TOPIC 6b
Australia in the Vietnam War era

6b.1 Overview
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LEARNING SEQUENCE

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6b.1.1 Introduction
The end of World War II left the world divided between two superpowers holding very different political beliefs and goals. This period in history is known as the Cold War. Capitalist societies such as the United States and Australia felt threatened by the communist system of the Soviet Union.

In the decades after World War II, Australia put great effort into forging links with the United States. Australians feared the threat to national security that could come with the spread of communism through the poorer countries of Asia, and looked to the United States to contain communism in our region. The alliance against communism prompted Australia to send soldiers to Vietnam in the 1960s. The Vietnam War eventually engulfed the Indochinese region and mobilised thousands of Australians and Americans in protest against the horror of war.
The influence of the United States went far beyond politics and national security; America represented everything that was modern, liberating and exciting. Australia’s Cold War alliance with the United States represented a break with the past. In a climate of political uncertainty, traditional values and beliefs were questioned. This era was a time of great change for Australia.

**Start questions**
1. What does the photograph in this section indicate about the people’s attitudes towards the war?
2. What feelings/beliefs/values/ideas are evident in the photo?
3. Why might Australia have decided to go to war?
4. What impact might the war have had on Australia as well as the world?

### 6b.2 Crushing the communists in Australia

#### 6b.2.1 The Cold War

The conflicting political systems and ideologies of the two superpowers increased world tension during the post-war period known as the Cold War. Communist and capitalist nations clashed on every major issue, with each side accusing the other of warlike intentions. Large standing armies were kept in readiness for war, with the superpowers stockpiling immensely destructive weapons. The world lived with the danger that the Cold War could escalate into full-scale warfare.

The Cold War was a drawn-out conflict over issues that were often vague and confusing. In Australia, the fear of communism was kept alive by events beyond our shores and by the belief that communism threatened our national security. The fear of communism sweeping the world became an Australian election issue in 1949. As an election promise, the leader of the Liberal Party, Robert Menzies, pledged that he would introduce legislation to outlaw the Communist Party.

#### 6b.2.2 World communism

In 1949, a civil war in China ended with a total victory for the communist forces led by Mao Zedong. When China, the largest nation on Earth, came under communist control the Western democracies believed the ‘free world’ was threatened. The democratic nations’ fears of a communist world revolution seemed to be coming true. It was believed that if one nation fell under communist domination, its neighbours would fall like a line of dominoes. This was the ‘domino theory’ and, in Australia, the fear of the ‘yellow peril’ from the north was replaced with an even greater fear of the Soviet Union’s red flag sweeping a ‘red tide’ across the world. Australians saw communism as one single political movement, with little difference between Soviet communism and Chinese communism.
Events that followed the communist victory in China increased Australian panic over the ‘red menace’:
• the Malayan Emergency (1948–1956) — a rebellion against British Rule led by the communist party of Malaya
• the Korean War (1950–1953) — a Chinese communist-backed North Korean invasion of US-backed South Korea
• the growth of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) and attempted takeover of the Indonesian government (1965).

SOURCE 2 The need for security through strong alliances was a cornerstone of foreign policy in the 1950s, as expressed by Robert Menzies in this speech to Parliament in April 1955.

There was a time when we permitted ourselves to think … that any great war would be thousands of miles away from us. But that day has gone … I call upon all Australians to realise the basic truth … that if there is to be war for our existence, it should be carried on by us as far from our soil as possible. It would be a sorry day for the security of Australia if we were driven to defend ourselves on our own soil, for that would connote the most disastrous defeats abroad and the most incredible difficulties for our friends and allies desiring to help us.

Two things are unbelievable. One is that any responsible Australian should think that we could be effectively defended either by our own efforts within our own borders or by resolution of the United Nations rendered impotent by the Communist veto. The simple English of this matter is that with our vast territory and our small population we cannot survive a surging Communist challenge from abroad except by the cooperation of powerful friends, including in particular the United Kingdom and the United States. …


SOURCE 3 A diagram illustrating the domino theory

SOURCE 4 A 1951 explanation of the domino theory by the Australian politician Richard Casey

If Indochina and Burma were lost to the Communists — indeed if either of them was lost — Thailand would be immediately outflanked and it would be difficult if not impossible for Thailand successfully to resist heavy Communist pressure unless very substantial help were afforded it from without.

If Thailand were lost to the Communists, the large export surplus of Siamese rice which is important for Malaya and many of the countries would cease to be available. In other words, the internal position in Malaya could deteriorate substantially even before any question of direct military aggression against Malaya from the north arose …

If South-East Asia and Malaya fell to the Communists, the position in Indonesia would become much less secure and inevitably the security of Australia itself would be directly imperilled.

6b.2.3 The Communist Party Dissolution Bill

In 1950, the Liberal Party government led by Menzies introduced the Communist Party Dissolution Bill into federal Parliament. Menzies claimed that ‘Australia must be placed on a semi-war footing which will involve restrictions on many civil liberties’. The legislation proposed to:

- outlaw the Communist Party
- permit government to take possession of all property belonging to the Communist Party
- prohibit anyone declared as a communist from holding a job in the trade union movement or in a government organisation.

Once declared a communist, it was up to the accused to prove his or her innocence. This clause in the legislation enraged many people, as it threatened individual rights and freedoms. Ten trade unions and the Australian Communist Party challenged the Bill in the Australian High Court. They argued that only during wartime should a democratic government have the power to control the rights of citizens. The High Court agreed and ruled that the Bill was unconstitutional. Prime Minister Menzies responded by announcing his intention to go to the people through a referendum to outlaw and crush the Communist Party in Australia.

The menace of communism was the major 1951 election issue. The referendum that came from it was one of the most bitterly fought in Australia’s history. Many public forces advocated the ‘yes’ vote, including the media and some groups within the Catholic Church. The Australian people cast 2,317,927 votes for and 2,370,009 against the proposal at the referendum on 22 September 1951. The ‘no’ majority in the referendum was not large, so the threat of communism remained alive as an issue within Australian politics.

**SOURCE 5** The Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, had made anti-communism one of the main election issues of 1949. This extract from a parliamentary debate in 1950 shows it was an issue that the government was determined to keep alive.

At the last general election, 87,958 persons, a small fraction of the total number of electors, voted for Communist candidates. The importance of the Australian Communist is therefore, not numerical, but positional; these Communists are not to be ignored as if they were a mere handful. They occupy key positions in key organisations in the industries upon which this country would have to depend if tomorrow it were fighting for its life. The choice before us is a grim but simple one. We can do nothing and let a traitorous minority destroy us, as they most assuredly intend to do; we can leave the Communist free to do his work so long as he is a union official, but deal with him in any other capacity; or — and this is the answer to the choice — we can fight him wherever we find him, leaving him no immunity and no sanctuary at all.

The security and defence of Australia are dependent not only upon the valour of our troops in time of war and upon the industry with which they are supported in the factory and on the farm, but also in the continuity of these great industries that are vital to a national effort should war come …

6b.2.4 The Petrov Affair — an Australian spy story

A modern spy thriller was played out in Canberra in 1954. On 13 April 1954, the three-year term of the Menzies government was drawing to a close and federal Parliament was sitting for its final session. Public opinion polls of the time indicated that voters were now more concerned about economic issues than they were about communism.

A few short hours before the close of Parliament, the Prime Minister made the startling announcement that a Soviet diplomat in Canberra, Vladimir Petrov, had been granted political asylum and that a royal commission would be established to investigate allegations of a Soviet spy ring operating in Australia.

Vladimir Petrov's defection raised questions about Australian security and stirred up the Australian fear of communism. The ‘Petrov Affair’ soon dominated the newspapers. There were detailed accounts of documents that had reportedly been handed over to the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) proving the existence of the spy ring. The leader of the Labor Opposition, Dr Herbert Vere Evatt, was completely unaware of the allegations before they were made public by the Prime Minister. Dr Evatt claimed the timing of the announcement of the Petrov Affair was part of a Liberal Party conspiracy aimed at keeping the Labor Party out of government. In the lead-up to the 1954 election, the Labor Party was portrayed as being sympathetic to communism.

Spies and security

The sense of the Petrov Affair being an exciting spy story increased as the days went by. Vladimir and Evdokia Petrov had been sent to Australia to spy on Soviet citizens working in Australia. The Australian fear of the ‘reds under the beds’, and their threat to Australian security, was reignited when the spy became the informer. In 1950s Australia, Vladimir Petrov was portrayed as a Cold War ally, a Russian communist who had been converted to the values of a free society like Australia.

Two weeks after Vladimir Petrov was granted permission to stay in Australia, his wife was taken by car to Sydney airport by two brutish Soviet officials. Three thousand people at the airport witnessed Mrs Petrov being dragged onto an aeroplane (SOURCE 6). In the melodramatic flight which followed, a distressed Mrs Petrov told a stewardess that her companions were carrying guns. When the aeroplane stopped to refuel in Darwin, the Australian police arrested the two Soviet guards. Mrs Petrov agreed to defect and remain with her husband in Australia.

**SOURCE 6** Photograph showing a distressed Mrs Petrov being escorted to an aeroplane at Sydney airport by two Soviet officials
Prime Minister Menzies won the 1954 election and Dr Evatt suffered irreparable damage to his career and reputation. The Royal Commission on Espionage opened on 17 May amid newspaper headlines. Members of the Communist Party were forced to testify (give evidence as a witness) at the Royal Commission and Dr Evatt appeared to defend his staff. At its conclusion in March 1955, the three Royal Commissioners had heard from 119 witnesses.

Investigations into the Affair in the decades after revealed some evidence of Soviet spy activity in 1950s Australia, but no major organised spy ring or Australian Labor Party involvement. In 1956 the Petrovs were given new identities, Sven and Maria Allyson, and settled into a quietly secure life in a suburb of Melbourne. Vladimir Petrov died in 1991 and his wife, Evdokia, died in 2002.

**The Labor Party split**

The much-publicised Petrov Affair was a sensational event in Australian history. During the 1950s the fear of the ‘red tide’ of communism reached hysterical levels. The year following the Petrov Affair the Labor Party split. The rumours of spy rings and communists within the Labor Party damaged reputations and relationships. In 1957 a conservative group within Labor, led by Bob Santamaria, formed the breakaway Democratic Labor Party (DLP). The DLP pledged to take a strong stand against communism in Australia, particularly within the trade unions. In truth, the Petrov case failed to prove that any Australian communists were Soviet spies.

**SOURCE 7** The newspapers quickly reacted to the Petrov announcement and provided the Australian public with detailed accounts of the story as it unfolded.

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The sensation of Vladimir Petrov’s escape from the Iron Curtain will be exceeded by the sensations affecting Australia’s internal security. Federal Ministers hinted this after a cabinet meeting tonight.

Today Petrov, who handed over vital documents when he asked for political asylum, was questioned for several hours by officials seeking his help in translating the documents.

The documents seem likely to link espionage in Australia with the suspected overall spy system organised for the South Pacific and South-East Asia.

- The Petrov spy-ring affair developed rapidly today.
- The Prime Minister, Mr Menzies, conferred with Cabinet until last night on the timing, terms of reference and location of the Royal Commission.
- Soviet Ambassador Mr Generalov told newspapermen that the Australian story that the Third Secretary had voluntarily sought political asylum was ‘nonsense’.
- Madame Petrov, at the Soviet Embassy, said she believed that her husband had been kidnapped. She will return to Russia soon.

Other developments were:

Passports for Communist delegates to Peking, China, were refused and current passports cancelled. The bill authorising the Royal Commission and empowering it to compel witnesses to give evidence passed both Houses of Parliament in record time, without opposition.

*The Sun, 15 April 1954.*

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**6b.2 Activities**

To answer questions online and to receive **immediate feedback** and **sample responses** for every question, go to your learnON title at www.jacplus.com.au. **Note:** Question numbers may vary slightly.

**Check knowledge and understanding**

1. Who am I? Identify the people or groups described by the following statements.

   (a) I led the communist forces to victory in communist China.
   (b) I led the Liberal Party during the 1950s and pledged to outlaw communism in Australia.
   (c) I challenged the Communist Party Dissolution Bill in the High Court.
   (d) I ruled that the Communist Party Dissolution Bill was unconstitutional.
6b.3 Why did Australia fight in Vietnam?

6b.3.1 Two Vietnams

Like the conflicts in Malaya, Korea and Indonesia, the outbreak of war in Vietnam was seen as the result of communist aggression. The south-east Asian country of Vietnam was divided between the communist north and capitalist south. In a world divided by the Cold War, the emergence of communist China and a communist state in North Vietnam was of great concern to the west.

Vietnam was divided after France lost control of its colonies in the area of south-east Asia known as Indochina. The decision to divide Vietnam was agreed upon at a 1954 conference attended by Britain, France, Russia and the United States. The conditions of the agreement were that:
- Vietnam was divided at the 17th parallel
- the communist Vietminh was to control the north
- a government friendly to the United States was to control the south.

(e) I publicly supported the ‘Yes’ vote in the 1951 referendum.
(f) I was a diplomat in Canberra who was granted political asylum.
(g) I was the leader of the Labor opposition during the Petrov Affair investigations.
(h) I was the new party formed from the split within Labor.

2. In one page, evaluate the impact of the Communist Party Dissolution Bill referendum and the Petrov Affair on Australian politics.

Comprehension and communication

3. Organise a class debate on the topic: ‘That national security is more important than freedom of speech’.

Develop source skills

4. Describe the figure in SOURCE 1 and find out what is painted on his shield.
5. Explain how SOURCE 1 supports the claim that there was an atmosphere of paranoia about communism during the 1950s.
6. According to SOURCE 2, why would Australians need to continue the fight against communism ‘far from our soil’?
7. Explain why defence alliances were so important.
8. Using SOURCES 3 and 4, write a simple explanation of the domino theory and what it meant for Australia.
9. In SOURCE 5, the Prime Minister pointed out that the communists had only a small number of supporters. Account for the government’s argument that Australia must nevertheless move strongly against communism.
10. SOURCE 6 was splashed all over Australian newspapers in 1954. Explain how this photograph could have been used to reinforce the government’s strong stand against communism.
11. Refer to SOURCE 7 and answer the following questions
   (a) Explain why The Sun newspaper described the Petrov Affair as a ‘sensation’.
   (b) Outline what the Royal Commission was given the power to do.
   (c) Explain why Royal Commission power is of such significance in a democracy like Australia.

SOURCE 1 Map showing the area once known as French Indochina. It remained divided during the Vietnam War.
Total war

The United States called on its allies to provide active support to contain the communist threat. South Vietnam was presented as an independent state standing against the advance of communism in South-East Asia. The Australian government agreed to the United States’ requests for military advisers to support their presence in the region. Thirty Australian army advisers were sent to South Vietnam in 1962.

Seven allied nations followed the United States into Vietnam: Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, the Philippines, Thailand, Spain and Taiwan. In August 1964, the United States claimed that the North Vietnamese had torpedoed its ships in the Gulf of Tonkin, so American bombing raids began in the North. Australia’s Prime Minister Menzies committed 800 Australian troops to fight, sending HMAS Sydney to Vietnam in 1965. In April 1966, Australia’s military commitment increased when a 4500-man force left for Vietnam. Total war descended on Vietnam when nearly 400,000 American troops poured into the South and bombs rained down on the North.

6b.3.2 Australia goes ‘all the way’

US President Lyndon Baines Johnson, popularly known as L.B.J., arrived in Australia in October 1966. As the first American head of state to visit Australia, he was given a welcome usually reserved for royalty. The United States
was facing international criticism for the escalation of war in Vietnam and looked to Australia for gestures of support. The new Prime Minister, Harold Holt, who had replaced Menzies when he retired, declared on behalf of Australia: ‘You have an admiring friend, a staunch friend that will be all the way with L.B.J.’

A huge crowd of enthusiastic Sydneysiders turned out to greet L.B.J. with ticker-tape and welcome posters. Thousands of Australians opposed to the war were also out in the streets with placards and banners demanding an end to the war in Vietnam. Protesters threw paint bombs at the presidential convoy and chanted ‘L.B.J., L.B.J., how many kids did you kill today?’

Later in 1966, the Australian people returned the Liberal Party/Country Party coalition government to power with a massive majority at the federal election. Despite the protests the majority of Australians were seen to support the war, so the number of troops sent to South Vietnam was once again increased. By the end of 1967 Australia committed 8300 military personnel to serve in Vietnam. When Australian forces were finally withdrawn more than 46,000 Australians had served in Vietnam.

SOURCE 3 By 1966 the war was the focus of public debate and protest. Many Australians were concerned at our readiness to fall into line with American foreign policy. Cartoonists had amusing ways of expressing that public concern, as illustrated in this cartoon by Aubrey Collette in The Australian, 1966.

6b.3 Activities
To answer questions online and to receive immediate feedback and sample responses for every question, go to your learnON title at www.jacplus.com.au. Note: Question numbers may vary slightly.

Check knowledge and understanding
1. True or false?
   (a) The Vietnamese decided to divide their country at a conference held in 1954.
   (b) Seven allied nations followed the United States into Vietnam.
   (c) The United States was given wide international support for intervention and escalation of the war in Vietnam.
   (d) More than 46,000 Australians served in Vietnam between 1962 and 1972.
   (e) The Australian public did not see communism as a threat to Australia.
   (f) The Australian Prime Minister Harold Holt was reluctant to commit troops to Vietnam.
   (g) The 1966 visit of the US President to Australia was welcomed by all Sydneysiders.
   (h) The 1966 election gave only a very small majority victory to the Liberal Party – Country Party coalition government.

Comprehension and communication
2. Imagine you are a member of the Australian public in 1966. Write a letter to your daily newspaper in which you put forward your argument either for or against Australia’s involvement in Vietnam.
6b.4 Australia divided — opposition to or support for the war

6b.4.1 Conscription

Debate about the wisdom of Australia’s involvement in Vietnam raged from the day the government announced the commitment to the war effort. As the years passed, the nation grew more divided between the anti-war movement and government supporters. Australia’s anti-war movement was strongly connected to protests against conscription, or ‘National Service’ as it was called. In the years since Australia’s Federation, conscription had existed in some form for 42 years.

Conscription had been a controversial issue during World War I and continued to arouse controversy and passion during the Vietnam War. In 1950, Prime Minister Menzies introduced a limited form of conscription requiring three months of full-time training and home service. This system was abandoned in 1958. Six years later Prime Minister Menzies introduced a Bill in Parliament that became one of the most divisive pieces of legislation an Australian government ever made. The 1964 legislation reintroduced conscription for males reaching their 20th birthday. After registering for ‘National Service’ the conscripts, or ‘Nashos’ as they were popularly known, were chosen by a lottery involving marbles with birth dates on them being picked from a barrel. This was
referred to as being ‘drafted’. Men in the draft age bracket had approximately a one in ten chance of being selected, and had to serve for a period of two years.

In 1966, Prime Minister Harold Holt announced that conscripts would be sent to fight in Vietnam. This was the first time conscripts had been sent to fight overseas during peacetime. In May 1966, the first conscripted soldier was killed in action. He was Private Errol Wayne Noack and he was 21 years of age.

**SOURCE 2** An extract from a newspaper article by Penelope Debelle, in *The Age*, 30 April 2005, recounting the death in 1966 of Private Errol Noack, the first Australian conscript to lose his life in Vietnam.

Grant Collins saw Errol Noack fall. Collins, now nearly 60, met Noack at Holsworthy, NSW, where they trained as machine-gunners. They were fit young men from Adelaide who were thrown together in the first round of conscripts from the 1965 National Service draw.

The day before Noack died, May 23, 1966, was Collins’ birthday. The Fifth Battalion had been in Vietnam for just 10 days. Noack and Collins talked about going for a swim in the warm waters of the South China Sea. Noack, a tall, handsome man who had worked as a suit model for Myer and was nicknamed Flex because of his biceps, loved the water.

Early next morning the helicopters took the men to a landing zone in Phuc Tuy province. After three to four hours of total confusion, the battalion set up a defensive post, then sent some of the party to get water from a creek. Then the war began. ‘All hell broke loose, firing seemed to come from everywhere,’ Collins recalls. ‘We gave covering fire over the top of our people. Unfortunately, we were firing across a creek, so the people embedded in the creek and people further along the creek could still fire at one another.’

Collins saw Noack stand up, get hit and go down. He recognised him by his size and build but could not believe what he had seen. Collins ran over and found Noack on the ground with a small, neat wound to the stomach. ‘He didn’t look too bad,’ Collins says. ‘I remember saying, “You’ve got a homer, mate” almost like saying “lucky bastard”.’

Early protests against conscription had come from religious groups and members of the Australian Communist Party. Conscription soon became a focus of the anti-war movement, with protest organisations urging men not to register and to resist the ‘draft’. The Labor Party leader, Arthur Calwell, named the draft the ‘lottery of death’. Under particular conditions, exemptions from National Service could be granted. If a person could prove he was a pacifist, he could lodge a conscientious objection to service. The consequence for others who refused to be conscripted was a two-year jail sentence.

The first ‘conscientious objector’ to the Vietnam war to be imprisoned in Australia was a postman from Melbourne named John Zarb. Leaflets supporting Zarb’s stand were distributed around Australia as part of the anti-war movement.

Over the period of the Vietnam War, a wide range of groups organised protests against the continuation of the conflict. Youth Against Conscription and Save Our Sons were formed in 1964.

**SOURCE 3** A march towards Pentridge jail demanding the release of John Zarb was given broad public support and media coverage.
Anger over conscription was rapidly turning into disillusionment with the nature of the war in Vietnam and Australia’s continued commitment to it. When Save our Sons (SOS) was formed in the mid 1960s the founding members were labelled as communist sympathisers, overprotective mothers and stirrers. In 1971, five SOS women were sent to Fairlea prison for handing out protest leaflets to conscripts on their way to Vietnam. The imprisonment of the Fairlea Five, as the Australian press called them, was widely criticised and became a focus for the anti-war movement.

SOURCE 4 An interview with one of the founding members of Save Our Sons, Jean McLean, shows how and why the protest movement grew in Australia.

I convened the first meeting of SOS … The issue of being against the war came later. These [women] were mainly against conscription as such … Our aims were that we were against conscription for overseas service … SOS was mainly a women’s group … at its height we had 500 people on our mailing list in Victoria and we had many more supporters … Some joined because they were politically aware, some because they were worried about their sons, and there were some like me with very young children but who objected to the whole idea of conscription … Every month we were at the barracks. We had to get there at some ungodly hour like 5 a.m. for the intakes, and then we’d march around with our flag and wearing ‘Save Our Sons’ sashes. We got continuous coverage in the media for eight years for doing that.


SOURCE 5 Photograph showing a Save Our Sons protest. This early protest group was not drawn from a radical youth movement but represented a broad section of the Australian public.
6b.4.2 The Moratorium Movement

Every evening, television broadcast the horror of Vietnam around the world and brought it into Australian homes. By 1970, the anti-war sentiment had rapidly grown into huge rallies, marches, church services, sit-ins and candlelight processions. These united protest movements demanded a moratorium (a suspension) of the Vietnam War. They represented a great range of opinion from political radicals to middle-class Australians who would not normally protest or challenge the government’s actions.

The Vietnam War moratorium rallies of 1970 appealed to people as a way of displaying their support for the end of the war. The first Moratorium Day was held in the United States with hundreds of thousands of people stopping work in a mass protest demanding that the United States government withdraw from Vietnam immediately. On 8 May 1970, the first Australia-wide march calling for a moratorium on sending conscripts to Vietnam was held.

The prominent Labor politician Jim Cairns was joined by academics,
writers, artists and church leaders in moratorium marches across the nation. The two demands of the Moratorium Movement were:

• the immediate, total and unconditional withdrawal of Australian and allied troops from Indochina
• the immediate abolition of conscription.

**RETROFILE**
The headmaster of a Methodist College in Sydney expressed how widespread the challenge to the government was when he publicly encouraged young men to defy National Service.

**SOURCE 8** The aims of the Moratorium Movement as expressed in an April 1970 Moratorium publicity leaflet

We demand the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of the total US and Allied military presence from Indochina, and the cessation of US aggression and internal subversion against the peoples of Indochina.

We demand the immediate, unconditional and unilateral withdrawal of Australian military forces from Indochina.

We demand the immediate abolition of conscription in any form, recognising it as a direct instrument of Australia’s involvement in US military intervention in Indochina.

We demand that the United States, Australian and other Allied governments withdraw all military, material and political support for those regimes or forces sustained by the United States in Indochina.

We demand that Australia end its present policies of military intervention in countries of Asia and the South-Western Pacific and refuse all future involvement in US or other aggression or interference in the internal affairs of any country.

We demand that the US and its Allies recognise the Indochinese people’s right to national independence, unity and self-determination.

Aims of the Third South Australian Vietnam Moratorium Campaign.

**RETROFILE**
In all, according to Australian War Memorial figures, 521 Australians were killed in Vietnam and approximately 3000 were wounded or injured.

**SOURCE 9** Memories of Australians who were involved in the moratorium campaigns of protest against the war in Vietnam

I went on the three Moratoriums [moratorium rallies], and took kids from Balwyn High. We made banners in the woodwork room which infuriated other teachers, but some parents hopped in and said it was not a bad thing. The first Moratorium was like coming in out of the cold and ended a sense of isolation. A lot of the time you were the only person in your family, workplace or street who opposed the war. (Gary Guest)

I marched with my mother and some staff from Nation Review; I remember thinking what a difference it was to when sixteen of us had stood outside the first ballot.

Even to this day, when thinking about that Moratorium, I feel a certain sadness about that. I was glad everyone was there, but I wondered where they were in 1965.

By 1970 … it had become Australia’s longest war and so many lives had been lost. I remember thinking, ‘It’s too late … it’s already over because the troops are being withdrawn anyway.’ (Michael Leunig)

The intensity of the conflict in Australia over our involvement in Vietnam, and the issue of conscription, contributed to the election of a Labor government in December 1972. Twenty-three years of conservative Liberal government had ended. The new Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam, immediately abolished National Service and recalled the Australian army. Australia’s military involvement in Vietnam was over. In 1974, the United States government reduced its level of support to the South Vietnamese government and ceased all bombing throughout Indochina. In March 1975, the communists launched their Spring Offensive and, in an overwhelming victory, took control of South Vietnam on 30 April 1975. The longest war of the twentieth century had come to an end.

6b.4.3 Skill builder: Analysis and use of sources: evaluating the reliability and usefulness of primary sources

Personal documents are valuable primary sources of information, as they provide evidence of a person’s character and motivation, ideas and beliefs. Letters, diary entries, memoirs and autobiographies express personal opinions and a particular point of view. These sources help historians to understand why people acted in the way they did and how they were affected by events in history.

Personal documents have limitations as evidence of the past. They will usually present history from one point of view, so they provide subjective and often biased accounts. The usefulness of these sources can be assessed when they are examined in the context of their times. Knowledge of the historical background of the sources helps historians judge their significance and value. Personal documents can then be analysed to determine the difference between fact and opinion. Historians evaluate the reliability of these sources by applying the following simple set of questions.

- What is the origin of the source? (Who wrote it, when and where?)
- Why was it written? (What is the motive or purpose?)
- Who was it written for? (Who is the audience?)
- What is the content of the source?

The answers to these questions will provide the information needed to determine usefulness. Using the source 11 letter as your evidence, explain why an anti-war attitude was emerging in 1966. In your response, consider the usefulness of this source to a historian studying Australia in the Vietnam War era.

SOURCE 10 Anti-war protesters outside Parliament House in Canberra, 1970. Policemen are pictured in the foreground. The protest voiced opposition to the visit to Australia of the US Vice-President Spiro Agnew.

SOURCE 11 Letter to The Sydney Morning Herald in 1966 addressing President Lyndon Johnson

Dear Mr. President:

It is unfortunate that your welcome in Australia has been clouded by the deep disagreements in this country as to our part in the Vietnamese War. I am concerned that the thought, comment and actions of our Government have reflected very little of this disagreement, nor indeed much awareness of what is involved. The fact that out of a population of eleven million we have had to depend...
6b.4 Activities

To answer questions online and to receive immediate feedback and sample responses for every question, go to your learnON title at www.jacplus.com.au. Note: Question numbers may vary slightly.

Check knowledge and understanding
1. Describe how conscripts were chosen and what National Service was.

Comprehension and communication
2. Invite a guest speaker to your class to share their first-hand experience of the Vietnam War years. Prepare questions to help you understand the issues. If you are unable to have a speaker attend your school, contact the Vietnam Veterans Association to gain some responses to your questions. Report what you have learned to the other members of your class.

Develop source skills
3. Read SOURCE 2. The death of conscripted soldiers had a huge impact on the Australian public’s attitude towards sending troops to Vietnam. Write your own newspaper editorial commenting on the issue of conscription and the death of the first Australian conscript.

4. Imagine you are one of the protesters photographed in SOURCE 3. Write a press release in support of John Zarb outlining why you support him and why you are opposed to the National Service Act.

5. Outline the aim of the SOS protest shown in SOURCE 5, and evaluate how effective you think it would have been.

6. Explain what SOURCES 5 and 6 indicate about the membership of the anti-war and anti-conscription groups of the 1960s. (Comment on the sex, age group and dress of the protesters.)

7. Refer to SOURCE 6 and the text to describe the way in which many young Australians and Americans responded to their country’s involvement in the Vietnam War.

8. Refer to SOURCE 8 and answer the following questions.
   (a) Using SOURCE 8 as your evidence, explain the overall aim of the Moratorium Movement.
   (b) Describe the change in Australian attitude towards the countries of Indochina.

9. Imagine you are a newspaper reporter. Write a brief description of the protest marches, using SOURCES 8, 9 and 10 as the basis of your report.
6b.5 The impact of the Vietnam War

6b.5.1 The voice of the Vietnam veteran

On 3 October 1987, the ‘Welcome Home’ parade for Vietnam veterans took place in Sydney. The welfare of these veterans of an unpopular war had been ignored after 1972, so the parade was a long-overdue recognition of their service to Australia. Many of the soldiers who fought in Vietnam had experienced difficulties settling back into civilian life, for a range of reasons:

- Vietnam veterans had come home to an anti-war attitude of contempt and hostility rather than to expressions of gratitude.
- Many veterans were left untreated for post-traumatic stress disorder (known as ‘battle fatigue’ in previous wars).
- Many veterans were exposed to dangerous chemicals in the defoliation campaign, leading to serious medical problems.

SOURCE 1 Vietnam veterans had reported a wide range of well-documented illnesses by the 1970s.

I’ve got rashes under the arms, groin. I get headaches all the time. They get bad. Flashes of temper. It’s like a boiler without a pressure-release valve. It builds up and builds up until it explodes … I explode. I can’t mix with people. I’ve got no sex drive … I was married twice. My first wife had quite a few miscarriages … I used to pick on the kids, isolate myself from their lives, behave irrationally until it got to a stage where they just couldn’t take anymore. Unfortunately I realised the problem just a little too late.


SOURCE 2 Vietnam veteran, Michael Scrase, recounting the stress of his homecoming after service in Vietnam

One minute I was in Vietnam and the next minute I was home, and I was totally lost. Cars backfiring scared you, you were on edge the whole time for weeks afterwards. There was no debriefing, no time to melt back in. I know my mum and dad found it very hard to handle me. In fact they told me quite plainly that I wasn’t the same person any more. I was prone to get violent, punch walls, get into rages very quickly. I’ve never slept right since the day I came home.

Quoted in Australia and the Vietnam War, Department of Veterans’ Affairs, Canberra, January 2007.

Australia had been unwilling to deal with the problems of these returned soldiers of an unpopular war. In 1980, the Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia was established to lobby governments for financial compensation and political recognition for its members. Veterans were reporting various disabilities but were still receiving no government support from the Department of Veterans’ Affairs.

Agent Orange was the most commonly used chemical mixture in Vietnam for defoliation. It was absorbed by the leaves of plants and would enter the water system. By 1967, an estimated 20 per cent of jungles, 36 per cent of mangroves and 42 per cent of food crops had been destroyed in Vietnam. The main aim of this defoliation was to deprive the Vietcong guerillas of cover. The Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) had also sprayed the Australian bases three times every week with various insecticides. In the late 1970s, Agent Orange was linked with three possible health problems:

- cancer
- birth abnormalities
- toxic brain dysfunction.
The Vietnam Veterans Association put pressure on the Commonwealth Government to establish an inquiry into Agent Orange. In 1983, the Hawke Labor government appointed a royal commission (known as the Evatt Commission) to investigate the effects of the chemical agents used in Vietnam. After hearing from the veterans, the government, the chemical companies and the scientists, the commission released its findings. It reported that there was insufficient evidence to prove that the veterans’ disabilities were caused by chemical defoliation. The commission did, however, find that the war had left veterans with significant psychological problems entitling them to government financial assistance.

For the following nine years, the veterans lobbied to have the findings of the Evatt Commission overturned. In October 1994, the Labor government finally acknowledged Agent Orange as the direct cause of cancer and other illnesses suffered by the Vietnam veterans. American veterans were also successful in their legal action against seven chemical companies. A multimillion-dollar American fund was then established to help veterans and their families.

The work of the Vietnam Veterans Association in gaining recognition for returned soldiers is an example of how citizens of a democracy can directly influence government. Veterans felt their particular needs and wishes were being ignored by successive Australian governments. The Veterans Association is an ‘interest group’ established to influence government decisions, not to form a government.

**SOURCE 3** Photograph taken in 1966 of Australian soldiers helping their wounded comrade during the Vietnam War

**SOURCE 4** A 1994 newspaper article on the McLennan Report. The report cited medical evidence supporting the veterans’ claim that Agent Orange was responsible for the serious health problems they suffered.

**Vietnam vets hail cancer decision**

*BY EBRU YAMAN AND CAMERON STEWART*

Vietnam veterans yesterday applauded the Federal Government’s landmark decision to accept a link between Agent Orange and cancer but said more needed to be done to recognise other war-related cancers.

The Government has announced it will accept the findings of an independent medical study which found clear links between a range of cancers and exposure to herbicides such as Agent Orange.

The decision, revealed exclusively in *The Australian* yesterday, is a key breakthrough in the 25 year battle by the Vietnam veterans to obtain government recognition of the cancer-producing effects of Agent Orange.

The move means more than 600 cancer-stricken Vietnam veterans will be eligible for disability payments within twelve months at an estimated cost to the government of about $4 million.

The president of the Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia, Mr John Printz, described the decision as a major victory.

“It is a very positive development for veterans, many of whom have had to suffer the turmoil, the strain and the stress of trying to obtain compensation for their disabilities … they were kicked in the guts for years about (Agent Orange),’ Mr Printz said …

The government’s decision to recognise the link between cancer and Agent Orange overturns the findings of the 1985 royal commission which concluded that Agent Orange was not a reason for the unusually high cancer rates among veterans …

6b.5.2 A war-torn world

A photograph of children fleeing from a napalm attack on 8 June 1972 (SOURCE 6) became one of the enduring images of the Vietnam War. Images such as this turned public opinion in America and Australia against the continued commitment of troops to Vietnam.

SOURCE 5 A scene from the ‘Welcome Home’ parade in Sydney, 3 October 1987. The parade was the first Australian commemoration of the Vietnam War and was organised by the Vietnam Veterans Association.

SOURCE 6 A photograph by Nick Ut showing children, frightened and some suffering burns, running from a napalm attack in Vietnam on 8 June 1972.

- Frightening scene is emphasised through the dark background and fear on the faces.
- Child in foreground brings viewer into the drama.
- Note the central image of the naked and terrified child.
- The soldiers’ heavy uniforms contrast with the vulnerability of the children.
6b.5.3 Changing times

The 1960s was a decade in which the younger generation challenged government policies and the basic values of Australian society. Tension and conflict within Australian society had never been as evident as it was during the period of the Vietnam War. Young Australians were greatly influenced by the values, culture and politics emerging in the United States.

The United States of the 1960s was a nation of civil rights movements, women’s liberation and the growth of popular political awareness. Opposition to involvement in the Vietnam War was particularly strong on university campuses. The issues of the time were often being expressed through the protest movement of the hippie generation. Bob Dylan’s *The Times They Are a-Changin’* became the protest anthem for a generation that had many causes to fight for.

By the mid 1960s, American popular music was carrying the social protest message all over the world. The hippie movement was born in San Francisco, preached peace and love and turned to Eastern philosophy for spiritual guidance. As in the United States, Australian hippies were usually from middle-class backgrounds. Their beliefs were a reaction to the brutality of the war in Vietnam.

As the 1960s drew to a close, the world watched in amazement as American astronauts walked on the moon. It was an event watched by millions of people on their television screens. In 1964, Canadian academic Marshall McLuhan had predicted that satellite communications would shrink the world to one large ‘global village’ in which television would dominate as the means of communication. By the 1970s, people were watching remote events as if they were happening in their own part of the world. American television broke through Australia’s sense of global isolation. With mass communication and popular culture, we entered the global community.

6b.5.4 Multicultural Australia

The Vietnam War led to deep division, on the moon or a mine . . . ‘sions within Australian society and also forced Australians to think seriously about attitudes to the peoples of the Asia–Pacific region. Our involvement in Vietnam was the result of a fear both of communism and of Asia. The Vietnam War made ordinary Australians politically active and had them questioning many long-held beliefs.

In the 1960s, Australians believed that communist China was the driving force behind the war effort in North Vietnam. By 1973 Australia had established diplomatic relations with communist China and, in 1979, we were reminded of our error in seeing communism as monolithic when war broke out between China and Vietnam.

By the 1970s, Australia no longer saw itself as white and British. Approximately two million people became refugees as a result of the Vietnam War. Between 1975 and the end of the twentieth century, more than 150,000 Indochinese refugees settled in Australia. Their arrival combined with that of thousands of people who had come from across Europe and the Middle East served to create a culturally diverse society. This new Australian nation was recognised with the introduction of a government policy of multiculturalism.
Prime Minister Bob Hawke declared 1989 the Year of Citizenship. Two people were granted the two-millionth Australian citizenships — Nigel Stoker, who arrived in Australia from Scotland in 1984, and Ngoc Anh Nguyen, who arrived as a refugee from Vietnam in 1981.

**SOURCE 8** This 1990s cartoon graphically illustrates the impact of economic ruin, war and population growth. Movements of massive numbers of people around the world have never been greater than in the period since World War II.

**SOURCE 9** Excerpt from a speech by the newly elected Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam, in December 1972

The change of government provides a new opportunity for us to reassess the whole range of Australian foreign policies and attitudes ... Our thinking is towards a more independent Australian stance in international affairs, an Australia which will be less militarily orientated and not open to suggestions of racism; an Australia which will enjoy a growing standing as a distinctive, tolerant, cooperative and well-regarded nation, not only in the Asia and Pacific region, but in the world at large.

E. G. Whitlam, 5 December 1972, quoted in *Australian Foreign Affairs Record*, Department of Foreign Affairs, Canberra, May 1973, p. 335.

### 6b.5 Activities

To answer questions online and to receive **immediate feedback** and **sample responses** for every question, go to your learnON title at www.jacplus.com.au. Note: Question numbers may vary slightly.

**Check knowledge and understanding**

1. Explain why the experience of many Vietnam veterans has been so difficult and why the Vietnam Veterans Association was established.
2. Outline the reasons for the Vietnam War era being a time of great change.

**Research and communicate**

3. There are many occasions when ordinary people feel that direct involvement and action is necessary to influence or change government decisions. The work of the Vietnam Veterans Association is a clear example of this. Research and write a report of 600–800 words about the work and achievements of the Vietnam Veterans Association. Your report should discuss what the objectives of the association were, how the association gathered support and used the media, and what the outcome of the work of this interest group has been.
4. Working in small groups, discuss the impact of the Vietnam War on Australia. Design a poster or write a poem expressing one of the ways in which Australia changed at this time.

**Develop source skills**

5. Predict how the medical and social problems described in **SOURCES 1 and 2** would have an impact on a veteran’s life and family after Vietnam.
6. Use **SOURCE 3** to answer the following questions.
6b.6 Research project: Nuclear testing at Maralinga

Numerous videos and interactivities are embedded just where you need them, at the point of learning, in your learnON title at www.jacplus.com.au. They will help you to learn the content and concepts covered in this topic.

6b.6.1 Scenario and task

After the defeat of Germany and Japan in 1945, two superpowers now dominated world politics: the USA and the USSR. In 1948-49 the two nearly went to war over the future of Berlin. They soon developed a bitter and long lasting mistrust of each other. Their competition for power and influence in post-war Europe saw that continent divided between pro-American, democratic Western Europe and Soviet Union-controlled communist countries of Eastern Europe. As Winston Churchill put it, an ‘iron curtain’ was drawn between east and west on that continent. There was no open military conflict between the two sides, but there was much tension that soon spread throughout the world and lasted until 1989. This period of time is known as the Cold War.

After 1949, both superpowers had nuclear weapons. It seemed that if war did break out the destruction would be on a massive scale. America’s closest ally, Britain, was now no longer as powerful as the USA and USSR, but was still head of the British Commonwealth; and
wanted to become a nuclear power to reinforce its status as an important world power and a strong ally of the USA and Western Europe. It had developed an atomic bomb but needed to do more testing before it could build up its nuclear arsenal. Where could it do this testing?

Australia—as a willing and loyal member of the Commonwealth, a strong supporter of the USA, fiercely anti-communist, and a country blessed with huge ‘empty spaces’ - seemed to Britain to be the perfect solution.

Your task

It is 1954. You are an ambitious Australian civil servant. You have been asked to produce a government report on the issue of whether the Prime Minister should agree to an official British Government request to set up a permanent nuclear testing station at Maralinga in South Australia.

Your report should include:

• an introduction outlining the British request including information on previous nuclear testing in Australia, why Britain needs to test in Australia, and the suitability of Maralinga
• background information on the situation in Europe and why this affects Australia’s security and Australia’s interests
• background information on the situation in East Asia and why this has serious implications for Australia
• information on the domestic situation in Australia including comments on links to the USA and Britain, and the political advantages and disadvantages of allowing the tests. Would a strong show of friendship with Britain be good for the Prime Minister’s popularity at this time?
• a final section where you put your recommendation - should Australia allow a British nuclear testing base on home soil and permit further tests? If opposing the request you must give clear reasons - what are the risks? Which groups in Australia might oppose the tests?

6b.6.2 Process

• Watch the introductory video on Maralinga. You can complete this project individually or invite other members of the class to form a group.
• Navigate to your Research Forum. A selection of research topics have been loaded to provide you with a framework for your research. You will also find documents in your Media Centre containing key questions to answer for each of the research topics, and a glossary of key Cold War terms.
• To discover extra information about the Cold War and nuclear testing in Australia find at least two sources other than the textbook. The weblinks in your Resources tab will help you get started.
• Decide whether you will recommend that the Prime Minister accepts or rejects the British request before preparing a draft report as a Word document. Remember you may include maps, diagrams and photos to support your findings and recommendations.
• Remember to write your report using very formal language, as it is to be read by the Prime Minister.
• This issue was very sensitive at the time and you may decide to make one or more sections of your report ‘Top Secret’ so that other government officials and the public do not see it. These sections should be placed in a sealed section labelled ‘For the Prime Minister’s eyes only’. You might like to use an appropriate software application to give your final draft an authentic old look. Some samples are provided for you in your Resources tab.

• Print your research report and hand it in with your final report.

6b.7 Review

KEY TERMS
conscription the compulsory enrolment of men for service in the armed forces
defection changing allegiance or deserting from a duty
defoliation the stripping of foliage on trees; used during the Vietnam War to deprive the Vietcong guerillas of cover that they could use for surprise attacks
guerillas small bands of soldiers who harass the enemy by surprise attacks
napalm a sticky substance used in flame throwers and fire bombs
pacifist a person who opposes in principle all war or violence
political asylum to provide refuge or a secure home for a person regarded as being at risk from the government of their own country
royal commission a group of people, usually judges, appointed by the government to investigate some area of public concern
unconstitutional in violation of the laws of a nation or state
yellow peril term used in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to describe Asia

6b.7.1 What next?

What next? That is for you to decide. This topic is not compulsory — it is an optional topic that New South Wales syllabus writers thought you might find interesting as you near the end of Year 10.

Australia in the Vietnam War era is a fascinating topic of study because it provides an understanding of forces that have shaped modern Australia. Involvement in the Vietnam War caused great conflict and upheaval in our society. This was an era of change; women demanded equality, Aboriginal Australians fought against two centuries of cruel discrimination, the White Australia policy was abandoned and a truly multicultural Australia began to emerge. This was an era in which public opinion turned, and the values and traditions of the past were challenged.

War in Vietnam had some terrible consequences. The sophisticated weaponry of war that was unleashed by the military might of the United States did not defeat North Vietnam. South Vietnam was taken over by the North. The war engulfed neighbouring Laos and Cambodia, and the entire region was economically and environmentally devastated by years of relentless bombing. More than two million men, women and children were killed. Countless more civilians were left homeless and suffering from terrible injuries.

There is so much more to learn about this important period of twentieth-century history. The consequences of the conflict for Australia, America and Indochina were complex. There are many topics that you could continue to investigate, including:

• the ongoing issues confronting Vietnam veterans in Australia and America
• the post-war relationship between Australia and the nations of Indochina
• the Pol Pot regime and refugees
• the reconstruction of Indochina
• popular culture of the Vietnam War era.

Many wonderful resources are available to students undertaking further study on the Vietnam War and the impact it had on the countries involved. These include:

• Australian government websites and publications — for example, those produced by the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Australian War Memorial
• movies — for example, the Australian production *The Odd Angry Shot* or the US film *Apocalypse Now*
• documentaries — for example, the Canadian miniseries *Vietnam — the Ten Thousand Day War* or the Australian production *Long Tan: the True Story*
• novels — for example, *Uncertain Fate* by Graham J. Brammer (1997, Allen and Unwin, Sydney)
• oral history collections — for example, Michael Caulfield’s *Voices of War*, Sydney 2006.

When you have researched an area of particular interest, consider how you can explain and communicate your knowledge. Choose a communication form that suits you and your topic — oral, graphic, written or digital. What comes next is up to you: compile a collection of film reviews or a database of newspaper articles, songs, speeches, posters and cartoons from the Vietnam War era; create a class timeline of events that were happening in world and Australian history during the period of the Vietnam War; have a class debate on the topic ‘Australia was justified in committing troops to Vietnam in 1965’. Be creative in how you use what you have learned from your study of Australia during the Vietnam War era.

### 6b.7 Activities

To answer questions online and to receive immediate feedback and sample responses for every question, go to your learnON title at www.jacplus.com.au. *Note: Question numbers may vary slightly.*