**Chapter 30, Section 2: Going to War in Vietnam**

**I. American Involvement Deepens** *(pages 896–898)*

**A.** After Ngo Dinh Diem refused to hold national elections, Ho Chi Minh and his followers created a new guerrilla army known as the **Vietcong.** Their goal was to reunify North and South Vietnam.

**B.** The United States continued to send aid to South Vietnam. The Vietcong’s power, however, continued to grow because many Vietnamese opposed Diem’s government.

**C.** President Kennedy continued the nation’s policy of support for South Vietnam, agreeing with past presidents that Southeast Asia was important in the battle against communism.

**D.** The unpopularity of South Vietnam’s President Diem increased because his government was corrupt, he created **strategic hamlets,** and he discriminated against Buddhism, one of the country’s most widely practiced religions. Diem was overthrown and later executed. This further weakened South Vietnam’s government, forcing the United States to become more involved.

**E.** After Kennedy’s assassination, President Lyndon Johnson inherited the problem of Vietnam.

**Discussion Question**

Why were Diem’s strategic hamlets unpopular with the peasants? *(The peasants resented being uprooted from their homes where they had worked to build farms and where many of their ancestors were buried.)*

**II. Johnson and Vietnam** *(pages 898–899)*

**A.** At first, President Johnson was cautious regarding Vietnam, yet he was determined to prevent South Vietnam from becoming Communist. Politically, Democrats needed to keep South Vietnam from becoming Communist, or Republicans would use it against them.

**B.** On August 2, 1964, President Johnson announced that North Vietnamese torpedo boats fired on two American destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin. A similar attack reportedly occurred two days later. The Senate and the House passed the **Gulf of Tonkin** **Resolution** on August 7, 1964, authorizing the president to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack on U.S. forces. Congress had given its war powers to the president.

**C.** After the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution was passed, the Vietcong began attacking bases where American advisers were stationed in South Vietnam. After an attack in February 1965, Johnson sent aircrafts to strike in North Vietnam.

**D.** While the polls showed that Johnson’s approval rating had increased, some dissenters in the White House warned that if the United States became too involved, it would be difficult to get out. In March 1965, however, Johnson increased American involvement, and American soldiers were fighting alongside the South Vietnamese troops against the Vietcong.

**Discussion Question**

Why did President Johnson expand American involvement in Vietnam in 1964? *(Johnson wanted to prevent South Vietnam from becoming Communist. He did not want to “lose” Vietnam, because he feared that the Republicans would blame his administration for losing Vietnam to communism.)*

**III. A Bloody Stalemate Emerges** *(pages 899–901)*

**A.** By 1965 some 180,000 American combat troops were fighting in Vietnam, with the number doubling by 1966. Many Americans believed they could win in Vietnam.

**B.** To take Vietcong’s hiding places away, American planes dropped **napalm,** a jellied gasoline that explodes on contact, and **Agent Orange,** a chemical that strips leaves from trees and shrubs. Farmlands and forests were turned into wastelands.

**C.** Americans underestimated the Vietcong’s strength, stamina, and morale.

**D.** Johnson refused to order a full invasion of North Vietnam, fearing China would get involved in the war.

**E.** President Johnson also refused to allow a full-scale attack on the Vietcong’s supply line, known as the **Ho Chi Minh trail.** This made winning difficult.

**F.** As American casualties increased, many American citizens began questioning the United States’s involvement in the war.

**Discussion Question**

Why were the American troops frustrated by the Vietcong? *(The Vietcong used ambushes, booby traps, and hit-and-run tactics. The Vietcong could blend in with the general population in cities and in the countryside and then vanish.)*