked popular appeal, his anticommunism guaranteed American support. When it came time for the 1956 unification elections, American intelligence analysts predicted that Diem would lose to the more popular Ho Chi Minh. Rather

than risk losing the elections, a move to government.

**Impact of the Communist** a communist rebel National Liberation to undermining the Vietnam under a communist called **Vietcong**, they assassinated roads and bridges. Vietnam, the Vietcong tactics to weaken Diem's own policies in South Vietnam. overwhelmingly Buddhist build a broad political Buddhist legislation land reforms. His lack of the civil war against the United States

**Kennedy Sends U.S.** election in 1960, President aggressive stand against Beginning in 1961, South Vietnam to aid Vietnam (ARVN) on communist forces. By military personnel were

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**Johnson Leads the** Three weeks after Diem struck down President B. Johnson was sworn in was a Cold War tradition of communism. For the in the Soviet Union, China same. He did not recognize knew that the American Vietnam.

### DOMINO THEORY AND THE SPREAD OF COMMUNISM



**>> Support a Point of View with Evidence** The graphic shows the international chain reaction that American strategists of the 1950s most feared. Were these strategists justified in their concern about the spread of communism? Explain.

**Interactive Gallery**

elections, a move made with the support of the U.S. government.

**Impact of the Communist Insurgency** By 1957, a communist rebel group in the South, known as the National Liberation Front (NLF), had committed itself to undermining the Diem government and uniting Vietnam under a communist flag. NLF guerrilla fighters, called **Vietcong**, launched an insurgency in which they assassinated government officials and destroyed roads and bridges. Supplied by communists in North Vietnam, the Vietcong employed surprise hit-and-run tactics to weaken Diem's hold on South Vietnam.

Diem's own policies also weakened his position in South Vietnam. A devout Roman Catholic in an overwhelmingly Buddhist nation, Diem did little to build a broad political base. Instead, he signed anti-Buddhist legislation and refused to enact significant land reforms. His lack of popular support hurt him in the civil war against North Vietnam. Only the support of the United States kept the unpopular leader in power.

**Kennedy Sends U.S. Troops to Vietnam** After his election in 1960, President John F. Kennedy took a more aggressive stand against the communists in Vietnam. Beginning in 1961, he sent Special Forces troops to South Vietnam to advise the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) on more effective ways to fight the communist forces. By 1963, more than 15,000 American military personnel were fighting in Vietnam.

Although U.S. military personnel fought bravely and achieved some success, Diem continued to alienate South Vietnamese citizens. By late 1963, his regime was in shambles. Buddhists protested his restrictive policies, occasionally by setting themselves on fire. The Kennedy administration eventually concluded that South Vietnam needed new leadership. Working behind the scenes, Americans plotted with anti-Diem generals to overthrow Diem's government. On November 1, 1963, Diem was removed from power; he was assassinated the following day.

**Johnson Leads the Nation into the Vietnam War** Three weeks after Diem's fall, an assassin's bullet struck down President Kennedy. Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson was sworn in as the new President. Johnson was a Cold War traditionalist who held a monolithic view of communism. For this "Cold Warrior," communism in the Soviet Union, China, and Vietnam were all the same. He did not recognize subtle differences. He also knew that the American people expected victory in Vietnam.



>> French soldiers march Vietminh prisoners captured during fighting near Dien Bien Phu.



>> Viet Cong guerillas patrol the Saigon River in South Vietnam.



>> President Johnson meets with his cabinet to discuss the Gulf of Tonkin incident. **Predict Consequences**  
How might the Gulf of Tonkin incident affect U.S. policy in Vietnam?

**Reasons for Escalating Conflict** In 1964, President Johnson faced his first crisis in Vietnam. On August 2, North Vietnamese torpedo boats fired on the American destroyer USS *Maddox* as it patrolled the Gulf of Tonkin off the coast of North Vietnam. The *Maddox* was not hit, and it returned fire on the North Vietnamese boat. Johnson promptly responded to the attack and to other North Vietnamese provocations. He announced that "aggression by terror against peaceful villages of South Vietnam has now been joined by open aggression on the high seas against the United States of America." Troubled by increasing strikes against an American ally, Johnson ordered an airstrike against North Vietnam.

**Congress** The President next asked Congress to authorize the use of force to defend American troops. With little debate and only two senators voting against it, Congress agreed to Johnson's request and passed the **Gulf of Tonkin Resolution**. The resolution authorized the President "to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression." The resolution gave Johnson tremendous war powers. It allowed him to commit U.S. troops to South Vietnam and fight a war against North Vietnam without ever going back to Congress to ask for a declaration of war. By authorizing the resolution, Congress had handed its war powers as expressed in the Constitution to the executive branch. This raised questions about the relationship between the legislative and executive branches of government. Presidents Johnson and Nixon used the resolution as the legal basis for their military policies in Vietnam.

**? DESCRIBE** What role did religious issues play in Diem's troubles as leader of South Vietnam?

## ASSESSMENT

1. **Contrast** the foreign policies of Eisenhower and Kennedy during the Cold War.
2. **Generate Explanations** Explain how Kennedy's response to the Cuban Missile Crisis mixed diplomacy and force.
3. **Identify Cause and Effect** Explain how World War II affected French colonial power in Vietnam.
4. **Draw Conclusions** Discuss reasons why the United States supported Ngo Dinh Diem, and explain how this changed in later years.
5. **Determine Point of View** Discuss President Truman's decision to support French efforts in Vietnam during the Cold War.