

**CHAPTER 16**  
**SECTION 1**

**Section Summary**  
**ORIGINS OF THE VIETNAM WAR**

**READING CHECK**

Who were the Vietcong?

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**VOCABULARY STRATEGY**

What does the word *ensure* mean in the underlined sentence? Circle the words in the surrounding sentences that could help you learn what *ensure* means. Think about what the United States needed from France.

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**READING SKILL**

**Summarize** Why did the United States help France in Vietnam?

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France had controlled Vietnam since the 1800s. After World War II, many Vietnamese wanted independence. This independence movement was led by **Ho Chi Minh**. Ho Chi Minh traveled around the world and had formed ties with the Soviet Union. He wanted independence and believed in communism.

The United States became involved in Vietnam for several reasons. First, it wanted to keep France as an ally. The United States needed to ensure French support in the Cold War. As a result, President Truman agreed to help France regain control over Vietnam. Second, both Truman and Eisenhower wanted to stop the spread of communism. They believed in the **domino theory**. This idea said that if communists took over in Vietnam, Vietnam’s neighbors would fall to communism. Communism would then spread throughout the entire region.

Despite billions of American dollars in support, France lost in Vietnam. In 1954, the French surrendered at a military base at **Dien Bien Phu**. The peace agreement between France and the communists gave Vietnam its independence. It also divided the country. Ho Chi Minh and the communists ruled North Vietnam. An anticommunist government ruled South Vietnam.

The United States provided aid to South Vietnam through the **Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO)**. However, a communist rebel group began attacking the South. The communist guerrilla fighters were called **Vietcong**. The Vietcong attacked government officials and destroyed roads and bridges.

In 1961, President Kennedy began sending U.S. troops to help South Vietnam. President Johnson increased U.S. involvement there. In 1964, North Vietnamese forces attacked a U.S. destroyer in the Gulf of Tonkin. Johnson asked Congress for the right to fight back. Congress passed the **Gulf of Tonkin Resolution**. It gave the President the power to send U.S. troops to fight in Vietnam without asking Congress to declare war.

**Review Questions**

1. What was the domino theory?

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2. How did the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution expand the powers of the presidency?

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