

Between 1945 and 1954, the Vietnamese waged an anti-colonial war against France and received \$2.6 billion in financial support from the United States. The French defeat at the Dien Bien Phu was followed by a peace conference in Geneva, in which Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam received their independence and Vietnam was temporarily divided between an anti-Communist South and a Communist North. In 1956, South Vietnam, with American backing, refused to hold the unification elections. By 1958, Communist-led guerrillas known as the Viet Cong had begun to battle the South Vietnamese government.

To support the South's government, the United States sent in 2,000 military advisors, a number that grew to 16,300 in 1963. The military condition deteriorated, and by 1963 South Vietnam had lost the fertile Mekong Delta to the Vietcong. In 1965, Johnson escalated the war, commencing air strikes on North Vietnam and committing ground forces, which numbered 536,000 in 1968. The 1968 Tet Offensive by the North Vietnamese turned many Americans against the war. The next president, Richard Nixon, advocated Vietnamization, withdrawing American troops and giving South Vietnam greater responsibility for fighting the war. His attempt to slow the flow of North Vietnamese soldiers and supplies into South Vietnam by sending American forces to destroy Communist supply bases in Cambodia in 1970 in violation of Cambodian neutrality provoked antiwar protests on the nation's college campuses.

From 1968 to 1973 efforts were made to end the conflict through diplomacy. In January 1973, an agreement reached and U.S. forces were withdrawn from Vietnam and U.S. prisoners of war were released. In April 1975, South Vietnam surrendered to the North and Vietnam was reunited.

### **CONSEQUENCES:**

1. The Vietnam War cost the United States 58,000 lives and 350,000 casualties. It also resulted in between one and two million Vietnamese deaths.
2. Congress enacted the **War Powers Act in 1973**, requiring the president to receive explicit Congressional approval before committing American forces overseas.
3. The **Twenty-sixth Amendment (Amendment XXVI)** to the United States Constitution limited the minimum voting age to 18. It was adopted in response to student activism against the Vietnam War

It was the longest war in American history and the most unpopular American war of the twentieth century. It resulted in nearly 60,000 American deaths and an estimated 2 million Vietnamese deaths. Even today, many Americans still ask whether the American effort in Vietnam was a sin, a blunder, a necessary war, or a noble cause, or an idealistic, if failed, effort to protect the South Vietnamese from totalitarian government.

### **THE DOMINO THEORY**

American foreign policy after World War II was based on the goal of containing Communism and the assumptions of the so-called "domino theory"—if one country fell to Communism, the surrounding countries would fall, like dominoes. In response to that threat, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) was formed in 1955 to prevent Communist expansion, and President Dwight D. Eisenhower sent some 700 military personnel as well as military and economic aid to the government of South Vietnam. The effort was foundering when John F. Kennedy became president.