

forces; 340 Australians were killed. The US and Australia painted the war as a victory that stopped the spread of communism. Military intervention, according to this view, had proved to be a good way to stop communism.

Vietnam

Vietnam had been a part of the French Empire since the 1800s. After a long struggle, the independence forces militarily defeated the French in 1954. Following a peace conference in Geneva, Vietnam was divided into two, with the long-term goal of reuniting the country after elections. Like Korea before it, the North was to be controlled by a communist government while the South had a US-backed government. And as in Korea, this division led to war.

Not everyone living in the north believed in communism, while many people in the south wanted communist rule. These tensions eventually led to war, particularly as more and more communist activity took place in the south, and the South Vietnamese government became more and more authoritarian in its response. The activities of the Vietcong (National Liberation Front), a political organisation and **guerrilla** force operating in the South that wanted all Vietnam to be united as a communist country, alarmed the anti-communist countries like the United States and Australia, and so from the mid 1950s they sent troops to support the government of the South.

The situation **escalated** in 1964 when an American destroyer falsely claimed it was attacked by the North. Under this pretext, the United States dramatically increased its troop numbers in Vietnam, and Australia also increased its involvement. Despite superior firepower and numbers, the US and its allies were never able to defeat the Vietcong or the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) in a decisive battle. People back in the US and Australia grew weary of the

war, and so by 1969 both Australia and the US began withdrawing combat troops. A ceasefire was signed in 1973, but the war continued

Source 5 A timeline of the Vietnam War

1929
Communist Party (led by Ho Chi Minh) and Vietnamese Nationalist Party (led by Nguyen Thai Hoc) gain prominence.
1941
Viet Minh formed to seek independence for Vietnam from France. Headed by Ho Chi Minh.
1954
French surrender after ten years of war. Vietnam divided into two. Ho Chi Minh heads up communist north with the support of China and Russia, Ngo Dinh Diem heads the republican south with the support of the United States.
1956
Scheduled elections in the south cancelled.
1962
Australia sends a team of 30 military advisers to the south.
1963
Diem murdered in coup by South Vietnamese army officers. US troops in Vietnam now number 16 000. China increases its support in the north.
1964
Menzies announces reintroduction of conscription. The United States commits more troops. The Save Our Sons movement is formed by a group of Australian mothers opposing conscription.
1965
Australia sends full battalion of regular army troops to Vietnam.
1966
Australian conscripts are sent to fight. Opposition starts to divide the nation.
1968
TET offensive. Communists ignore a New Year's Eve ceasefire and launch a massive attack in the south. Protest movements gain momentum.
1969
Withdrawal of US troops begins. Australia follows suit.
1972
All Australian troops brought home. The new Labor government stops all aid to South Vietnam.
1973
US troop withdrawal complete. Ceasefire reached, but civil conflict between North Vietnam and South Vietnam continues.
1975
North Vietnamese troops enter Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City). Vietnam reunited under communist rule.

until 1975, when the last US troops were withdrawn as the NVA entered Saigon in the South. Vietnam was then united as a communist country.

In total, almost 60 000 Australians, including ground troops and air force and navy personnel, served in Vietnam; 521 died and more than 3000 were wounded. The war was hugely controversial for a number of reasons:

- Some people felt that foreign powers had no right to intervene in what was essentially a civil war.
- Some questioned whether we should be fighting communism and supporting the corrupt and brutal South Vietnamese government.
- Some believed the war could not be won and that it was immoral to waste so many lives in a lost cause.
- Some were appalled by the immense price paid by Vietnam and its people. Millions of Vietnamese were killed, including in massacres of innocent civilians. In one well-known case, in the village of My Lai in 1968, more than 400 civilians, mainly women, children and the elderly, were murdered by US troops. The use of weapons such as **napalm** devastated the Vietnamese environment and caused horrific burns. The chemical pollutants still affect Vietnam today.
- Many Australians soldiers sent to Vietnam were not volunteers but were chosen by **conscription**. Some people considered it immoral to force someone to fight and kill. At this time the voting age was still 21, yet the age for conscription was 20. Some questioned how a person not yet considered old and responsible enough to vote could be considered old enough to fight and kill.



Jacaranda World History Atlas
Australia and Cold War conflicts pp. 202–3
The Vietnam War pp. 206–7
Australia's international relationships pp. 208–9

Source 6 This iconic photo of the Vietnam War, taken in 1967, shows Iroquois helicopters landing to return Australian troops to base.



AWM EKN/67/0130/VN

The Vietnam War led many Australians to question old certainties, particularly the need to fight communism. Some young men defied the law by refusing to register for conscription, in some cases choosing to go to jail rather than participate in the war. A large protest movement developed in opposition to the war, holding some of the largest protest marches ever seen in Australia. Many historians link the anti-Vietnam movement to the beginning of other campaigns for social change, such as the environmental and women's rights movements.

armistice a ceasefire or truce that ends fighting in a conflict so terms for permanent peace can be discussed
ASIO Australian Security Intelligence Organisation; a body responsible for collecting information on terrorism and other dangers to Australia's security
conscription compulsory military service
escalated became much more serious and urgent
guerrilla a member of an irregular military force that avoids fighting pitched battles, adopting tactics such as harassing the enemy, sabotage, and cutting communications and supply lines
napalm a highly flammable substance used in bombs primarily to burn away forest

Activities

Student workbook
3.3, 3.7

EXPLANATION AND COMMUNICATION

- Create a timeline of Cold War events that involved Australia.
- Explain the two treaties Australia signed to help it to fight communism.
- What was the domino theory?
- Explain the idea of 'forward defence'.
- Briefly summarise the events of the Korean War.
- Explain three reasons why people opposed the Vietnam War.

CHRONOLGY, TERMS AND CONCEPTS

- Who were the Vietcong?
- Based on **Source 5**, list four countries that have been actively involved in affairs in Vietnam.

ANALYSIS AND USE OF SOURCES

- Why do you think **Source 1** 'shocked' Australians when they first saw it?
- Using **Source 3**, describe the conditions in which soldiers were sometimes required to fight in the Korean War.
- Using the text and **Source 4**, create a timeline for the Korean War.
- What does **Source 6** tell us about the nature of the war in Vietnam? Begin by describing what you see in the picture, and how this picture might differ from scenes from other wars such as World War I or II.

PERSPECTIVES AND INTERPRETATIONS

- Based on what you have read, why do you believe it was a good political tactic for conservative politicians to portray members of the Labor Party as communists?
- Some people saw in the Korean War proof that communism could be stopped and that a forward defence strategy worked. Do you believe this view proved to be correct?
- Why do you think many people believed it was wrong to allow people who were too young to vote to be conscripted?