From Fear to Force

Trace two influences on U.S. involvement in Vietnam

SS24.US2.13b "Investigate and explain the effects of the domino theory and the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution on United States involvement in the Vietnam conflict."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two sentences that show how the domino theory shaped U.S. choices. Circle the sentence that states what the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution authorized, then number two sentences that describe later U.S. military actions.

Why U.S. Involvement Grew

1. In 1954, President Dwight D. Eisenhower warned that if Vietnam fell to communism, nearby countries might follow, like a row of falling dominoes. This prediction became known as the domino theory. U.S. leaders feared that a communist victory in South Vietnam could weaken American influence across Southeast Asia. That fear helped justify sending money, weapons, and military advisers to South Vietnam instead of treating its struggle as a local conflict. The theory was a prediction, not proof that neighboring countries would fall. Still, it made the survival of South Vietnam seem important to U.S. security far beyond Vietnam's borders.

2. In August 1964, the destroyer USS Maddox exchanged fire with North Vietnamese boats in the Gulf of Tonkin. U.S. officials then reported a second attack on American ships, but later evidence cast serious doubt on whether that attack occurred. President Lyndon B. Johnson asked Congress for authority to respond. On August 7, Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, authorizing the president to take "all necessary measures" to repel attacks on U.S. forces and prevent further aggression in Southeast Asia. Congress did not declare war. The resolution gave Johnson broad political and legal backing to expand military action without a formal declaration of war.

3. Together, the domino theory and the resolution affected different parts of the decision to fight. The theory supplied a reason to defend South Vietnam, while the resolution supplied broad authority for a president to act. In 1965, Johnson began sustained U.S. bombing of North Vietnam. He also sent large numbers of American combat troops to South Vietnam. These choices turned an existing U.S. advisory role into a much larger ground war. Johnson cited the resolution to support his actions, although the war's expansion had other causes, including conditions on the ground. Neither the prediction nor the resolution guaranteed victory.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the domino theory help explain U.S. aid to South Vietnam?

2. How did reports of attacks in the Gulf of Tonkin lead to a change in Johnson's authority?

3. How did the resolution affect Johnson's ability to expand U.S. military involvement without a declaration of war?

4. Why would it be inaccurate to say the domino theory and the resolution alone caused the 1965 expansion?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 75 to 95 word editorial paragraph for a 1965 newspaper arguing whether these two factors justify expanded U.S. involvement. Explain how each affected U.S. decisions, distinguish a prediction from legal authority, and use at least two facts from the passage.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 11 · SS24.US2.13b

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two sentences that show how the domino theory shaped U.S. choices. Circle the sentence that states what the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution authorized, then number two sentences that describe later U.S. military actions. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the domino theory help explain U.S. aid to South Vietnam?	**Leaders feared a communist victory in South Vietnam could weaken U.S. influence across Southeast Asia, so they sent money, weapons, and advisers to support South Vietnam.**
2	How did reports of attacks in the Gulf of Tonkin lead to a change in Johnson's authority?	**After officials reported attacks, Johnson asked Congress for authority to respond. Congress passed a resolution authorizing broad measures against attacks and further aggression.**
3	How did the resolution affect Johnson's ability to expand U.S. military involvement without a declaration of war?	**It gave Johnson broad political and legal backing for military action even though Congress had not formally declared war.**
4	Why would it be inaccurate to say the domino theory and the resolution alone caused the 1965 expansion?	**They supplied a reason to defend South Vietnam and authority to act, but Johnson made the decisions to expand the war, and conditions on the ground also mattered.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Americans should question the rapid expansion of the war. The domino theory warned that a communist victory in South Vietnam might endanger other countries, but a prediction is not proof. Congress's Gulf of Tonkin Resolution gave President Johnson broad authority to use force without declaring war. He has since ordered sustained bombing of North Vietnam and sent combat troops to South Vietnam. Those steps are much larger than sending advisers. Before accepting this escalation, the public should ask whether the feared regional collapse is likely and whether such broad authority should remain in place.

Accept either position in Part 3 if the paragraph is 75 to 95 words, uses at least two accurate passage facts, and distinguishes the theory's prediction from the resolution's grant of authority. Do not accept claims that Congress declared war or that the theory proved other countries would fall.