



Vietnam Today

TERMS & NAMES

Ho Chi Minh

Politburo

doi moi

supply and demand

Tet

MAIN IDEA

Vietnam has struggled for centuries to be a unified nation.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The United States and other countries have established new trade relations with a unified Vietnam.

DATELINE

SAIGON, SOUTH VIETNAM, APRIL 30, 1975—At last the war between North and South Vietnam is over. Saigon, the capital of South Vietnam, has fallen. Few thought this day would ever come. At this moment, North Vietnamese citizens and soldiers march victoriously toward Saigon.

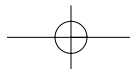
Hundreds of South Vietnamese fought to climb aboard the last helicopters lifting Americans off the roof of the United States embassy. The thousands left behind worry about what will happen to them now.



Place • Helicopters evacuate Americans and some Vietnamese from defeated South Vietnam. ▲

A History of Struggle

The Vietnam War was only the latest in a series of wars and invasions that the people of Vietnam had endured. China ruled Vietnam for more than a millennium, until A.D. 939. During this time, the Chinese built roads and waterways. They introduced the use of metal plows, farm animals, and improved methods of irrigation. Though China strongly influenced life in Vietnam, the Vietnamese protected their own culture and traditions.



China invaded Vietnam again in 1407, but in 1428, after ten years of fighting, the Vietnamese were able to force out the Chinese. For a time, Vietnam enjoyed peace and prosperity. But during the 1500s and again in the 1600s, Vietnam was disrupted by civil wars. It has not enjoyed a long period of peace and growth like the one in the 1400s since.

French Rule In 1858, Napoleon III, the ruler of France, invaded Vietnam. He wanted to increase the size of his empire and benefit from more trade in Southeast Asia. Gradually, over the next 25 years, France took control of all of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos.

The French transported natural resources such as rice, coal, gems, and rubber out of Vietnam. They exported French goods to Vietnam, making the Vietnamese buy them at higher prices than they would have paid for goods made in neighboring countries. The French failed to bring health care and education to the people of Vietnam. Because of irrigation, there was more land to farm, but most farmers could not afford the land. During the first half of the 20th century, 3 percent of landowners in southern Vietnam owned 45 percent of the land. Peasants, who made up 70 percent of the landowners, owned only about 15 percent of the land.



Place • Ho Chi Minh was president of North Vietnam from 1954 to 1969. ▲

War

Over time, the Vietnamese organized against the French. Some people, especially in northern Vietnam, also looked to China for help. **Ho Chi Minh** (HO CHEE MIN), who studied communism in the Soviet Union and China, became a leader in Vietnam's independence movement.

North and South Vietnam France tried to maintain its rule over Vietnam, but Ho Chi Minh and his government began fighting the French. He received support from the Communist government in China. The United

States government, worried that communism would spread to Vietnam and other parts of the world, sent money and weapons to the French.

In 1954, an agreement was signed that again divided Vietnam into two parts: Communist North Vietnam and U.S.-supported South Vietnam. In South Vietnam, no government was able to rule successfully, and soon the Vietminh began looking for ways to overthrow South Vietnam's government and unite all of Vietnam as a Communist nation.

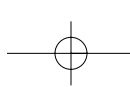
BACKGROUND

The organization that led Vietnam's independence movement was called the Vietminh.

Reading Social Studies

A. Analyzing Motives

Why did the Vietnamese want to be independent from France?



Movement • Over 500,000 U.S. troops were in Vietnam in the late 1960s. ▼



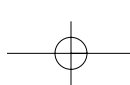
Place • Many people in the United States protested the war in Vietnam. ▲

The United States Intervenes Not wanting South Vietnam to fall to communism, the United States provided it with military support. In 1965, the United States went a step further and began bombing North Vietnam. By 1973, however, opposition to the war by citizens in the United States led to the withdrawal of troops. North Vietnam overwhelmed South Vietnam, and the war ended in 1975. Three million Vietnamese died during the war, and four million were wounded. Bombs and chemical weapons destroyed much of Vietnam, leaving more than half the people homeless. The country reunited in 1976 as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Several hundred thousand South Vietnamese fled to the United States and other nations.

GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting a Map

1. **Movement** • What body of water does the Red River flow into?
2. **Location** • Why might the capital city of Hanoi be located where it is?





Vietnam Today

Vietnam is now a communist nation. People elect representatives to the National Assembly, which then chooses the prime minister. A group called the **Politburo** (PAHL·iht·BYUR·oh) heads the only political party, the Communist Party. The Communist Party and especially the Politburo have a major role in the government.

The Government and the Economy In a Communist nation, the government owns and runs industries and services. The government makes almost all decisions about the economy. After the Vietnam War, many people lived in poverty, while many educated people left the country. It was a difficult time for the new government. In an effort to improve the economy, the government restricted trade with other nations. Instead, this made the economic situation worse.

In 1986, the government began a policy called *doi moi* (dwa mwa), or “change for the new.” Under *doi moi*, individuals gain more control of some industries. The state still owns the land, but farmers decide how to work it. Businesses can control prices, which rise and fall according to **supply and demand**. The

price of a good goes up or down depending on how many people want it and how much of that good is available.

Farming and Industry Most of the farmland in Vietnam is in the deltas of the Red and Mekong rivers. Almost four-fifths of the farmland is planted with rice, the main staple of the Vietnamese diet. There are also plantations for growing rubber, bananas, coffee, and tea. The most profitable industry in Vietnam is food processing. Seafood is frozen or canned and

then exported to nations such as Japan, Germany, and the United States. Also important is silk, which is produced in Vietnam, woven into textiles, and exported around the world.

Opening Doors Perhaps the biggest boost to the Vietnamese economy occurred when Vietnam opened up trade with the rest of the world. Foreigners started businesses and invested in Vietnam, bringing money and modern technology with them.

In 1994, the United States began trading again with Vietnam. This is when the two nations reopened diplomatic relations. The governments now communicate and work together.



Place • People live in houseboats on the Saigon River in Ho Chi Minh City. ▲

Reading Social Studies

B. Recognizing Effects Why might it have taken so long for diplomatic relations between Vietnam and the United States to be reopened?



Culture • During the three days of Tet, people celebrate the New Year. ▲

Living in Vietnam

In the large cities of Vietnam, many people live in apartment buildings. One apartment may house children, their parents, and their grandparents. In the country, families live in stone houses in the north and in houses built of bamboo and wood in the warmer

south. Many people do not have electricity or running water, and get their water from wells or creeks.

Along the Mekong River, many people live in houseboats or in houses built on stilts to be safe from floods. In the mountains, people may live in longhouses (long, narrow buildings that hold up to 30 or 40 people). A fireplace in the middle of the house is used for cooking and warmth. A hole in the roof lets out the smoke.

Holidays The most important holiday is **Tet**, the Vietnamese New Year. This three-day festival includes parades, feasts, dances, and family gatherings. Tet marks the beginning of spring. People bring tree buds indoors to blossom. Fireworks light up the skies. Families feast on dried fruit, pickled vegetables, candy, and fish, duck, or meat in rice cakes. To start the New Year, people wear new clothes, pay debts, and settle old arguments. Children may receive gifts of money wrapped in red rice paper.

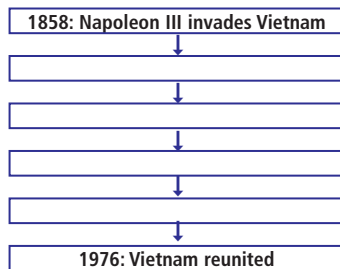
SECTION 3 ASSESSMENT

Terms & Names

1. Identify: (a) Ho Chi Minh (b) Politburo (c) *doi moi*
(d) supply and demand (e) Tet

Taking Notes

2. Use a sequence chart like this one to list the main events that led to the reunification of Vietnam in 1976.



Main Ideas

3. (a) Why did Ho Chi Minh want independence from France?
(b) Why did the United States wage war against North Vietnam?
(c) How is Vietnam governed today?

Critical Thinking

4. Contrasting

Contrast the effects of Chinese and French rule on Vietnam.

Think About

- the contributions of China to the culture of Vietnam
- the reasons foreign powers wanted to rule Vietnam
- the response of the Vietnamese to French rule

ACTIVITY -OPTION-

How do former enemies learn to get along? Think of a way to encourage good relations between the United States and Vietnam. Share your **idea** with your classmates.