president by General Suharto, and the Communists were wiped out. Suharto took charge in 1967 and was reelected in 1973, 1978, 1983, and 1988, each time for a five-year term.

Under General Suharto, Indonesia has followed a nonaligned policy. However, Suharto leans toward the West on many issues. In 1985, Indonesia hosted an Asian-African Conference to commemorate the Bandung Conference, held in 1958. Of great importance was the presence of Chinese Communist leaders at the meeting. This marked the first contact on such a high level since relations with China were broken off when the Indonesians accused the Chinese of causing the uprising of 1965. In 1990, after 23 years of no diplomatic links, Indonesia and China normalized relations.

Djakarta, Indonesia, one of the largest cities in Southeast Asia.

Thailand (Siam)

Thailand’s foreign policy has traditionally leaned toward the strongest nation in the area. The Thais played off the British and the French in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, always allying themselves with the stronger of the two. Mainly for this reason, Thailand was able to keep its independence.

In the 1930s and early 1940s, the Thais supported the Japanese. When it became clear that Japan would lose World War II, the Thais switched their support to the United States and its allies. After the war, the Thais followed American policy. Now, with the United States reducing its power in Southeast Asia, the Thais have tended to seek better relations with the People’s Republic of China, while maintaining a strong pro-American policy.

Over the past 15 years, thousands of refugees from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam have settled in eastern Thailand. This border area has been the scene of military clashes between Thailand and its neighbors.
Laos

Laos was established as an independent country when the French holdings in Indochina were divided in 1954. As an independent nation, Laos tried to maintain a neutral stance. However, during the Vietnamese conflict, both the Pathet Lao, a Communist group, and the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) made serious attempts to gain control of parts of Laos. In April 1974, a coalition government consisting of Communists and non-Communists was set up. Souvanna Phouma, a non-Communist, was premier, and Phoumi Vongvichit, a Communist, became vice-premier and minister of foreign affairs. In July 1974, Premier Souvanna Phouma suffered a heart attack and Phoumi Vongvichit was named acting premier.

By the end of 1974, all foreign troops had withdrawn from Laos. The Laotians said they would be willing to accept economic aid from all nations, both Communist and non-Communist. A Lao People’s Democratic Republic was proclaimed in December 1975.

Laos held its first parliamentary election in April 1989. It was supposed to adopt a constitution in December 1990, but agreement on some issues was not achieved. The constitution describes Laos as “a people’s democratic state under the leadership of the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party.” The constitution further states that “the central goal of economic policy is a market economy.” Presently the head of state is Prime Minister Kayson Phomvihan.

Laos continues to survive largely as a result of foreign aid from Japan, China, the United States, France, and Australia. Most of the country’s limited trade is with the United States, the former Soviet Union, China, Japan, and neighboring Southeast Asian countries.

Vietnam

The Vietnam Conflict

When Vietnam was given its independence in 1954, it was divided at the seventeenth parallel into North Vietnam and South Vietnam. Under the terms of the Geneva Agreement, an election for the whole of Vietnam was to be held in 1956, but this election was never held. The South Vietnamese government, supported by the United States (neither of which had signed the 1954 Geneva Agreement), refused to take part in any election for fear the Communist North would win.

When it became clear that no election would be held, the North Vietnamese helped organize the National Liberation Front (NLF) to reunite the country. The NLF set up a guerrilla group, the Viet Cong, to fight in the South Vietnam countryside. By 1960 the NLF controlled more than 80 percent of the land. The government of South Vietnam asked the United States to send supplies and technicians to act as advisers.

On August 4, 1964, President Lyndon Johnson announced that the U.S. destroyers Maddox and C. Turner Joy had been attacked by shell fire and possibly by elements of the North Vietnamese Navy. This alleged attack took place in the Gulf of Tonkin, off the coast of North Vietnam. It has never been confirmed that an attack took place.

On August 7, 1964, at the request of President Johnson, Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. This resolution gave the president the power to take “all necessary measures to repel an armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.”

The United States did not declare war on North Vietnam; however, President Johnson used the resolution as a legal basis for increasing U.S. involvement in South Vietnam. In
March 1965, he sent a group of U.S. Marines to South Vietnam, the first American combat forces to enter the war.

The United States became involved because it hoped to prevent the Communists from gaining complete control of the country. At first, American involvement was restricted to advising, but when the situation did not improve, the United States gradually sent over 500,000 soldiers into Vietnam to fight.

American planes began to bomb North Vietnam. As American raids increased, and more and more Americans poured into Vietnam, the Chinese and Russians increased their aid to the Viet Cong, and North Vietnamese army units began operating in the South.

Why were the Americans in Vietnam? President Lyndon Johnson, who ordered the soldiers into Vietnam, stated on April 7, 1965, “Our objective is the independence of South Vietnam and its freedom from attack. We want nothing for ourselves, only that the people of South Vietnam be allowed to guide their own country in their own way.”

Many Americans, however, did not agree that the United States had become involved in Vietnam for these aims. They felt that President Johnson and, later, President Richard Nixon had not been entirely truthful with the American people. Indeed, in the summer of 1971, the publication of U.S. government documents, known as the Pentagon Papers, showed that the American government had not revealed all the facts to the people.

By 1968, Americans in great numbers had begun to speak out against the war, and the U.S. government began to look for ways to get out of it. In March 1968, President Johnson ended the bombing of most of North Vietnam. The North Vietnamese accepted this as an overture for peace, and agreed to begin peace talks in Paris in May. In December 1968, the talks were enlarged to include both the Communist NLF and the anti-Communist government of South Vietnam.

In May 1969, President Richard Nixon proposed a peace plan for Vietnam, one feature of which was a mutual withdrawal of U.S. and North Vietnamese troops. However, in early 1970, the United States launched an attack against the North Vietnamese in Cambodia. The purpose, as stated by President Nixon, was to destroy the North Vietnamese power to attack the Americans while they were leaving South Vietnam.

By that time, American losses in Vietnam had risen to over 55,000 dead. Over 1 million Vietnamese had been killed, and the land in both North and South Vietnam was destroyed.

**Peace in Vietnam**

Finally, on January 23, 1973, President Nixon announced to a war-weary America that “we today have concluded an agreement to end the war and bring peace with honor to Vietnam and Southeast Asia.”

The terms of the agreement were divided into nine parts, or “chapters”:

1. All parties would respect the independence and unity of Vietnam as recognized by the 1954 Geneva Agreements.
2. A cease-fire throughout Vietnam, but not in Cambodia or Laos, was to begin on January 27, 1973, with all military units remaining in place. All U.S. troops were to be withdrawn within 60 days, and all U.S. military bases in South Vietnam were to be dismantled (taken apart).
3. All military prisoners were to be released within 60 days.
4. The right of the people of South Vietnam to determine their own political future was specifically recognized.
5. The Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) was recognized as a temporary military boundary between two parts of Vietnam that were expected to be reunited through peaceful negotiation between their two governments.

6. An International Control Commission and Supervision (ICCS) was set up to watch over the truce.

7. Self-determination and neutrality for Laos and Cambodia were agreed to.

8. The United States pledged itself to aid in the reconstruction, specifically of North Vietnam, and also throughout the Indo-Chinese Peninsula.

9. All parties agreed to put the agreement into effect.

However, there still remained the unsolved problem of the other wars in Southeast Asia—in Laos and Cambodia. Although attempts were made to set up a cease-fire in each of these countries, war continued into the summer of 1973.

In the first year after the signing of the peace agreement in January 1973, nearly 13,000 South Vietnamese soldiers and over 2,000 civilians were killed. According to reports, 45,000 North Vietnamese and Viet Cong also died.

From the start of the cease-fire the four-nation International Commission of Control and Supervision (ICCS) was powerless to halt the fighting. The Canadian members of the ICCS were so unhappy with the commission’s lack of power that they quit in August 1973. The Canadians felt that they were sent to observe a peace and remained to watch a war. The other ICCS members—Poland, Hungary, Indonesia, and Iran—were not very active in trying to keep the peace.

The cease-fire agreement also called for the setting up of a council of South Vietnamese and Viet Cong, which would be the beginning of a new coalition government for South Vietnam. But the council was never set up because no one could decide who should be on it.

In addition, economic problems in South Vietnam became very serious. American aid had been cut, and President Thieu was forced to cut exports and raise taxes. Also, South Vietnam suffered from increasing inflation, and prices rose steadily. The price of rice doubled and the price of sugar tripled. The South Vietnamese people were not happy with the economic situation.

In the North, the Communist government made some progress in repairing the damages of war. The government put strict controls on prices and tried to increase production of food and other goods. Although outside aid was limited, peace allowed the North Vietnamese to turn toward efforts at improving the lives of the people.

In late 1974 and early 1975, the situation in Vietnam began to change. Opposition to President Thieu of South Vietnam increased because of corruption in his government and because of Thieu’s refusal to allow greater civil rights for the people. Inflation also grew worse. In addition, U.S. military and economic aid was greatly reduced. The Thieu government found it more and more difficult to maintain economic, social, and military stability (balance).

Communist pressure by the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese within South Vietnam grew. South Vietnamese generals were afraid to fight and made serious mistakes. By April 1975, the situation had become extremely serious. Hue, Danang, and Nha Trang, important cities of South Vietnam, were in Communist hands. Only Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City) remained free of North Vietnamese control.
War as seen through the eyes of these North Vietnamese children.
The Troubled History of Vietnam in a Capsule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event or Situation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A.D. 1–938</td>
<td>Vietnam was under Han China control. The Chinese had conquered Vietnam 200 years before. This conquest and control is a major reason for Vietnamese fear and distrust of the Chinese even today.</td>
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<tr>
<td>939</td>
<td>The independence of Vietnam was achieved under the leadership of Ngo Quyen.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1000–1800</td>
<td>A Vietnamese state was expanded on the Indo-Chinese Peninsula. At the same time, different Vietnamese families fought each other for control of the government. Vietnam was not unified in this period.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1750</td>
<td>French economic and trading interests and interference in Vietnam affairs began.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1802</td>
<td>Unification of Vietnam’s three areas (Annam, Tonkin, Cochín China) was achieved by Emperor Ghia Long.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1881–1885</td>
<td>The French actively colonized Vietnam and all of the Indo-Chinese Peninsula, including Cambodia and Laos.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>The Communist party was set up in Vietnam by Nguyen Ai Quoc (Ho Chi Minh).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>Vietnam was invaded by the Japanese.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>The Viet Minh League (League for Independence of Vietnam) was set up under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1941–1945</td>
<td>Ho Chi Minh led a guerrilla war against the Japanese with American advice and help.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>The Japanese proclaimed the independence of Vietnam. A Vietnamese Republic was set up with Hanoi as capital. Ho Chi Minh was leader of the new state.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1945–1954</td>
<td>The French returned and tried to destroy the Viet Minh. With American aid a 10-year war went on.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>The French surrendered an important base at Dien Bien Phu in May. In July a cease-fire agreement was made.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>At Geneva an agreement dividing Vietnam at the 17th parallel was reached. The United States and the new government of South Vietnam refused to sign.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>The Viet Cong National Liberation Front was organized in South Vietnam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>The U.S. Defense Department reported that U.S. destroyers were fired upon by North Vietnamese in the Gulf of Tonkin (later proved untrue). U.S. intervention in Vietnam began.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>In January, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and Le Duc Tho of North Vietnam signed an agreement ending U.S. intervention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>Fighting, which had never stopped in Vietnam, in May became much heavier.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>Spectacular Communist military successes led to the collapse of the South Vietnamese army and government. In April the Viet Cong set up a Provisional Revolutionary Government to rule South Vietnam.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
President Thieu felt that he had been betrayed by the United States. He claimed that Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and former President Nixon had guaranteed aid in case of trouble.

With defeat facing him, Thieu resigned as president. A new government led by General Duong Van Minh (known as Big Minh) was set up. Its objective was to negotiate (work out) a peace with the Communists. On April 30, 1975, the South Vietnamese government surrendered unconditionally to the Viet Cong. Minh handed over all power to the Viet Cong Provisional Revolutionary Government, thus ending the conflict.

In the years since, Vietnam has been united much has occurred. The Vietnamese have followed a strong policy in relation to their neighbors. The Vietnamese opposed the Bali summit meeting of ASEAN (page 504). They felt that the other nations of Southeast Asia were “ganging up” on Vietnam and that ASEAN was being used to oppose the revolutionary and reform movements in Southeast Asia.

At the same time efforts were made to improve relations with their neighbors. Visits were made by high-ranking Vietnamese to Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, Singapore, and Malaysia. Hints were sent out that Vietnam wanted peace and might join ASEAN sometime in the future.

In December 1991, Vietnam and China opened their joint border for the first time in ten years. Trade blossomed, and the Chinese sent assistance to Vietnam. However, in June 1992, Chinese warships sailed into the South China Sea to renew China’s claim to the Sprattly Islands. Vietnam also claims these islands, which lie to the southeast of Vietnam and to the northwest of Borneo. The islands are important because it is suspected that large amounts of oil and natural gas lie beneath the sea.

In addition, Chinese troops have moved border markets deep into Vietnam and built compounds. They appear to wish to make this encroachment (advance beyond established limits) a permanent situation.

Cambodia (Formerly Kampuchea)

Since independence from France was achieved in 1953, Cambodia has faced political unrest and instability. Cambodia would have liked to follow a neutral policy during the Vietnam conflict. However, because of its location near Vietnam, the North Vietnamese used it as a supply base. Prince Sihanouk, president of Cambodia, tried to remain on friendly terms with the Chinese and the Vietnamese. However, as the war continued in Vietnam and more and more Vietnamese entered Cambodia, Sihanouk attempted to strengthen his ties with the United States in order to protect himself from the North Vietnamese. In 1970, while Sihanouk was out of the country, the Cambodian army revolted and made one of its generals, Lon Nol, president.

When the North Vietnamese began to move their army toward the Cambodian capital, Phnom Penh, Lon Nol asked for American aid, which was sent immediately. In late 1970, Lon Nol suffered a stroke, and the government came under the control of military leaders. However, by early 1972, Lon Nol had recovered sufficiently to regain control of the government.

Fighting continued in Cambodia throughout the period from 1973 to 1975. The United States sent military equipment in great quantities to the Cambodian army of Lon Nol.
However, this aid did little to help control the Khmer Rouge (the Communist forces). Communist pressure grew, coming closer and closer to Phnom Penh. By April 1975, the situation was hopeless, and Lon Nol left Cambodia for “health reasons.” The Communists occupied Phnom Penh, and it appeared that the civil war in Cambodia was over.

The new government was Communist-controlled (North Vietnamese Communists) and anti-American. In May 1975, Cambodian gunboats attacked the unarmed American merchant vessel *Mayaguez* well outside Cambodian territorial waters, capturing the ship and its crew of 39 American sailors. Within a few days American planes bombed Cambodian airfields. American marines attacked an island off the coast of Cambodia where the sailors were thought to be held as prisoners. The *Mayaguez* and its crew were released by the Cambodians.

In an effort to eliminate all opposition, the Communist government of Cambodia, led by Pol Pot, started a policy of repression in 1976. Reports coming from Cambodia stated that thousands of Cambodians had been executed. Many thousands of other Cambodians had been sent to reeducation centers to be made into supporters of the government. The name Cambodia was changed to Kampuchea. (In 1989, the name was changed back to “The State of Cambodia.”)

By early 1978, the capital, Phnom Penh, had become a ghost city. In 1975, the population of Phnom Penh had been over 2 million. In early 1978, the population was reported to be about 20,000. The people had been forced to leave and live in the countryside. It is estimated that between 2 and 4 million Cambodians died under the brutal rule of Pol Pot.

**War with Vietnam**

In December 1977 and January 1978, Vietnamese troops moved into an area of Cambodia called the Parrot’s Beak, which juts into Vietnamese territory. Heavy fighting resulted, and both sides admitted that many had died. The Vietnamese took over most of the area and did not seem willing to leave.

The reason for the attack lies in past history. The Cambodians and Vietnamese have hated each other for centuries. When the Khmer Rouge took over Cambodia in 1975, many thousands of Vietnamese living there were massacred. In 1976, the Vietnamese tried to assassinate Premier Pol Pot of Cambodia. In the spring of 1977, Cambodia began to make raids into Vietnam from the Parrot’s Beak. By December, the Vietnamese had had enough, and the invasion began.

About one year after Vietnamese troops moved into Cambodia—in December 1978 and early 1979—Cambodian rebels, aided by thousands of Vietnamese soldiers, defeated the Cambodian army. A new government friendly to Vietnam was set up, and the Vietnamese army remained in control of large areas of Cambodia. Then, in an announced attempt “to teach Vietnam a lesson,” China attacked Vietnam along its northern border. The former Soviet Union came to the rescue of Vietnam by supplying it with arms. After a brief period of warfare, the Chinese troops withdrew.

In December 1978, Pol Pot and his army were driven out of Cambodia into Thailand. The Vietnamese occupied all of Cambodia and set up a government in Cambodia friendly to Vietnam. Pol Pot asked Prince Sihanouk for his support. Sihanouk agreed, saying, “We have to choose between letting the Vietnamese colonize Cambodia and working with Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge.”

In early 1983, a rebellion broke out in Cambodia against the Vietnamese-supported government. It continued into 1985. In March 1985, the rebels were badly defeated and forced to retreat into Thailand.