

Fulbright Investigates the Vietnam War

Student Materials

The Tonkin Gulf Resolution C-E-R Worksheet.....	page 1
Headlines graphic organizer.....	page 4
“Who was J. William Fulbright?” comprehension questions.....	page 5
Revised Tonkin Gulf Resolution graphic organizer.....	page 6
Revised Tonkin Gulf Resolution template.....	page 7
Individual Reflection.....	page 8
Taking Informed Action (article and comprehension questions).....	page 9

Thank you for downloading our materials! Click the link below or scan the QR code to access our free materials anytime.

<https://levin-center.org/students-educators/lbh-downloads/>



Name: _____

The Tonkin Gulf Resolution C-E-R Worksheet

Congress passed the Tonkin Gulf Resolution based on President Johnson's word and Senator Fulbright's endorsement. Later, Senator Fulbright felt misled by the Johnson administration.

Directions: Watch President Johnson's Vietnam address from 8/4/64. Refer to your Tonkin Gulf Incident Map as you watch.

What are your initial reactions to what President Johnson just said?

With your team, lay out the primary source evidence from your envelope in chronological order and list the order in the space below.

Primary Sources Listed in Chronological Order:

Source Letter	Date Published
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	
9.	
10.	
11.	

Next, match each piece of evidence with the claim it best fits. All evidence will be used only once but some claims may have multiple pieces of evidence. As you work, think about whether the evidence suggests the claim in the chart is true, or whether it suggests the claim is misleading. When your group has finished discussing, write the evidence letter in the chart.

Claim (Source 1C: Excerpts from The Tonkin Gulf Resolution, passed by Congress August 7, 1964)	Evidence Letter	
	Suggests claim is true	Suggests claim is misleading
"To promote the maintenance of international peace and security in southeast Asia."		
"Whereas naval units of the Communist regime in Vietnam, have deliberately and repeatedly attacked United States naval vessels lawfully present in international waters, and have thereby created a serious threat to international peace"		
"Whereas these attackers are part of 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"		
"Whereas the United States is assisting the peoples of southeast Asia to protest (sic) their freedom and has no territorial, military or political ambitions in that area, but desires only that these people should be left in peace to work out their destinies in their own way"		

1. What do you notice about how the evidence seems to change over time?

Use these excerpts from the rest of the resolution to answer the following questions.

"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 force, to assist any member or protocol state of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty requesting assistance in defense of its freedom. 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."

2. According to the section above, why is the United States involving itself in Southeast Asia at all?

3. Reread the second paragraph. Do you have any questions or concerns about the way that clause is worded?

Why did Senator Fulbright's understanding of the Gulf of Tonkin incident change over time? Use two quotes from the evidence strips to support your claim.



Name: _____

Headline Graphic Organizer

Directions: Each video will be played for you as a whole class. After each video, talk in your teams for two minutes, and create a newspaper headline that captures what you think is the most important or interesting takeaway from what you just saw. Be prepared to share your headline with the class.

Video	Headline
Retired General and Ambassador Maxwell Taylor	
Senior US Diplomat George Kennan	
Secretary of State Dean Rusk	
Lt John Kerry	

What did Senator Fulbright's hearings reveal to the nation?



Name: _____

“Who was J. William Fulbright?” Comprehension Questions

1. Why is Senator Fulbright so personally invested in getting to the bottom of the war in Vietnam?
2. The Gulf of Tonkin incident happened in 1964. Based on what you already know about the domino theory, containment, and American attitudes towards communism, why might Johnson have felt it necessary to get the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution passed quickly?



Name: _____

“Who was J. William Fulbright?” Comprehension Questions

1. Why is Senator Fulbright so personally invested in getting to the bottom of the war in Vietnam?
2. The Gulf of Tonkin incident happened in 1964. Based on what you already know about the domino theory, containment, and American attitudes towards communism, why might Johnson have felt it necessary to get the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution passed quickly?



Names: _____

Revised Tonkin Gulf Resolution Graphic Organizer

Use the table below to draft your revised Tonkin Gulf Resolution.

What happened in the Tonkin Gulf?
How did the events in the Tonkin Gulf affect the U.S.?
What were U.S. goals in the Vietnam region?
What are your team's recommendations to the President? Do you support his actions? Why or why not?
What do you want the U.S. to do? What powers are you giving to the President? When do these powers expire?



Eighty-eighth Congress of the United States of America

AT THE SECOND SESSION

*Begun and held at the City of Washington on Tuesday, the seventh day of January,
one thousand nine hundred and sixty-four*

Joint Resolution

To promote the maintenance of international peace and security in southeast Asia.

Whereas: _____

Whereas: _____

Whereas: _____

*Resolved by the Senate and the House of Representatives of the United States of
America in Congress assembled,*

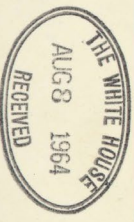
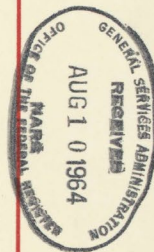
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

APPROVED

AUG 10 1964

Acting President pro tempore of the Senate.

Lyndon B. Johnson



Name: _____

Individual Reflection

After you have participated in the gallery walk and voted on a new resolution, answer the following questions individually.

1. How did the new resolution that your team created differ from the original and why?
2. How important is it that Congress and the President trust each other?



Name: _____

Individual Reflection

After you have participated in the gallery walk and voted on a new resolution, answer the following questions individually:

1. How did the new resolution that your team created differ from the original and why?
2. How important is it that Congress and the President trust each other?



**Taking Informed
Action**

Congress revisits approval for Iraq invasion, recalling change of heart on Vietnam

Elving, Ron. (2023, March 25). *Congress revisits approval for Iraq invasion, recalling change of heart on Vietnam*. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/2023/03/25/1165953799/congress-repeal-iraq-war-aumf-vietnam>

In the coming weeks, both chambers of Congress are expected to debate and vote on a bill repealing the authority that Congress gave President George W. Bush to use force against Iraq.

It has been more than half a century since Congress repealed a similar resolution. That was the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution of 1964, which had allowed then-President Lyndon Johnson to escalate the conflict in Vietnam.

That war ultimately cost more than 55,000 American lives and many times that many Vietnamese lives, destabilizing the entire region.

We will return to that precedent in a moment. For now, Congress is focused on the fallout from its decision to greenlight a war with Iraq in October 2002. The U.S. and its allies invaded and occupied Iraq the following March. It was 20 years ago this month.

There was no declaration of war against Iraq, although the Constitution gave that power to Congress in its Article I. Congress has not declared war on anyone since 1942, nor has any president asked it to. But there have been long and bloody wars in Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq – not to mention hundreds of strikes using drones, missiles and "special forces" (the exact number is not known).

By repealing its 2002 authorization for the war in Iraq, Congress may hope to reassert more control on the war-making decisions of the executive branch. That is the goal, at least, of many on Capitol Hill.

One of repeal's principal sponsors in the Senate is Virginia Democrat Tim Kaine. He says the 2002 authorization (and another granted to President George H.W. Bush in 1991 prior to the Persian Gulf War) "are no longer necessary, serve no operational purpose, and run the risk of potential misuse."

A struggle as old as the republic

Congress has tried to stand up to presidents in previous eras, as the struggle between the branches is built into the nation's founding documents. But Congress has been weakened in this struggle by events over a long period of time and more recently by dramatic events in real time.

Congress has often been complicit in allowing the executive leeway for military adventures, dating back at least to Thomas Jefferson's forays against pirates in the Mediterranean in the early 1800s.

But the expansion of presidential war-making accelerated literally in a flash on Sept. 11, 2001, when hijacked airliners smashed into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Nearly 3,000 lives were lost, exceeding even the death toll from the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor that propelled the U.S. into World War II.

Sept. 11, 2001, galvanized Americans much as Pearl Harbor had. Americans were fearful, and also vengeful. The awfulness of the Twin Towers collapsing and the grief of thousands of families who lost loved ones turned swiftly to anger. There were popular songs on the radio and rants on TV about what the U.S. would do in retribution. Just three days after those attacks, Congress met and passed an authorization for the use of military force, or AUMF, directing President Bush to go after the perpetrators and those who harbored or enabled them.

That covered the invasion of Afghanistan that fall and has been used by every president since for scores of operations — many still secret. It is important to note that the 2001 AUMF against terrorists

would remain intact under the current Senate's repeal bill; the measure would apply only to the later resolution aimed specifically at Iraq and an 1991 AUMF concerning Iraq's invasion and occupation of neighboring Kuwait.

Shifting the onus of Sept. 11 to Saddam

The Iraq resolution came 13 months after Sept. 11. The initial thrust into Afghanistan had ousted the Taliban regime but failed to capture al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden. The Bush administration increasingly turned its attention to the regime of Saddam Hussein. While never explicitly saying Saddam had aided in the Sept. 11 attacks, Bush and his national security strongly implied it.

"Iraq continues to flaunt its hostility toward America and to support terror," Bush told Congress in January 2002. "... The Iraqi regime has plotted to develop anthrax, and nerve gas and nuclear weapons."

Bush also asked Congress to "imagine those 19 hijackers [on Sept. 11, 2001] with other weapons and other plans, this time armed by Saddam Hussein." Just before the AUMF of 2002 was debated, national security adviser Condoleezza Rice warned the U.S. could not wait to find "a smoking gun" because it might be "a mushroom cloud."

So the Iraq AUMF was approved by a vote of 296-133 in the House and 77-23 in the Senate. Only six Republicans voted no in the House and just one in the Senate. A majority of Democrats in the House were opposed (126-81). But in the Senate, the majority of Democrats voted yes (29-21). There was one Independent vote against the resolution in each chamber.

Tracing a familiar track with tragic results

In all this, the trajectory of the Iraq War as an issue in domestic politics tracked the precedent set by the Vietnam War.

The Tonkin Resolution was named for a bay on the Vietnamese coast where torpedo boats were alleged to have attacked U.S. warships. Johnson persuaded Congress the national honor was at stake and Vietnam was the key to stopping the advance of global communism. Congress passed a resolution saying he could "take all necessary measures" to protect U.S. interests in Vietnam. The House voted unanimously for it, and only two members of the Senate opposed it.

In 1970, the Senate vote to repeal it was 81-10. (The lopsided vote for Tonkin in 1964 was nearly matched by the vote for the September 2001 AUMF against terrorists, which had one House member, Democrat Barbara Lee of California, opposed and two senators not voting.)

Back in 1964, Johnson had his Tonkin authority and public support (he won a full term in the White House that November with 60% of the popular vote). Soon, he was escalating the war until half a million U.S. personnel were in Vietnam. Draft orders soared, protests proliferated, and support on Capitol Hill deteriorated.

Although popular at first, Johnson's war became an albatross. He aborted his bid for a second elected term in 1968.

Two years later, Johnson's Republican successor Richard Nixon was trying to wind down U.S. involvement in Vietnam and did not want to defend the Tonkin resolution. The leaders in both parties in Congress were ready to have it off the books so as to assert more oversight on presidential war-making.

Attempts in that direction were made in the years that followed, including the passage of the War Powers Resolution in 1973. But presidents continued to find ways around Capitol Hill in the decades to come, especially after the life-changing experience of Sept. 11, 2001.

The 2002 Iraq vote cast a long shadow on domestic politics

Any comparison to Vietnam seemed far-fetched when Congress went along with Bush on Iraq in 2002. The initial invasion was successful: Baghdad fell and the Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein went into hiding (later to be captured, tried and executed).

But the occupation that followed was awkward at best, breeding far greater resistance among Iraqis than Bush administration planners had expected. Even those glad to be rid of Saddam chafed at the presence of a foreign army.

Over time, support waned back at home, as well. The war paid the U.S. no visible dividends and made no new friends. Multiple polls measured support above 70% in the month of the invasion, but below 50% by the summer of 2004. It has remained under water ever since.

While Bush survived to be reelected in 2004, he came close to losing in the Electoral College. He had the protection, too, of noting that his Democratic opponent John Kerry, a Democratic senator from Massachusetts, had voted for the Iraq authorization — as had Kerry's running mate John Edwards of North Carolina.

But two years later, Democrats stormed to majorities in both chambers of Congress in 2006 for the first time in 12 years. The central issue that year: the Iraq War.

Early in 2007, as debates began among Democratic candidates for president and first-term Sen. Barack Obama used his opposition to the Iraq War as an Illinois state legislator to set himself apart from more experienced Senate colleagues — especially putative frontrunner Hillary Clinton of New York.

More than a few observers at the time noted that without that Iraq vote, Obama would not have had an actual issue to use against Clinton.

Just as Obama had made Clinton pay for her 2002 vote on Iraq, Trump used it to question her judgment in the 2016 fall campaign. Trump himself had expressed ambivalence about the Iraq War on several talk shows when it began, but he later claimed to have been against it before it even began. He has also later classed it among the "forever wars" the U.S. should never have fought.

Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, an independent running for president in 2016 and again in 2020, called the Iraq War "the worst foreign policy blunder in U.S. history." He himself had voted against the resolution in 2002 as a member of the House. But his effort to use the issue against Biden in the 2020 primaries was ultimately not successful.

As president, Biden has signaled the president would sign the repeal, which some in Congress have been pushing for years. The House passed a repeal bill in 2021 that did not get to the Senate floor. The sponsor of that House bill, as well as this year's successor version, was Democrat Barbara Lee of California.

Lee was the lone member of Congress to cast a vote against not only the 2002 Iraq resolution but also the previous AUMF against terrorists that cleared Congress three days after Sept. 11, 2001.

Comprehension Questions

1. When was the Authorization for Use of Military Force that covered the war in Afghanistan and Iraq first passed?
2. What are two similarities between the AUMF and the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution? (cite specific passages from the text in your answer)
3. Having learned about the Gulf of Tonkin and the AUMF, how would you recommend Congress grant authority to a president in the future, if faced with a similar threat or attack?

