

The End of the War

READING FOCUS

- How did President Nixon's policies lead to American withdrawal from Vietnam?
- Why did President Nixon campaign promising to restore law and order?
- What happened in Vietnam after the withdrawal of American forces?
- What was the legacy of the Vietnam War?

MAIN IDEA

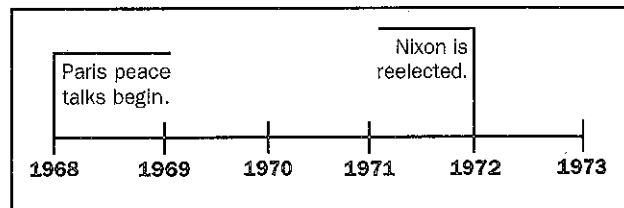
The end of the Vietnam War involved slow-moving peace negotiations, the gradual withdrawal of American troops, and the fall of South Vietnam.

KEY TERMS

Paris peace talks
Vietnamization
silent majority
POW
MIA

TAKING NOTES

As you read, complete a time line of events leading up to the end of war in Vietnam.



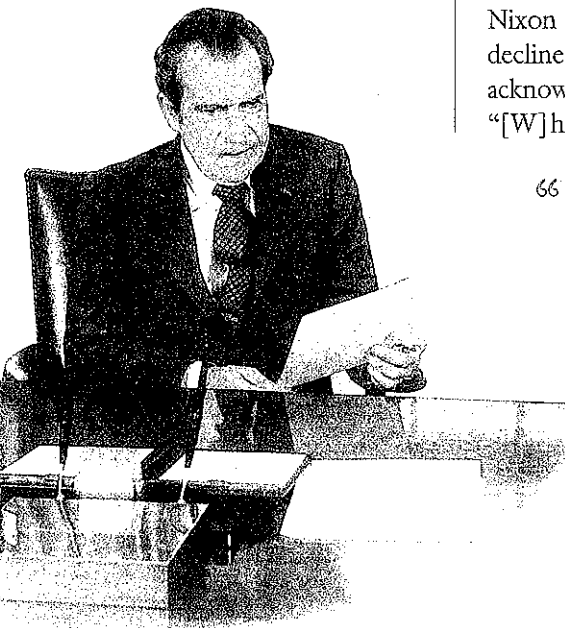
Setting the Scene A year after his election, President Nixon was still seeking—and receiving—the support of Middle America. But he was also well aware of increasing opposition to the Vietnam War. On November 3, 1969, Nixon gave a speech about Vietnam. Sometimes called the “silent majority speech” because of the President’s appeal to those he felt quietly supported his policies, the address reviewed the history of America’s participation in the Vietnam conflict. Nixon noted that under his administration, “United States casualties have declined” and that “we are finally bringing American men home.” He also acknowledged, however, that the war was far from over, and posed the question, “[W]hat is the best way to end it?”

*“My fellow Americans, I am sure you can recognize from what I have said that we really only have two choices open to us if we want to end this war. I can order an immediate, precipitate withdrawal of all Americans from Vietnam without regard to the effects of that action. Or we can persist in our search for a just peace through a negotiated settlement if possible, or through continued implementation of our plan for Vietnamization if necessary, a plan in which we will withdraw all of our forces from Vietnam on a schedule in accordance with our program, as the South Vietnamese become strong enough to defend their own freedom. I have chosen this second course. It is not the easy way. It is the right way. . . . And so tonight—to you, the great silent majority of my fellow Americans—I ask for your support.”*⁹⁹

—Richard Nixon

Nixon’s Vietnam Policy

As President Johnson’s term drew to a close, he cut back on the bombing of North Vietnam and called for peace negotiations. The **Paris peace talks** began



President Richard Nixon in the White House

in May 1968, but failed to produce an agreement. Richard Nixon's claim that he had a secret plan to end the war in Vietnam helped him win the presidency in November.

Withdrawing Troops In June 1969, President Nixon announced a new policy known as **Vietnamization**. This involved removing American forces and replacing them with South Vietnamese soldiers. By 1972, American troop strength dropped to 24,000. As much as Nixon wanted to defuse antiwar sentiment at home, he was determined not to lose the war. Therefore, as he withdrew American troops, he ordered secret bombing raids on the major targets shown on the map at right.

The War Spreads to Cambodia President Nixon also widened the war beyond the borders of Vietnam. In April 1970, Nixon publicly announced that United States and South Vietnamese ground forces were moving into neighboring Cambodia. Their goal was to clear out Communist camps there, from which the enemy was mounting attacks on South Vietnam. The United States, he asserted, would not stand by like "a pitiful helpless giant" while the Viet Cong attacked from Cambodia:

53 We take this action not for the purpose of expanding the war into Cambodia but for the purpose of ending the war in Vietnam and winning the just peace we all desire. We have made and we will continue to make every possible effort to end this war through negotiation at the conference table rather than through more fighting on the battlefield.

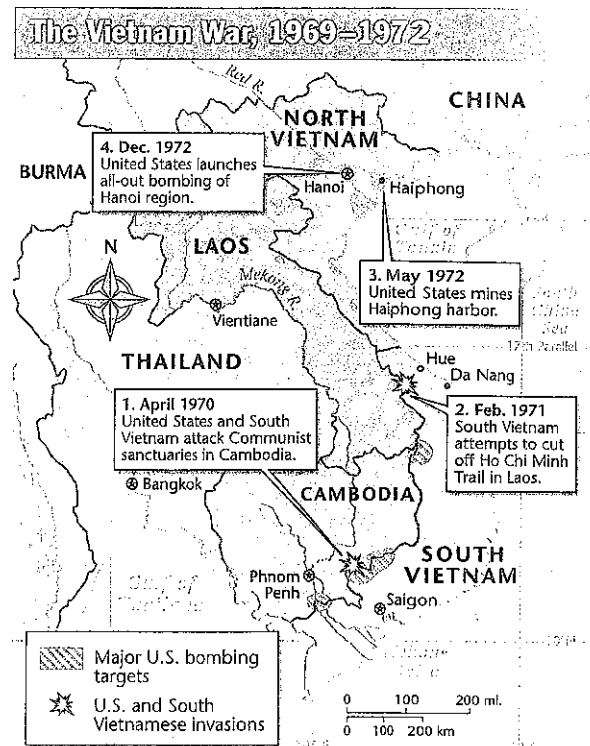
—Richard Nixon

Nixon knew that the invasion of Cambodia would not win the war, but he thought it would help at the bargaining table. He was willing to intensify the war in order to strengthen the American position at the peace talks. Nixon's actions, however, brought chaos and civil war in Cambodia and a fresh wave of protests at home.

Nixon Calls for Law and Order

One of Nixon's campaign pledges had been to restore law and order in the country. This need seemed particularly apparent to Americans in October 1969 when one SDS faction turned to violence. This group called their organization the Weathermen, after a line in a Bob Dylan song—"You don't need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows." They were determined to bring about a revolution immediately. In October, the group converged on Chicago. Dressed in hard hats, boots, and work gloves, members of the Weathermen rampaged through the streets wielding pipes, clubs, rocks, and chains. They tangled with police (as they had planned), regrouped, and came back for still another confrontation. This kind of violence alarmed Americans and turned some against the antiwar movement.

The Silent Majority President Nixon recognized that student radicals, antiwar protesters, and the counterculture in general had never appealed to many Americans. Despite widespread discontent on college



MAP SKILLS Although Nixon began withdrawing troops from Vietnam in 1968, he stepped up bombing raids. **Location** According to this map, in what areas were United States bombing raids concentrated during the later years of the war?

Focus on GOVERNMENT

The Pentagon Papers In June 1971, *The New York Times* began publishing articles based on a classified government study of American involvement in the Vietnam War. The study, which came to be called the Pentagon Papers, revealed that government officials had lied to Congress and the American people about the war. Presidents had made secret policy decisions, such as giving military aid to France and waging an undercover war against North Vietnam in the early 1960s. Such revelations shocked the public and led to a growing distrust of government that would be reinforced by the events of the 1970s.

COMPARING PRIMARY SOURCES

The Tragedy of Kent State

In May 1970, the National Guard opened fire on a crowd of antiwar protesters at Kent State University in Ohio, and killed four students. Reaction to the incident was strong but mixed.

Analyzing Viewpoints Compare the main arguments made by these two women.

In Support of the National Guard's Actions

"He told me they didn't fire those shots to scare the students off. He told me they fired those shots because they knew the students were coming after them, coming for their guns. People are calling my husband a murderer; my husband is not a murderer. He was afraid."

—Wife of a member of the National Guard, quoted in *Newsweek* magazine, May 18, 1970

Opposed to the National Guard's Actions

"Nixon acts as if the kids had it coming. But shooting into a crowd of students, that is violence. They say it could happen again if the Guard is threatened. They consider stones threat enough to kill children. I think the violence comes from the government."

—Mother of Jeffrey Glenn Miller, a student killed at Kent State, quoted in *Life* magazine, May 15, 1970

This famous photograph of the shooting of a student at Kent State University horrified the nation.



campuses, not all students agreed with the antiwar protesters. Some firmly supported American involvement in Vietnam. Others questioned the war but were troubled by the lawlessness and radicalism of many antiwar protests. These students did not receive the press coverage of their more outspoken classmates. But they did make their opinions known by writing letters to campus newspapers or by challenging the actions of antiwar groups in court.

Likewise, many adults held student protesters responsible for rising crime, growing drug use, and permissive attitudes toward sex. Some of these Americans expressed their patriotism by putting flag decals on their car windows or by attaching bumper stickers that read "My Country, Right or Wrong" and "Love It or Leave It." In the 1969 speech quoted at the beginning of this section, Nixon referred to this large group of Americans as the **silent majority**. To strengthen his position on law and order, Nixon aimed to discourage protest, especially against the war. In his "silent majority speech" he declared, "If a vocal minority, however fervent its cause, prevails over reason and the will of the majority, this nation has no future as a free society."

Kent State and Jackson State Tensions between antiwar activists and law-and-order supporters reached a peak in 1970. The U.S. invasion of Cambodia in 1970 fueled the protest movement on college campuses in

the United States. At Kent State University in Ohio, students reacted angrily to the President's actions. They broke windows in the business district downtown. They also burned the army Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) building, which had become a hated symbol of the war.

In response, the governor of Ohio ordered the National Guard to Kent State. Tension mounted. When students threw rocks at them, the guardsmen loaded their guns and donned gas masks. They hurled tear gas at the students, ordering them to disperse. Then the guardsmen retreated to another position. At the top of a hill, they suddenly turned and began firing on the students below.

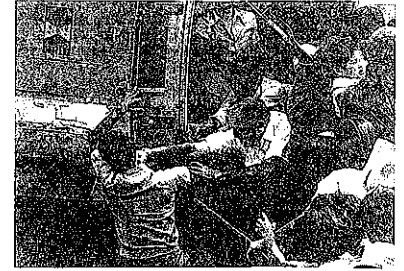
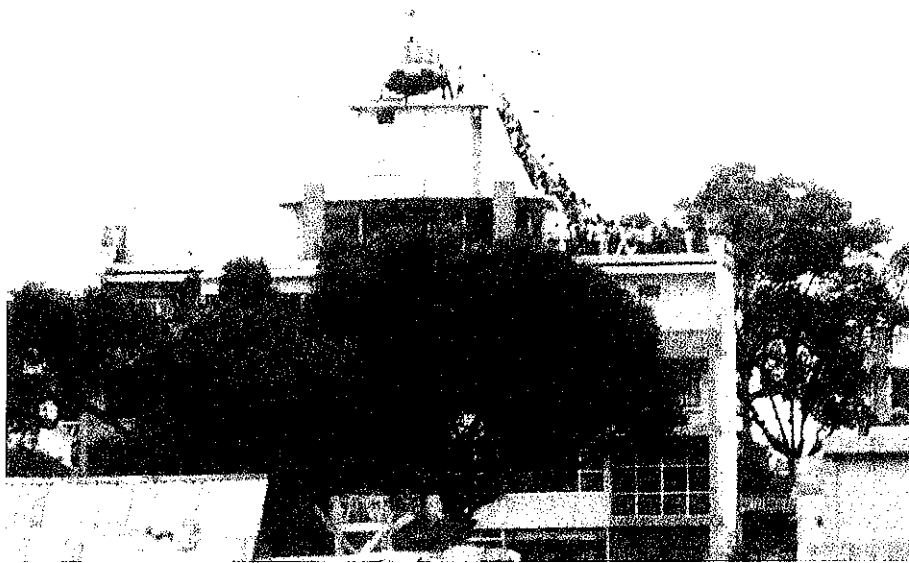
Seconds later, four students lay dead, with nine others wounded. Two of the dead had been demonstrators 250 feet away from the guardsmen. The other two were bystanders, almost 400 feet away.

Similar violence flared at Jackson State, a nearly all-black college in Mississippi. A confrontation between students and police left two students dead and eleven wounded.

These attacks horrified Americans. In a sign of the deep divisions in the nation, 100,000 construction workers marched in an angry demonstration in New York City in support of the President.

American Withdrawal

The war dragged on, as did the Paris peace talks. In January 1972, while running for a second term as President, Nixon announced that North Vietnam had refused to accept a proposed settlement. At the end of March, the North Vietnamese began a major assault



VIEWING HISTORY The photo at left shows Vietnamese evacuees boarding an American helicopter near the American Embassy in Saigon in 1975. In the smaller photo, an American official punches a man trying to board the last plane out of Nha Trang; the plane was already overcrowded with fleeing refugees. **Drawing Inferences** What do these photos suggest about the way the United States ended its involvement in Vietnam?

on South Vietnam. This led Nixon to order the most intensive bombing campaign of the war. The United States bombed the North Vietnamese capital of Hanoi and mined North Vietnamese harbors.

Just days before the 1972 election, National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger announced, "Peace is at hand." As it turned out, the settlement was not actually final. After Nixon's reelection in November and another round of B-52 bombings of North Vietnam in December, peace finally arrived. In January 1973, the United States, South Vietnam, North Vietnam, and the Viet Cong signed a formal agreement in Paris. Among the provisions in the agreement were these:

1. The United States would withdraw all its forces from South Vietnam within 60 days.
2. All prisoners of war would be released.
3. All parties to the agreement would end military activities in Laos and Cambodia.
4. The 17th parallel would continue to divide North and South Vietnam until the country could be reunited.

Aftermath of the War in Asia

American involvement in the war came to an end in 1973, but the fighting between North and South Vietnam continued for another two years. Americans had believed that they could defend the world from communism anywhere, at any time. American technology and money, they assumed, could always bring victory. Vietnam proved that assumption to be false.

South Vietnam Falls After the withdrawal of American forces, South Vietnamese soldiers steadily lost ground to their North Vietnamese enemies. In the spring of 1975, the North Vietnamese launched a campaign of strikes against strategic cities throughout South Vietnam, the final objective being the seat of government in Saigon.

South Vietnamese forces crumpled in the face of this campaign. On April 29, 1975, with Communist forces surrounding Saigon, the United States carried out a dramatic last-minute evacuation. American helicopters airlifted more than 1,000 Americans and nearly 6,000 Vietnamese from the city to aircraft carriers waiting offshore. On April 30, North Vietnam completed its conquest of South Vietnam, and the Saigon government officially surrendered. After decades of fighting, Vietnam was a single nation under a Communist government.

CRITICAL CHECK

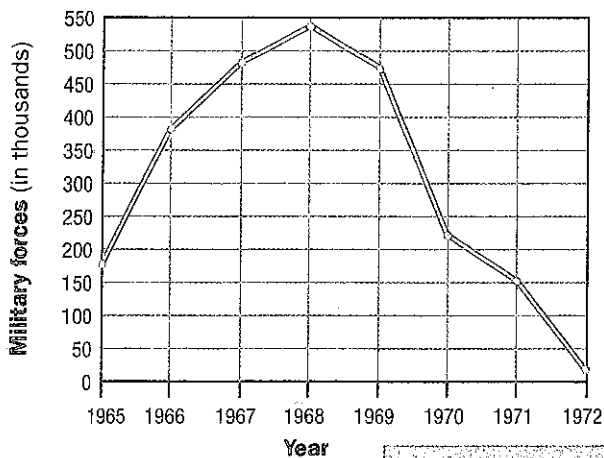
How did peace finally arrive?

Southeast Asia After the War One reason for American involvement in Vietnam was the belief in the domino theory. As you recall, this was the assumption that the entire region would collapse if the Communists won in Vietnam. With the North Vietnamese victory, two additional dominoes did topple—Laos and Cambodia. The rest of the region, however, did not fall.

The suffering of the Cambodian people was one of the most tragic effects of the war in Vietnam. In April 1975, Cambodia fell to the Khmer Rouge, a force of Communists led by the fanatical Pol Pot. In five years of fighting, Cambodia had already suffered as many as a half million civilian casualties, mostly by American bombs. Worse was to come. The Khmer Rouge in effect declared war on anyone “tainted” with Western ways, and they killed as many as 1.5 million Cambodians—a quarter of the population. Many were shot, while the rest died of starvation, from disease, from mistreatment in labor camps, or on forced marches.

Although not so extreme, Vietnam’s new leaders also forced hundreds of thousands of South Vietnamese soldiers, civil servants, and other professionals into “re-education camps.” Meanwhile, more than 1.5 million Vietnamese fled their country by boat, leaving behind all personal possessions in their determination to escape. In addition to these refugees, hundreds of thousands of Cambodians and Laotians also fled their homelands, many making their way to the United States.

U.S. Forces in Vietnam, 1965–1972

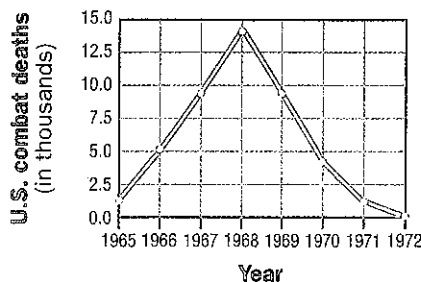


SOURCE: National Archives and Records Administration

INTERPRETING GRAPHS

United States involvement in Vietnam peaked in 1968. Analyzing Information (a) How many United States soldiers were in Vietnam in 1968? (b) When did American casualties begin to decrease? (c) Judging from the two graphs, what is one reason for this decrease?

U.S. Deaths in Vietnam, 1965–1972



SOURCE: National Archives and Records Administration

The Legacy of the War

The Vietnam War resulted in more than 58,000 Americans dead and 300,000 wounded. In addition, more than 2,500 Americans were listed as POWs (prisoners of war) and MIAs (missing in action) at the end of the war. Many of them remain unaccounted for. After Vietnam, soldiers came home to a reception that was quite different than the ones their fathers and grandfathers had received following the World Wars. There were no welcoming ticker-tape parades. Many veterans complained that Americans did not appreciate the sacrifices they had made for their country.

Counting the Costs The Vietnam War was the longest and the least successful war in American history. The costs of the war were enormous. The United States spent at least \$150 billion on the war. This expense resulted in growing inflation and economic instability.

The costs of the war were high for Vietnam as well. More bombs rained down on Vietnam than had fallen on all the Axis powers during World War II. The number of dead and wounded Vietnamese soldiers ran into the millions, with countless civilian casualties. The landscape itself would long bear the scars of war. In 1994, the United States announced an end to the long-standing

American trade embargo against Vietnam. The next year the United States agreed to restore full diplomatic relations with its former enemy.

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Aside from the Civil War, the Vietnam War divided the nation more than any other conflict in American history. The issues were so difficult and emotional that for many years something was forgotten—that the Americans who died in Vietnam should be honored with a national monument.

In 1979, a group of veterans began making plans for a Vietnam Veterans Memorial. They wanted to recognize the courage of American GIs during the Vietnam ordeal and to help heal the wounds the war had caused. A Vietnam veteran named Jan Scruggs started a fund for the memorial. Eventually, he won support from Congress to build a monument in Washington, D.C., near the Lincoln Memorial. The question quickly arose: How could the memorial honor the people who gave their lives, while avoiding the hard political issues surrounding the war?

Scruggs's committee held a contest. Famous architects and artists submitted their ideas. Many were surprised when the winner was a 21-year-old college student named Maya Ying Lin. Her idea was to build a long wall of black granite, cut down into the ground. This wall would display the names of every American man and woman who died in the Vietnam War.

Lin had a reason for each element of the memorial. She chose black granite because it reflects light like a mirror, allowing visitors to see reflections of themselves and the nature around them. She put the memorial on a slope that led below ground level to create a quiet place where visitors could think about life and death and sorrow. She placed the names in the order people died, rather than in alphabetical order, so that the individual passing of each life would be emphasized. The memorial was to be long, but not tall, so that visitors could easily see and touch every name.

Lin's concept suited the needs of a nation that needed to heal. Her simple, abstract design would allow visitors to carry their own beliefs to the memorial, without creating images that might disturb or distract them. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial was completed in 1982, and ever since, people have added to it by leaving personal tokens at the wall in memory of their loved ones.



VIEWING HISTORY A Vietnam veteran holds a flower as he points to a name on the Memorial, which was designed by Maya Lin (lower photo). **Determining Relevance** How do you think listing the names on the wall has contributed to the Memorial's popularity?

Section

Assessment

READING COMPREHENSION

1. What terms were finally agreed to at the **Paris peace talks**?
2. What event led to American withdrawal from Vietnam?
3. Why was President Nixon's policy known as **Vietnamization**?
4. Who are **POWs** and **MIAs**?

CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

5. **Determining Relevance** How did violence at Kent State and Jackson State affect American public opinion? Explain your answer.
6. **Making a List** Do you think the United States made every effort to win the war in Vietnam? List reasons why or why not.



Take It to the Net

Activity: Creating a Time Line
Much has happened in Vietnam since the end of the war. Create a time line of important events in Vietnam from 1974 to the present. Use the links provided in the *America: Pathways to the Present* area of the following Web site for help in completing this activity.
www.pfeebach.com