

## From Korea to Vietnam

The Korean War was brought to its conclusion by several key circumstances. Neither the East nor the West wanted the Korean conflict to expand into a larger war. For one of the first times in history, major powers began to think in terms of fighting “limited wars”—military engagements with specific goals fought with limited means.

Other factors contributing to the end of the Korean War included the election of Dwight Eisenhower as president in the fall of 1952. Eisenhower indicated he would expand the scope of the war and might even use nuclear weapons. Another factor was the death of Joseph Stalin in March 1953.

The Korean conflict proved costly. Approximately four million Koreans were killed or wounded on both sides, as well as nearly one million Chinese. (The Americans had 142,000 casualties, both killed and wounded.) The war was costly in another way, as well. The war caused a deterioration of Chinese and American relations which caused both sides to regard each other with coldness. Not until the 1970s would President Richard Nixon bring about a thawing of relations between the U.S. and China.

To many American officials, communist China’s involvement in the Korean War proved China was prepared to promote the expansion of communism throughout Asia. As a result, the U.S. extended support of Chinese Taiwan off the coast of mainland China where the Nationalist government had established itself in 1949 after Mao’s communist victory.

China, in fact, did seek to expand its influence in Asia. By the mid-1950s, China was looking toward the Asian colony of French Indochina as a possible ally. The French government had been struggling with a resistance organization called the Vietminh Front since the end of World War II. The Vietminh was dominated by the Indochinese Community Party under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh.

At the same time Mao’s Communist forces were fighting Chinese Nationalist forces during the late 1940s, Ho Chi Minh’s revolutionaries were menacing the French colonial power in Indochina. By the early 1950s, Vietminh forces were close to toppling French control of their state.

Given Chinese support to the Vietminh, President Eisenhower supported the French and, at a conference held in Geneva, Switzerland, in 1954, French Indochina was divided into North and South Vietnam. (By 1956, the French withdrew themselves from Indochina completely, leaving Eisenhower and the U.S. as South Vietnam’s protector.)

Although the division was to be temporary until official elections could be held, the two Vietnams—the north controlled by the Communists and the south by pro-West elements—remained divided throughout the 1950s. To help guarantee that South Vietnam would not fall to communism, Eisenhower helped create a Southeast Asian counterpart of NATO, called SEATO, (Southeast Asian Treaty Organization), which included the U.S., Britain, France, Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, the Philippines, and Pakistan.

By the 1960s, the Communist threat against South Vietnam became so intense that the United States committed ground combat troops to the region. This “Vietnam War” further antagonized relations between China and the U.S. and became a major crisis for America.

As the war continued throughout the sixties, American involvement escalated until over 500,000 U.S. troops were stationed in South Vietnam. Unable to attain a complete victory against North and South Vietnamese Communist forces, the U.S. commitment to South Vietnam had developed into a quagmire with no reasonable way out.

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### *Review and Write*

1. What were the negative results of the Korean War?
2. What was SEATO, who were its members, and what was its purpose?
3. Describe American involvement in the conflicts in Southeast Asia during the 1950s.