

# THE TONKIN GULF RESOLUTION

## 1964

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The Tonkin Gulf Resolution was drafted as the result of reports of unprovoked North Vietnamese attacks on two United States naval vessels in the Gulf of Tonkin. Congress approved the resolution on August 7, 1964, authorizing a significant expansion of United States involvement in the Vietnam War. The reports were later believed to be false, and many Americans came to believe that President Johnson had misled Congress in order to gain support.

### **THINK THROUGH HISTORY: Analyzing Issues**

How did this resolution justify the use of armed force in Southeast Asia? Were there any contradictions within those justifications? Explain.

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Whereas naval units of the Communist regime in Vietnam, in violation of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and of international law, have deliberately and repeatedly attacked United States naval vessels lawfully present in international waters, and have thereby created a serious threat to international peace; and

Whereas those attacks are part of a deliberate and systematic campaign of aggression that the Communist regime in North Vietnam has been waging against its neighbors and the nations joined with them in the collective defense of their freedom; and

Whereas the United States is assisting the peoples of Southeast Asia to protect their freedom and has no territorial, military or political ambitions in that area, but desires only that these peoples should be left in peace to work out their own destinies in their own way: Now, therefore, be it

*Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,* That the Congress approves and supports the determination of the President, as Commander in Chief, to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.

SEC. 2. The United States regards as vital to its national interest and to world peace the maintenance of international peace and security in southeast Asia. Consonant with the Constitution of the United States and the Charter of the United Nations and in accordance with its obligations under the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty, the United States is, therefore, prepared, as the President determines, to take all necessary steps, including the use of armed

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force, to assist any member [Britain, France, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Thailand and Pakistan] or protocol state [South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia] of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty requesting assistance in defense of its freedom.

SEC. 3. This resolution shall expire when the President shall determine that the peace and security of the area is reasonably assured by international conditions created by action of the United Nations or otherwise, except that it may be terminated earlier by concurrent resolution of the Congress.

Source: *The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution* by John Galloway (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1970), pp. 167–168.