The U.S. House and Senate passed the following resolution by an overwhelming majority on August 7, 1964, five days after the USS Maddox had been fired upon by the North Vietnamese. Asserting that there had been two unprovoked attacks, U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson ordered attacks on North Vietnamese naval bases and submitted this resolution to Congress.

The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution allowed the president to take "all necessary steps" to protect the forces of the United States and its allies. As a result, U.S. participation in Vietnam grew -- without a formal declaration of war.

Joint Resolution of Congress

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.

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