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THE CHOICES PROGRAM

*Explore the Past...Shape the Future
History and Current Issues for the Classroom*

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The Limits of Power: The United States in Vietnam



THE CHOICES PROGRAM

Explore the Past... Shape the Future

History and Current Issues for the Classroom

WATSON INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
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CHOICES for the 21st Century Education Program

November 2005

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The Choices for the 21st Century Education Program is a program of the Thomas J. Watson Jr. Institute for International Studies at Brown University.

Thomas J. Biersteker
Director, Watson Institute for International Studies

Acknowledgments

The Limits of Power: The United States in Vietnam was developed by the Choices Program with the assistance of the research staff of the Thomas J. Watson Jr. Institute for International Studies and scholars at Brown University. We wish to thank the following researchers for their invaluable input:

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The research of the Watson Institute's Critical Oral History Project on the American War in Vietnam was central to the writing of this unit. Led by James G. Blight, the Project's contributors include Robert S. McNamara, Robert K. Brigham, Thomas J. Biersteker and Herbert Y. Schandler.

We wish to thank Don Bakker of Nauset Regional High School in Eastham, Massachusetts for his work as the unit author of the first edition of *The Limits of Power: The United States in Vietnam*.

The Limits of Power: The United States in Vietnam is part of a continuing series on international public policy issues. New units are published each academic year and all units are updated regularly.

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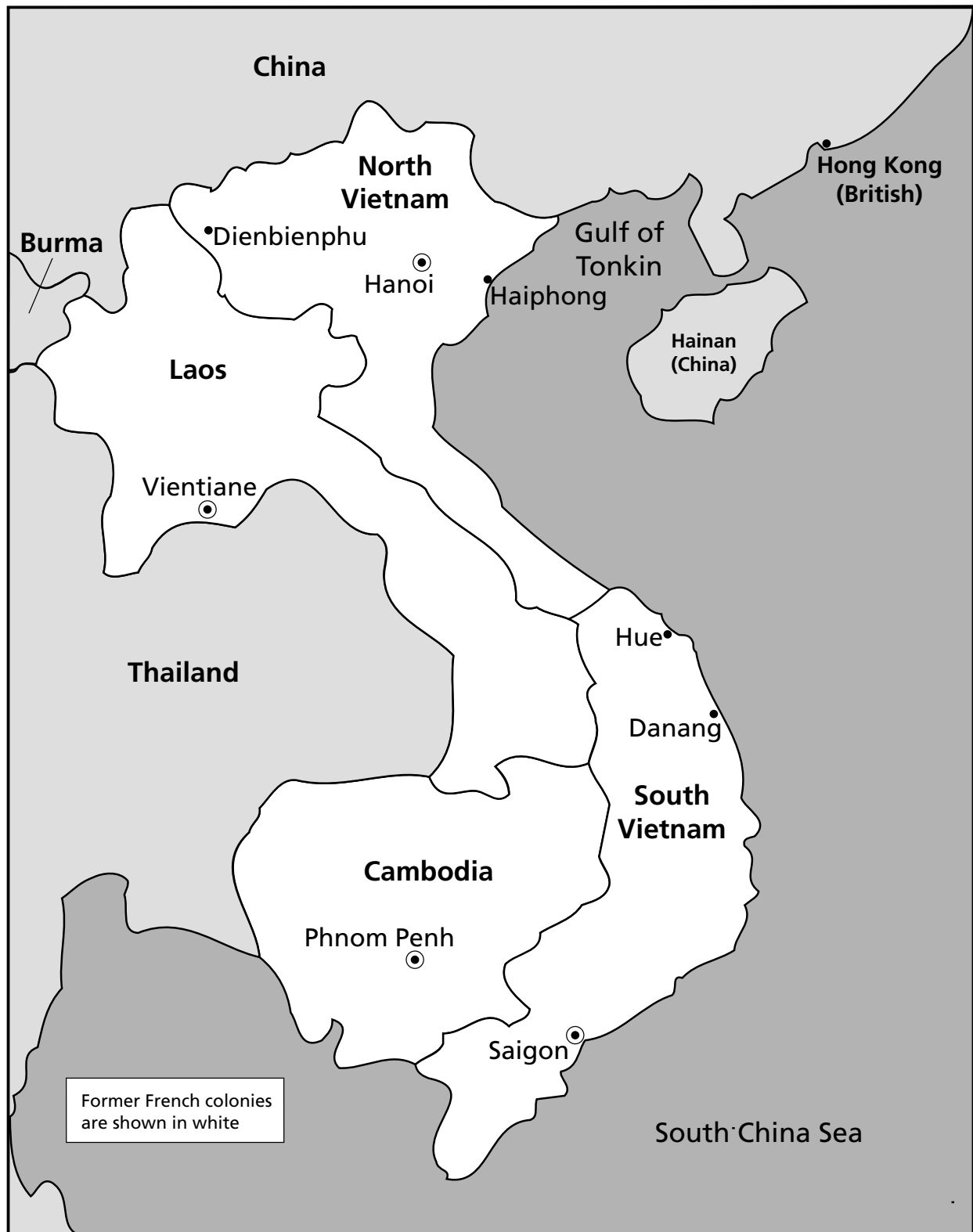
THE CHOICES FOR THE 21ST CENTURY EDUCATION PROGRAM is a program of the Watson Institute for International Studies at Brown University. CHOICES was established to help citizens think constructively about foreign policy issues, to improve participatory citizenship skills, and to encourage public judgement on policy issues.



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Southeast Asia During the Vietnam War



Introduction: Vietnam and the American Experience

The Vietnam War is different things to different people. For some Americans it conjures images of anti-war protests, draft dodgers, and M.I.A.s. Others speak about the “lessons” of Vietnam. For others it is a distant war in the distant past.

Whatever it may represent to Americans today, the Vietnam War is an important part of U.S. history. The Vietnam War changed politics, culture, and the United States itself. Hollywood has made movies about it. Musicians, poets, and scholars have all tried to understand and describe what happened.

The effects of the war have been far-reaching. The Vietnam War was even an issue during the 2004 campaign for the U.S. presidency. The United States is what it is today in part because of the American experience of the Vietnam War. But Americans understand and remember the American experience in Vietnam in different ways.

“No event in American history is more misunderstood than the Vietnam War.”

—former President Richard M. Nixon

The first step to understanding the Vietnam War is to examine how and why the U.S. government became deeply involved in a complex and costly war halfway across the globe.

This reading uses selections from speeches, articles, political cartoons, songs, and memoranda to trace events from before Americans became involved in Southeast Asia until the last military personnel left Vietnam. The documents were written by the major participants in the decision-making process. These primary sources are the raw material that historians work with when they write history. As you read, focus not only on the ideas expressed, but also on the words and phrases chosen to express them. As you study these documents, ask yourself what are the values and perceptions behind these opinions and

what are the implications of the recommendations.

In the next pages, you will follow the path of U.S. decision-makers as the drama of the Vietnam War unfolded. You will be given the information that they had at the time and you will be asked to view the world from the perspective of their values and objectives. With your classmates, you will analyze the situation in Vietnam at several key junctures and will explore the policy choices decision-makers considered. Like an earlier generation of U.S. decision-makers, you, too, will be asked to recommend what role the United States should play in Southeast Asia during the 1960s. You will have an opportunity to reenact debates and to consider questions and lessons from the period that still influence policy-makers today.



A young person traces a name etched into the Vietnam War Veterans Memorial in Washington.

Owen Franken/Time & Life Pictures/Getty Images. Used with permission.

Part I: The Cold War in Southeast Asia—1946-54

The American road to Vietnam began in early 1947 in the villages of Greece and in the mountains of Turkey. Shortly after the surrender of the Axis powers in 1945, the unity of World War II's victorious allies—the United States, Britain, France and the Soviet Union—unraveled. A conflict gradually began, pitting the Soviet Union against the United States and Britain (soon to be joined by France), over the shape of the postwar world. During the second half of 1946, U.S. decision-makers engaged in a spirited debate concerning the nature of Soviet intentions and what policies the United States should adopt toward the Soviet Union.

By early 1947, the U.S. government had reached a consensus. At the heart of the new U.S. strategy were the ideas of George Kennan, the State Department's principal expert on the Soviet Union. Kennan proposed that the United States “contain” overt Soviet military expansion and the covert Soviet use of rebellion and armed uprising to spread communist influence around the world.

The United States applied its new policy of “containment” to defeat Soviet-supported rebels in Greece and to counter Soviet political pressure against Turkey. In a speech before Congress on March 12, 1947, President Harry S. Truman outlined what would become known as the “Truman Doctrine.”

“At the present moment in world history nearly every nation must choose between alternative ways of life. The choice is too often not a free one. One way of life is based upon the will of the majority, and is distinguished by free institutions, representative government, free elections, guarantees of individual liberty, freedom of speech and religion, and freedom from political oppression. The second way of life is based upon the will of a minority forcibly imposed upon the majority. It relies upon terror and oppression,

a controlled press and radio, fixed elections, and the suppression of personal freedoms. I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.”

—President Harry S. Truman

While his speech did not refer to either the Soviet Union or communism, Truman left no doubt as to the target of his challenge. In the following years, he laid the foundations for U.S. policies during what became known as the Cold War. The Marshall Plan of 1948-1952 provided \$12.5 billion in U.S. aid to help the countries of Western Europe recover from the war. In 1948, the United States organized a massive airlift to supply West Berlin after the Soviets cut off access to the city. After the end of the Soviet blockade, the United States, Canada, and Western Europe formed in a military alliance called the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949.

By the late 1940s, U.S. decision-makers hailed the policy of containment in Europe as a success. America's leadership of the “free world” had stopped aggression in Europe. In Asia, however, the situation was very different. The defeat of the Japanese in 1945 and the weakness of the British, French, and Dutch colonial powers in Asia sparked the rise of anti-colonial and nationalist movements. At the same time, the Chinese civil war between the communists led by Mao Ze-dong and the nationalists of Chiang Kai-shek resumed with full fury. After erupting originally in the late 1920s, the conflict had smoldered during the years of Japanese aggression.

Why was the United States careful of becoming involved in China?

In contrast to its active, interventionist role in Europe, the United States was very cautious of becoming involved in China. The

United States gave economic aid and military equipment to the nationalists, but avoided deeper commitment. U.S. leaders recognized that few Americans would support a land war on the Asian mainland.

U.S. policy changed dramatically after the communists drove the nationalist forces from mainland China in September 1949 and proclaimed the People's Republic of China. The U.S. government believed the new communist leaders were puppets of the Soviet Union. In response, the United States denied the communist government's legitimacy, refused to have any dealings with it, and blocked its takeover of the seat reserved for China in the United Nations.

Why did France become involved militarily in Indochina?

After World War II, France attempted to reassert its control over French colonial possessions in Indochina (Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia). During the Japanese occupation, a Vietnamese anti-colonial movement led by Ho Chi Minh had grown in strength. In September 1945, less than a month after the Japanese surrender, Ho Chi Minh declared Vietnam's independence from France in a speech patterned after the American Declaration of Independence. Temporary agreements struck after the war between the French and Ho Chi Minh's forces soon broke down, with each side blaming the other. By December 1946, a full-blown insurgency campaign by Ho's forces, the Vietminh, was underway. The French attempt to set up a competing Vietnamese government under French protection and headed by the emperor Bao Dai did little to stop the growth of the insurgency. In January 1950, the Vietminh officially proclaimed the "Democratic Republic of Vietnam." Only communist China, the Soviet Union, and the communist countries of Eastern Europe extended diplomatic recognition to the Vietminh government. The United States ignored the new republic.

French armed forces in Southeast Asia soon numbered more than 150,000, while French casualties and financial costs steadily mounted.

By the spring of 1954, more than 92,000 troops had died fighting for the French Union Forces. While most of these casualties were Africans from French colonial possessions, Indochinese, and Foreign Legionnaires, nearly 21,000 Frenchmen had died. The loss of 8,200 French officers and noncommissioned officers exceeded the rate at which officers were graduating from French military colleges. French efforts to transfer the burden of the fighting to the Vietnamese army under Bao Dai (a policy that the French called "yellowing") proved unsuccessful. Many of the Vietnamese troops either deserted to the Vietminh or showed little enthusiasm for carrying on the fight to preserve French colonial rule. As France's counter-insurgency plans sputtered, much of the Vietnamese countryside, both in the north and in the south, came under Vietminh control.

What attitude did the United States have toward France's involvement in Indochina?

In the United States, there was little interest at first in the French colonial war in Indochina. Even before the defeat of the Japanese in World War II, President Franklin D. Roosevelt (1933-1945) and other U.S. leaders criticized French colonial practices.

"I [have] for over a year expressed the opinion that Indochina should not go back to France but that it should be administered by an international trusteeship. France has had the country—thirty million inhabitants—for nearly one hundred years, and the people are worse off than they were at the beginning."

—President Franklin D. Roosevelt

Since their own history was rooted in a long struggle against colonial rule during the eighteenth century, many Americans were sympathetic to the aspirations of the Vietnamese, even though they had little knowledge of Ho Chi Minh, the Vietminh, and what they stood for. Typical were the remarks of a young congressman and future president from Mas-

sachusetts, John F. Kennedy, who declared shortly after the war in Indochina had begun: “The United States must not ally itself with a colonial regime that [has] no real support from the people. The single most powerful force in the world is man’s desire to be free.”

What events led the United States to change its perspective on Southeast Asia?

The Chinese communist conquest of the Chinese mainland in October 1949 and the communist North Korean invasion of South Korea on June 25, 1950 changed the U.S. perspective on the war in Indochina and led to the first of many U.S. commitments in the area. The decision to send U.S. forces to the Korean peninsula was a particularly decisive turning point. Previously, U.S. defense strategists had defined a “strategic island defense perimeter” stretching from the Aleutian Islands down through Japan, Taiwan, and the Philippines to Australia and New Zealand. Although South Korea fell outside the perimeter, President Truman reacted to the North Korean invasion by asserting that “they [the communists] won’t get away with it! Period!” Similarly, Truman announced two days later that U.S. military aid would be provided to the French government and that a U.S. military mission would be sent to Indochina to advise the French forces.

In December 1950, the U.S. government signed the Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement with France and the governments under French control in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. The United States no longer saw the war in Indochina as a colonial war having little im-



pact on American strategic interests. Instead, the government viewed it as part of the U.S. effort to contain the influence of communism in Asia. U.S. economic and military aid to France soon paid for nearly 80 percent of France’s cost of the war. Uncomfortable with the apparent role of supporting a colonial power, U.S. leaders continually prodded the French to grant real independence to the Vietnamese. The French, who were fighting to preserve their colonial empire, refused to accept the American advice.

The United States and its allies in the United Nations (UN) fought in Korea from June 1950 until they reached an armistice in July 1953. American and UN casualties rose sharply when regular units of the Chinese People’s Army intervened in the conflict. As Chinese leaders had threatened, China acted

after UN forces crossed the 38th parallel and entered North Korea. Initially, the United States had sought to unite North and South Korea, thereby punishing the aggressors in North Korea.

China's entry into the war forced a stalemate. U.S. leaders backed away from their original goal, fearing that the war might escalate further. Meanwhile, the American people became disillusioned, and public support for U.S. involvement dropped from a clear majority to about 30 percent of the American people. Although neither President Truman nor President Dwight D. Eisenhower had requested a declaration of war from Congress for U.S. action in Korea, the U.S. "police effort" involved nearly 5.8 million American troops. The loss of nearly thirty-four thousand American lives in combat and an additional twenty thousand lives due to accidents and disease suggested to many that the United States should not fight a land war for limited objectives on the Asian mainland.

How did the end of the Korean War put pressure on France?

The armistice that ended the Korean War left the borders on the peninsula unchanged. For the French government, the war's conclusion brought increasing pressure at home to end the conflict in Indochina.

A letter from Ho Chi Minh in November 1953 seemed to offer the possibility of a negotiated settlement. While Ho reaffirmed the intention of the Vietminh to fight to victory, he also suggested that if the French government wished "to bring about an armistice and solve the Vietnam problem through negotiations, the people and government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam will be prepared to discuss the French proposal." Ho's letter fanned political controversy by referring to the widespread resentment within France of U.S. policies and to the possibility of a rearmed and powerful Germany.

"Today it is not only the independence of Vietnam that is exposed to serious attacks. Even the independence of France is being seriously threatened. On the one hand, American Imperialism is making French Colonialists carry on and extend the war of conquest in Vietnam for the purpose of rendering France weaker and weaker and taking over her position in Vietnam. On the other hand, the American Imperialists are forcing France to sign the EDC* pact which implies that German militarism will be reborn."

—Ho Chi Minh

What was the "Navarre Plan"?

While tempted by the promise of a negotiated settlement to the war, the French continued to pursue the "Navarre Plan"—a strategy designed by the French commander in Indochina to crush the insurgency. General Henri Navarre's plan called for a dramatic buildup in the French Union forces, primarily by increasing the Vietnamese forces fighting for the French, and for the construction of strong strategic positions from which the French could block the movement of Vietminh forces and strike at their rear supply bases. With his declaration that, "now we can see it [victory] clearly—like light at the end of the tunnel," the general boosted the spirits of French people who refused to accept the loss of any part of their empire.

In November 1953, General Navarre daringly ordered six battalions of the French Union forces to be dropped into the valley at Dienbienphu, a mountainous region near the Laotian border in northwest Vietnam. Navarre hoped that his forces would block the Vietminh army from entering Laos and capturing positions on the upper Mekong River. Although the French position could be reinforced only by air, Navarre aimed to lure the Vietminh into a conventional battle in

*The EDC, or European Defense Community, was a U.S.-supported security pact directed against the Soviets that would have brought a rebuilt, powerful German army into Western defense plans.

which superior French air power and artillery would overwhelm its army. For seven years, the Vietminh had worn down the French with hit-and-run attacks. Navarre's goal was to force the Vietminh to fight on French terms—engaging in a contest of firepower and entrenched positions.

Why did France lose at Dienbienphu?

Unfortunately for the French, the Vietminh leader, General Vo Nguyen Giap, brilliantly countered their carefully laid plans. Strengthened by fresh supplies and artillery brought from China, Giap quickly deployed his forces—thirty-three infantry battalions and six regiments of artillery—in the hills surrounding the French position. The French high command had not believed it possible that the Vietminh could bring artillery to the tops of these hills. When the first salvos fell on the airplane landing strips that were the French forces' only link to the outside world, it was clear that the French battalions were trapped. Moreover, anti-aircraft guns the Vietminh obtained from the Chinese neutralized France's air power. The plight of the doomed French army at Dienbienphu would occupy the attention of much of the world for the next four months, as daily press reports and diagrams of the battlefield traced the dwindling perimeter of the French position.

Meanwhile, the British and Soviets, who shared a strong interest in ending the war in Southeast Asia, organized an international peace conference in Geneva during the spring of 1954. Britain, the Soviet Union, France, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam representing the Vietminh, the United States, delegations representing the royal governments of Laos and Cambodia (which were supported by the French), a delegation from the French-supported Republic of Vietnam, and the Chinese People's Republic participated. For China, attendance at this conference boosted its international image, which had suffered because of China's intervention in the Korean War.



Indochina at the time of the 1954 Geneva Conference.

Why was the United States reluctant to participate in the peace conference?

The United States was very reluctant to participate in this conference for two reasons. First, the United States had consistently denounced the Chinese communists as puppets of Moscow and as international bandits whom they would neither recognize diplomatically nor deal with in any manner. Second, unlike the British and the French, who were reconciled to at least a partial communist victory in Indochina, U.S. leaders refused to consider the loss of any additional land to communist control.

In fact, as the siege at Dienbienphu tightened during the months leading up to the conference, U.S.-French discussions touched on the possibility of employing American forces to reverse the communist tide in Indochina. Plans the U.S. military suggested included the use of American air power, including nuclear weapons, to relieve the garrison at Dienbienphu, followed by the introduction

of U.S. warships and ground troops to bolster the French effort in Indochina. This plan was ultimately rejected, primarily because of strong British opposition to any joint intervention. There were other reasons leaders rejected the plan. The U.S. Army chief of staff, General Matthew Ridgway, had reservations about fighting a ground war in Asia. President Eisenhower refused to act without congressional approval; congressional approval was unlikely after congressional leaders discovered that

the British would not join the plan. Finally, France was cool to the proposal when it realized that the United States expected it to grant the nations of Indochina full independence.

The last French position at Dienbienphu surrendered on May 7, 1954 to the Vietminh. The following day, the Geneva Conference formally opened. While the French government still had several hundred thousand troops in Indochina, the French will to continue the struggle had been lost at Dienbienphu.

Background Briefing Democratic Republic of Vietnam (Vietminh)

The day of liberation for the Vietnamese people is finally here! After a century-long struggle, the Vietnamese people, led by the Vietminh, have defeated decisively the forces of colonialism and imperialism. Total military victory and national independence are within our reach.

For the past eight years, the Vietnamese people have been fighting single-handedly the French imperialists and their lackeys in Vietnam. Shortly after our leader, Ho Chi Minh, raised the banner of independence in September 1945, we requested that the United States and Britain support the idea of Vietnamese independence and “take steps necessary for the maintenance of world peace which is being endangered by French efforts to reconquer Indochina.” Our pleas for Western and United Nations’ assistance went unheeded. We were forced to fight on our own against an enemy with superior forces and superior weaponry. The courage of our men and women and the superior tactics of our leaders have turned the tide of battle and brought about the historically inevitable triumph of the people and the humiliation of the imperialists. Despite the huge amounts of money and war materials that the United States has sent the French and that were used to kill and maim the Vietnamese people and keep them in bondage, the imperialists are now on the run and know that their days are numbered.

Our objective is the total expulsion of the colonial forces and the establishment of communist governments in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. In addition, steps must be taken to prevent the warmongering Americans from establishing counter-revolutionary bases in the area. Such provocative actions by the chief imperialist power would threaten the safety of the people’s governments and endanger world peace. While the French and British colonial

powers have reluctantly recognized the triumph of the people’s movements in Southeast Asia, the United States insists upon denying the justness and reality of the people’s victory. American obstructionism in Asia has prevented the Chinese People’s Republic from taking its rightful place among the sovereign nations of the world, and American threats have prevented Western nations from recognizing the Democratic Republic of Vietnam since it was proclaimed in 1950.

France must immediately recognize the full sovereignty and independence of Vietnam and the full sovereignty and independence of Pathet Lao [communist forces in Laos] and Khmer [communist forces in Cambodia]. All foreign troops must withdraw from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos immediately and free elections must be organized to form a democratic government in each country. Vietnam must not be divided. The Vietnamese people are one. Our Chinese brothers have been encouraging us to accept a temporary military settlement that would leave southern Vietnam still under the control of the imperialist lackeys. We object to such a resolution, but if necessary to bring about an end to the French presence in Indochina, we would reluctantly accept it. The Chinese People’s Republic has been our faithful ally throughout this long struggle and we must respect the opinions of its leaders. However, assurances must be given that elections will be held soon to provide for the unification of the Vietnamese people under a truly representative people’s government. While a military solution may precede a political settlement, the latter must not be put off indefinitely. The goal of a free, unified Vietnam that we are about to achieve on the battlefield must not be lost at the conference table in Geneva.

From the Historical Record

Speech by Ho Chi Minh declaring Vietnamese independence from the French, September 2, 1945

“We hold the truth that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, among them life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.’ This immortal statement was made in the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America.... The Declaration of the French Revolution made in 1791 on the Rights of Man and the Citizen also states ‘All men are born free and with equal rights, and must always remain free and have equal rights...’ Nevertheless, for more than eight years, the French imperialists, abusing the standard of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, have violated our Fatherland and oppressed our fellow-citizens. They have acted contrary to the ideals of humanity and justice. In the field of politics, they have deprived our people of every democratic liberty.... For these reasons, we, members of the Provisional Government, representing the whole Vietnamese people, declare that from now on we break off all relations of a colonial character with France.... The whole Vietnamese people, animated by a common purpose, are determined to fight to the bitter end against any attempt by the French colonialists to reconquer their country. We are convinced that the Allied nations, which at Tehran and San Francisco have acknowledged the principles of self-determination and equality of nations, will not refuse to acknowledge the independence of Vietnam.”

Comments by Ho Chi Minh, fall of 1945

“[The Americans] are only interested in replacing the French.... They want to reorganize our economy in order to control it. They are capitalists to the core. All that counts for them is business.”

Press release by representatives of Vietminh, January 6, 1947

“THE VIETNAM STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE. At a time when the democratic powers have just emerged from a long war

against Fascism, Vietnam, victim of French colonial aggression, must still defend itself with arms. It is no longer necessary to emphasize the misdeeds and crimes of that particular form of colonialism, its constant and deliberate attempt to poison an entire people with alcohol and opium, its policy of exploitation, pressure, and obscurantism imposed upon Vietnam by a handful of colonialists and from which the French people themselves have derived no real benefit. Suffice it to recall that since the French conquest more than three-quarters of a century ago, the people of Vietnam have never ceased striving to regain their independence. The long list of uprisings and revolts, although harshly quelled, have marked this painful period with interruption and have demonstrated the invincible strength of our national spirit.... VIETNAM APPEALS TO THE WORLD. The era of colonial conquest and domination is over. Vietnam is firmly resolved to the very end in her struggle for her most sacred rights, viz., the territorial integrity of her country and her political independence.”

Statement of Vietminh strategy, issued during the early years of the war

“The general strategic line to be followed by our resistance is protracted warfare. An agricultural country, we are brought into conflict with an industrial country. With rudimentary weapons we are fighting an enemy equipped with aircraft, armour, warships.... We know how to preserve and increase our strength, season our army and give military training to our people, if we learn to wage war while carrying out our combat operations, we shall obtain what we lacked at the beginning, and though weak at first, we shall become strong. By decimating, harassing, demoralizing the enemy, we shall turn the tide. Losing his initial superiority, the enemy, a victor at the start, will be vanquished in the end. If we prolong the war, our strength will increase; that of the enemy will dwindle, the poor morale of his troops will sink ever deeper, the serious financial problems saddled on him will be ever more aggravated. The

more we fight on, the closer national unity will grow and the stronger the support of the world democratic forces. On the other hand, in France itself, the enemy will be ever more hampered by the popular movement against war and for democracy; the revolutionary upsurge in his colonies will force him to scatter his forces; his isolation in the international arena will worsen. To get at this result, we need time. Time is for us.”

Statements by Pham Van Dong, head of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRVN) delegation, May 1954

“[The DRVN proposes] recognition by France of the sovereignty and independence of Viet-Nam over the whole territory of Viet-Nam.... Conclusion of an agreement on the withdrawal of all foreign troops from the territories of Viet-Nam, Khmer [Cambodia] and Pathet Lao [Laos].... Organization of free, general elections in Viet-Nam, in Khmer and Pathet Lao in order to form a single govern-

ment in each country.... Conferences will take all measures to guarantee the free activity of patriotic parties, groups, and social organizations. No foreign intervention will be allowed.... A complete and simultaneous cease-fire over all the territory of Indochina by all the armed forces—land, sea, and air—of the belligerent parties.... Complete cessation of all introduction into Indochina of new military units...of all kinds of arms and munitions... establishment of a control [commission] to assure the execution of the provisions of the agreement on the cessation of hostilities.... It is common knowledge that in order to reestablish peace in Indochina, it is necessary to put an end to the provision by the United States of arms and munitions to Indochina, to recall the American missions, advisers, and military instructors, and to cease all intervention by the United States, in whatever form, in the affairs of Indochina.”

Background Briefing—France

The political and economic survival of France are at risk because of the situation in Indochina. The economic costs of the war, which has been going on for eight years, have been draining the French treasury and preventing our full economic recovery from the ravages of the war against Germany. Nearly two trillion francs have been spent on this war. This is more than twice the amount of total aid received from the U.S. Marshall Plan. Our officer corps has been decimated, with more than 8,200 killed, and our military colleges cannot graduate enough officers to replace those killed and disabled. We are unable to fulfill our commitments to the defense of Europe because of the burdens of this war. Our political life has been disrupted and governments have fallen because of public discontent. Pierre Mendes-France, our new premier, has pledged to bring the war to a close within thirty days or he will resign. Only the sending of French draftees to Indochina can guarantee the security of our forces already there, and we know that the French people will not tolerate this. While the dangers of allowing this strategic area to fall under communist control are very great, and the loss of this valuable part of the French empire cannot help but inflict deep and lasting wounds, we can no longer continue the struggle. Our nation's future is at stake!

The century-long role of France in Indochina should never be a source of shame for our country. On the contrary, we have brought the blessings of modern administration, medicine, economic development, and, of course, French culture and values. All Vietnamese, not just those who have been enlightened by French education, have benefited from our guidance. Long before the Americans recognized the dangers of communist aggression in Asia, we were fighting to halt the encroachment of communism into Southeast Asia. Until 1950, we fought this battle alone, suffering the unjustified criticisms of our allies. Although the United States since June 1950 has contributed part of the costs of the war, the blood shed in Indochina has been French, not

American. Ambiguous, last-minute offers from the United States to send ships, warplanes, and perhaps even troops have come too late. Much earlier American attitudes fatally undermined French rule in Indochina, and we cannot but suspect that the United States intends to take our place in this resource-rich area of the world. The tragic outcome of this war cannot, however, dim the glory achieved by the French soldiers, administrators, and educators who have contributed so much to Indochina during the century of enlightened French guardianship.

Our objectives are to end the financial and human costs of the war, to limit the gains of the communists, and to retain as much French influence in the area as possible. We fear that if the communists at this conference achieve the total victory they have been unable to gain on the battlefield, then all of Southeast Asia will be lost to communism. The smaller states will be unable to resist the pressure from their communist neighbors. French economic and political interests can be protected by limiting the area ceded to communist control and by strengthening those areas that can be denied to the communists. The conference in Geneva should limit itself to the resolution of the military situation and defer to the future the resolution of the more difficult political issues.

The aggressive appetites of the Vietminh and the Chinese communists who have supported them will not be satisfied for long with a partial victory. Now that the eyes of the British and Americans have been opened to this threat, we hope that collective actions can be taken to check the spread of communist influence. In particular, it is necessary that the United States, which has made no secret of its reluctance to attend this conference and participate in its deliberations, commit itself to guaranteeing the settlement which is achieved here. Only the Americans have the resources to stabilize the situation.

An immediate cease-fire and regrouping of the respective forces is necessary, followed by

the exchange of prisoners of war. A temporary military division of Vietnam along the 18th parallel could be made. We wish, in addition, to preserve an enclave in the Red River delta, near Hanoi. Vietnamese who wish to relocate south and thus avoid being subjected

to communist control should have that right. Elections to settle the political future of all of Vietnam should be held no sooner than eighteen months after the cease-fire to allow the ravages of war to heal.

From the Historical Record

Article by Jacques Soustelle, a leading spokesman for the French Gaullist party, October 1950

“The United States has been fighting in Korea since June 26, 1950, and France has been fighting in Indochina since December 19, 1946. The two conflicts differ from each other in many ways. However, each clearly has a place in the same strategic and political complex. They share a common factor. Each results from the expansion of Soviet power toward the sea, pushing its satellites ahead, and exploiting against the West the nationalism, even xenophobia of the Asiatic masses.... When the Japanese themselves were forced to acknowledge their defeat, there were no more French cadres, no organized French force, either in Asia (near Indochina) or in the interior of Indochina itself. This combination of circumstances accounts for the importance suddenly assumed by the Viet Minh.... The Viet Minh also received arms, and in large quantities, from the Japanese when the latter realized that they had lost.... The Viet Minh made its appearance, proclaimed the ‘Democratic Republic of Viet Nam’ and set about entrenching itself and digging in at Tonkin before the French could return.... Too often there is a tendency to believe that France had done little or nothing for Indochina and the Indochinese. In fact, the economic development of Indochina had made great progress since the beginning of this century.... It cannot fairly be denied that this progress has benefited the many, and not only an oligarchy of French origin.... France did not neglect her duties towards the Indochinese in the cultural field.... And it is to be remarked that these French educational activities gave large scope to primarily Indochinese subjects.... France did all that was in her power for the people of Indochina...except to open

to them the road to self government...[because] the French carried their respect for the historical and local structure to excess.... I believe that no one, even the Indochinese themselves, could have done for Indochina what France has done. But a tragic inadequacy in the growth of the political structure of the country created discontent within the new native elite. This Communism has been able to exploit.... The Viet Minh is the pawn which the Kremlin [Soviet leaders] is moving up on the Indochinese chessboard.... Ho Chi Minh [has] acted as an agent of a global policy, the double purpose of which was and remains, first, to weaken France in Europe by forcing her to deflect a large part of her forces and resources to the Asian theatre; and second, to open a first breach in the Pacific front.... The war in Vietnam has cost France considerable losses in manpower and an enormous financial burden.... This unsettles French public opinion and seriously undermines the country’s strength and influence in Europe.... If the front held by France in Indochina were destroyed, the position of opponents of Communism in Malaya [Malaysia] and the Philippines would quickly become untenable.... It would be an Asiatic Munich. The conflict in Indochina is only a local manifestation of the resistance of peoples on the periphery of Asia to the Soviet expansion from the heart of the continent.”

Remarks made by French President Vincent Auriol, May 6 and October 25, 1952

“We are the supporting pillar of the defense of the West in Southeast Asia; if this pillar crumbles, Singapore, Malaysia and India will soon fall prey to Mao Tse-tung [Mao Zedong].... The defense of freedom in Indochina has practically cost us twice what we received

under that [Marshall] plan and in the form of military aid, 1,600 billion francs as compared to 800 billion.... And for what did our officers, our non-commissioned officers and our soldiers sacrifice themselves? For our interests? No, but for a cause which is not ours alone: for the defense of the young, associated and friendly states [Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia] to which we brought prosperity and to which we gave independence in order to defend freedom in Asia and thereby to defend freedom and security in Europe and the world.... In view of this, who can still be surprised about the reactions of this country when it is treated unjustly, when one overlooks its sacrifices or seems to minimize them, when its warnings are clearly ignored?"

Speech by French Premier Pierre Mendes-France on July 22, 1954, the last day of the Geneva Conference, in which he explains the position his government took at the conference

"The nightmare is over.... I do not want anyone to have illusions concerning the contents of the agreements.... The text is sometimes cruel, because it sanctions facts which are cruel; it was no longer possible that it should be otherwise.... If the war were to continue our [forces] would be placed in a perilous position unless it received substantial reinforcements within a short time; the dispatch of conscripts [draftees] then became a pressing necessity unless an armistice could be very rapidly concluded.... [The] results are without a doubt the best that could be hoped for in the present state of things.... The liberation of prisoners was the subject of special provisions, and I do not have to tell you how much importance the French delegation attached to them. A right of option was proclaimed and organized, so that all Vietnamese, regardless of their permanent or present residence, would be able freely to return to the zone of their choice. It was provided...by a unanimous decision of the nine participants, that the settlement would

have only a temporary character, and that the unity of the country would be reestablished as quickly as possible through general elections under international control.... The situation has on the administrative and territorial level the advantage of being clear. The evacuation by our forces of certain zones in the North has its exact counterpart in the evacuation of the Central and Southern zones occupied by the Viet Minh. The obstacles to a good administration of the country south of the 17th parallel are thus removed. Vietnam [the southern zone] can now look forward to prompt economic revival.... North of the demarcation line we face a new situation which is not without difficulties and risks. It seems to me, however, that our adversaries of yesterday, introduced in our schools to our way of thinking, could not remain insensitive to it [French ideas and culture].... The Geneva agreements obviously sanction losses already suffered or losses made inevitable by the deterioration of the military situation.... But they leave intact the possibilities which exist for France to remain in the Far East and to play her role there.... Our mission in Indochina is thus not over, but will undoubtedly take on new aspects.... It [the settlement] will be evident in an inestimable gain—by sparing the lives of our young men—and it will enable us to reinforce our military positions in Europe and in Africa.... Too long indeed were our Allies kept under illusions with regard to the potentialities of our military actions and the objectives we were able to attain. No doubt since the beginning of the year, the realities, the sad realities, have contributed to enlighten them.... Even among the Americans who were not inclined *a priori* to approve our policies, a realistic view of things prevailed. They realized that not only had the worst been avoided, but that waging war in the Far East was a heavy liability for European policy and in a more general manner for all Western policy."

Background Briefing—The People's Republic of China

The hopeless situation of the French in Indochina clearly indicates that Western imperialism is dead in Southeast Asia. The Vietnamese people are about to join their Chinese brothers in establishing a true people's democracy led by the Communist Party. To protect their hard-won triumph and to ensure that the security of the People's Republic of China is not endangered, the war in Indochina should be brought to an end. The People's Republic of China strongly supports the idea of peaceful coexistence in Asia.

The leaders of the Vietnamese people's democratic forces have correctly looked to the experience of the Chinese people who, led by the Chinese Communist Party and Mao Ze-dong, achieved victory over the forces of Western imperialism and their puppets just five years ago. The strategists of the Vietminh have followed the tactics developed by Chairman Mao to combat the better-armed and often larger forces of colonialism. By cleverly luring the enemy to extend its operations beyond its central lines, then quickly surrounding it with superior forces and cutting off its lines of retreat, the inspired and valiant people of Vietnam have recently achieved long-deserved victories in their eight-year struggle. The fate of the colonial aggressors at Dienbienphu has shown that the historically inevitable triumph over imperialism is now within reach. Since late 1949, when the People's Republic of China was established, we have supported the struggle of our Vietnamese brothers with encouragement, tactical advice, supplies, and, most recently, with military equipment. We extended diplomatic recognition to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in early 1950. While our level of aid has not approached the huge amounts of military equipment that the American warmongers have supplied to the French imperialists, our aid has made possible the recent victories of the Vietminh. We have not committed troops from the Chinese People's Army to the struggle because they have not been needed.

It is now time to end the struggle against the forces of imperialism in Asia. As Chairman Mao has taught, it is proper and necessary in the long struggle against imperialism to conclude temporary peace agreements with the enemy. Such a peace will enable the democratic forces to consolidate their gains and to prepare for the next phase. The forces of imperialism must permanently evacuate the northern part of Vietnam and recognize the Democratic Republic of Vietnam as the legitimate government there. The establishment of a democratic communist government will increase the security of the Chinese people by pushing the forces of the warmongering Americans and their lackeys further away from the territory of China.

Although the French apparently have recognized that their colonial adventure in Southeast Asia has ended, the American government continues to pursue its reactionary, aggressive policies against the peoples of Asia. Recent hints that the United States may send aircraft, ships, and armies to continue the fruitless war against the people in Vietnam—a war the United States has financed for the past few years—demonstrate how dangerous and irrational the imperialists can be when they sense that the people are on the verge of triumph. Fortunately, the French and British imperialists have shown no interest in these U.S. threats. While the Vietminh can justify the liberation of all of Vietnam, for tactical reasons it is necessary that they accept for the moment control only over the northern half of their country. Unification with the people of southern Vietnam can be accomplished by peaceful means within a short period of time. Above all, care must be taken not to provoke the Americans to dangerous, irresponsible actions, such as their invasion of the Democratic Republic of Korea four years ago.

The People's Republic of China calls for an immediate cease-fire in Indochina, the return of all prisoners of war, and the immediate withdrawal of French forces from Indochina.

Guarantees that would prevent the Americans from establishing a counter-revolutionary, colonial outpost in southern Vietnam are necessary. While we believe that the conflicts in Laos and Cambodia, and the legitimacy of the Pathet Lao [communist forces in Laos] and Khmer Issarak [communist forces in Cambodia], should be addressed at the conference in Geneva, in the interests of achieving peace

we will encourage our Vietnamese brothers to withdraw their forces from Laos and Cambodia. Since future problems in Asia cannot be resolved without the rightful participation of the Chinese people, the U.S. government must recognize the People's Republic of China as the legitimate government of China and allow us to take our seat rightfully in the United Nations.

From the Historical Record

Book by Chairman Mao Ze-dong, On the Protracted War, written in 1938 and republished in 1951

"Because the enemy force, though small, is strong (in equipment and the training of officers and men) while our own force, though big, is weak (only in equipment and the training of officers and men but not in morale), we should, in campaign and battle operations, not only employ a big force to attack from an exterior line a small force on the interior line, but also adopt the aim of quick decision. To achieve quick decision we should generally attack, not an enemy force holding a position, but one on the move. We should have concentrated, beforehand and under cover, a big force along the route through which the enemy is sure to pass, suddenly descend on him while he is moving, encircle and attack him before he knows what is happening, and conclude the fighting with all speed. If the battle is well fought, we may annihilate the entire enemy force or the greater part or a part of it. Even if the battle is not well fought, we may still inflict heavy casualties."

Articles by Chairman Mao Ze-dong, January and April, 1940

"In the international situation the 'heroes' in the colonies and semi-colonies must either stand on the side of the imperialist front and become part of the force of world counter-revolution or stand on the side of the anti-imperialist front and become part of the force of world revolution. They must stand either on this side or on the other, for there is no third choice.... After we have repulsed the attack...and before a new one [begins], we

should stop at the proper moment and bring that particular fight to a close.... Then we should on our own initiative seek unity with the [enemy] and, upon his consent conclude a peace agreement.... Herein lies the temporary nature of every particular struggle."

Remarks by Chairman Mao Ze-dong, August 11, 1949

"Disrupt, fail, disrupt again, fail again, till their doom—that is the logic of imperialism and all reactionaries in the world. They will certainly not go against this logic. This is a Marxist law. We say: 'Imperialism is very vicious.' That means that its fundamental nature cannot be changed. Till their doom, the imperialist elements will not lay down the butcher's knife, nor will they ever turn into Buddhas..."

Speeches by Communist Party spokesman Liu Shao-ch'i, November 3, 16, and 23, 1949

"[The Chinese working class needs] to shoulder the grave responsibility of assisting the working class and working people of capitalist countries and especially of colonial and semi-colonial countries in Asia and Australia. The victorious Chinese working class cannot and must not evade this honorable international responsibility.... The path taken by the Chinese people in defeating imperialism and its lackeys and in founding the People's Republic of China is the path that should be taken by the peoples of the various colonial and semi-colonial countries in their fight for national independence and people's democracy.... The war of national liberation in Viet

Nam has liberated 90 percent of her territory.... The national liberation movement and the people's democratic movement in the colonies and semi-colonies will never stop short of complete victory. Their struggles are entirely righteous.... The great victory of the Chinese people has set them the best example."

Official Chinese publications, August 26 and September 25, 1950 (Note: While these articles refer specifically to the situation in Korea, Vietnam is also on China's border and has traditionally been a focus of Chinese security concerns.)

"The barbarous action of American imperialism and its hangers-on in invading Korea not only menaces peace in Asia and the world in general but seriously threatens the security of China in particular. The Chinese people cannot allow such aggressive acts of American imperialism in Korea. To settle the Korean question peacefully, first the opinions of the Korean people and next the opinions of the Chinese people must be heard.... No Asian affairs can be solved without the participation of the Chinese people. It is impossible to solve the Korean problem without the participation of its closest neighbor, China...North Korea's friends are our friends. North Korea's enemy is our enemy. North Korea's defense is our defense. North Korea's victory is our victory ...We Chinese people are against the American imperialists because they are against us. They

have openly become the arch enemy of the People's Republic of China by supporting the people's enemy, the Chiang Kai-shek clique, by sending a huge fleet to prevent the liberation of the Chinese territory of Taiwan, by repeated air intrusions and strafing and bombing of the Chinese people, by refusing new China a seat in the U.N., through intrigues with their satellite nations, by rearing up a fascist power in Japan, and by rearming Japan for the purpose of expanding aggressive war. Is it not just for us to support our friend and neighbor against our enemy? The American warmongers are mistaken in thinking that their accusations and threats will intimidate the people of China."

Articles in People's Daily, April 21 and May 9, 1954

"We do not commit aggression against others and [we] are firmly opposed to aggressive action by anyone else.... We advocate peace and oppose war. But we certainly will not take it lying down if someone else's armed aggression is directed against us.... [The American Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff] has proposed sending aircraft carriers and planes to participate directly in the Indochina war, and [Vice President Nixon] has actually shouted about dispatching American ground forces to Indochina.... The time is ripe for ending the war in Indochina."

Background Briefing—The United States

The survival of the free nations of Southeast Asia is endangered today. The United States will not allow another nation to fall under the control of international communism. Should part of Indochina be placed permanently under communist control, such a regime, taking its directions from the Soviets and China, will seek to subvert its neighbors. Just as a row of dominos will topple if one is knocked down, so the young and vulnerable free nations of Southeast Asia will fall to the communists. The security of the United States and its vital interests in this area require that this be prevented. Should we fail, the free world would suffer a major blow and the forces of communist aggression would be strengthened.

The United States is deeply sympathetic to the attempts by people who have been ruled by European colonial powers to achieve their national independence. Because of our own heritage, we can identify with their aspirations. However, in Southeast Asia the forces of nationalism have been subverted by international communism. The Vietminh are not fighting for Vietnamese freedom and independence; they are merely pawns of Soviet and Chinese communists. No matter how hard they may attempt to conceal it, they are aided and directed by Moscow and Beijing. North Korea's unprovoked invasion of South Korea revealed the ugly face of communist aggression in Asia. At that time, the United States took a firm stand to halt the spread of communism in Asia, and we strongly urge that the Western powers take a firm stand in Indochina today to halt communist aggression there. Since 1950, we have been supplying the French with economic and military aid to fight the communists. We have spent nearly \$3 billion of our taxpayers' money to finance this war. Unfortunately, France's reluctance to pledge full independence for the people of Indochina has been an obstacle in its struggle to defeat the Vietminh. More than 150,000 Vietnamese were drafted to fight with the French forces, and all but nine thousand successfully avoided the

call to service, an indicator of the weakness of native loyalties for the French.

While the recent French loss of the garrison at Dienbienphu is a serious blow to the anti-communist struggle, its impact should not be overestimated. To defeat the communists, the United States is willing to send American planes, ships, and ground troops to Indochina, provided the British and French agree to a joint effort. The Republican Party's platform in 1952 pledged that the United States would not sanction any further territorial gains through communist aggression. This administration intends to stand by that commitment. We hope that our allies in London and Paris share these sentiments.

The real evil force behind communist aggression in Southeast Asia is Red China. This bandit regime, imposed by force of arms on the Chinese people, is a puppet government, responding to its master in Moscow. We refuse to recognize the legitimacy of this illegal regime and we will not deal with it in any manner that would imply approval or acceptance. Its treachery and aggressive designs were revealed to the world in Korea. We will continue to support the legitimate government of China, currently in temporary exile in Taiwan, and we will block any attempt by the Soviets to give Red China a seat in the United Nations. After all, only three years ago the United Nations branded Red China as the aggressor in Korea.

If we cannot persuade our allies to join us in a united defense against the present communist aggression in Indochina, we will seek to minimize the territorial gains that the Vietminh will achieve at this conference. The principles that we insist upon are: that the Vietminh withdraw their forces from Cambodia and Laos and the independence of these countries be preserved; that at least the southern half of Vietnam remain free; that there be no provisions which would restrict the right of southern Vietnam to defend itself by obtaining military material and advisers

from foreign countries; that there be no political provisions which would risk the loss of southern Vietnam to communist control; and finally, that the eventual unification of a free Vietnam by peaceful means not be precluded. If the negotiated settlement does not conform to these basic principles, we shall disassociate ourselves from this conference and return

to Washington. In addition, we intend to take immediate steps to construct a mutual security defense organization (South East Asia Treaty Organization) which will halt further communist aggression in Asia just as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization has halted further communist aggression in Europe.

From the Historical Record

Testimony of Assistant Secretary of State Dean Rusk before Congress, June 1950

“This [the Indochina war] is a civil war that has been in effect captured by the [Soviet] Politburo and, besides, has been turned into a tool of the Politburo. So it isn’t a civil war in the usual sense. It is part of an international war.”

Speech by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, March 29, 1954

“Under the conditions of today, the imposition on Southeast Asia of the political system of Communist Russia and its Chinese Communist ally, by whatever means, would be a grave threat to the whole free community. The United States feels that that possibility should not be passively accepted, but should be met by united action. This might involve serious risks. But these risks are far less than those that will face us a few years from now, if we dare not to be resolute today.”

Letter by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles to President Dwight Eisenhower, April 22, 1954

“The situation here [Paris] is tragic.... There is, of course, no military or logical reason why loss of Dien Bien Phu [Dienbienphu] should lead to collapse of French will.... It seems to me that Dien Bien Phu has become a symbol out of all proportion to its military importance.”

Remarks by Vice President Richard Nixon to reporters, April 17, 1954

“More men are needed and the question is where to get them. They will not come from France, for France is tired of the war.... The

French, however, while slow in training the native soldiers, resent the idea that the United States or others should send men to do the job. More difficult is the job of spirit. Encouragement must be given to fight and resist. Some say if the French get out, the Vietnamese will fight with more spirit, because they would be fighting for their independence. But the Vietnamese lack the ability to conduct a war by themselves or govern themselves. If the French withdrew, Indochina would become Communist-dominated within a month. The United States as a leader of the free world cannot afford further retreat in Asia. It is hoped that the United States will not have to send troops there, but if this government cannot avoid it, the Administration must face up to the situation and dispatch troops. Therefore, the United States must go to Geneva and take a positive stand for united action by the free world.... This country is the only nation politically strong enough at home to take a position that will save Asia. Negotiations with the Communists to divide the territory would result in Communist domination of a vital new area.... It should be emphasized that if Indochina went Communist, Red pressure would increase on Malaya [Malaysia], Thailand, and Indonesia and other Asian nations. The main target of the Communists in Indochina, as it was in Korea, is Japan. Conquest of areas so vital to Japan’s economy would reduce Japan to an economic satellite of the Soviet Union.”

Memorandum summarizing discussion between President Dwight Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles regarding situation in Indochina, May 7, 1954

“The U.S. should (as a last act to save Indochina) propose to France that if the following five conditions are met, the U.S. will go to Congress for authority to intervene with combat forces: a) grant of genuine freedom for Associated States; b) U.S. take major responsibility for training indigenous forces; c) U.S. share responsibility for military planning; d) French forces to stay in the fight and no requirement of replacement of U.S. forces; e) action under UN auspices.”

Instructions sent by President Dwight Eisenhower to the U.S. delegation at the Geneva Conference

“You will not deal with the delegates of the Chinese Communist regime, or any other regime not now diplomatically recognized by the United States, on any terms which imply political recognition or which concede to that regime any status other than that of a regime with which it is necessary to deal on a de facto basis in order to end aggression or the threat of aggression.... The position of the United States...is that of an interested nation which, however, is neither a belligerent nor a principal in the negotiations. The United States is not prepared to give its express or implied approval to any cease-fire, armistice, or other settlement which would have the effect of subverting the existing lawful governments... or which otherwise contravened the principles stated in (4) above [these people should not be amalgamated into the Communist bloc of imperialistic dictatorship].”

Joint letter sent by President Eisenhower and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill to French government, June 29, 1954

“The United States Government/His Majesty’s Government would be willing to respect an agreement which 1) Preserves the integrity and independence of Laos and Cambodia and assures the withdrawal of Vietminh forces therefrom. 2) Preserves at least the southern half of Vietnam.... 3) Does not impose on Laos, Cambodia, or retained Vietnam [South Vietnam] any restrictions materially impairing their capacity to maintain stable non-Communist regimes; and especially restrictions impairing their right to maintain adequate forces for internal security, to import arms and to employ foreign advisers. 4) Does not contain political provisions which would risk loss of the retained area to Communist control. 5) Does not exclude the possibility of the ultimate reunification of Vietnam by peaceful means... 6) Provides effective machinery for international supervision of the agreement.”

Statement issued by a U.S. State Department spokesman, July 11, 1954

“The United States will not become a party to any agreement which smacks of appeasement. Nor will we acknowledge the legitimacy of Communist control of any segment of Southeast Asia.”

Statement by the spokesman of the U.S. delegation at the Geneva Conference, July 18, 1954

“If the agreements arrived at here are of a character which my government is able to respect, the United States is prepared to declare unilaterally that...it will refrain from the threat or use of force to disturb them, and would view any renewal of the aggression in violation of the agreements with grave concern.”

Background Briefing—Britain

It is the view of His Majesty's Government that two major issues are at stake in South-east Asia today. First, the war in Indochina must be halted before it ignites a larger conflict, potentially engulfing much of East Asia. Second, the tide of communist aggression in Southeast Asia must be turned back. If the war is not brought to a close, the British colonies of Malaysia and Hong Kong, as well as the states of the British Commonwealth of Nations in the area (Australia, New Zealand, and India) could be affected. The British government has neither the resources nor the desire to become involved in a land war in Asia. Nevertheless, it is necessary that concerted actions be taken to halt the spread of communism in Asia.

Great Britain has had vital national interests in Asia for more than one hundred years. Unlike our French allies, who seem incapable of shedding their outmoded colonial mindset, the British government has adjusted to the rising tide of genuine nationalism in Asia. India, the crown jewel of the British empire, gained its independence shortly after the last war. Where clear-cut aggression has taken place, as in Korea, the British people have taken their place alongside their American allies in defeating the forces of aggression. To protect and maintain its interests in the area, His Majesty's Government has recognized the necessity of dealing with governments with whom we do not share fundamental values. Unlike the Americans, we see no value in ignoring the obvious existence and power of the People's Republic of China and we have opened diplomatic relations with Beijing. We believe that conflicts between governments can best be resolved when the parties speak to one another. Thus, we have agreed to chair, with the Soviet Union, this conference in Geneva in the hopes that a settlement acceptable to the parties involved can be reached. We would like to see the U.S. government adopt a more constructive attitude in participating in the deliberations of the conference and in seeking a reasonable resolution to the crisis. We must all be willing to compromise for the cause of world peace.

U.S. attempts to continue the war and to expand its scope are, in the opinion of our government, unwise and dangerous. We will not join any military efforts to expand the war by sending British forces into the area, and we strongly urge the United States not to embark upon this road. The Vietminh, fighting under the banner of Vietnamese nationalism, have enjoyed widespread support among the people of Vietnam. Moreover, the Vietminh army has shown on the battlefield that it is a formidable opponent. On the other hand, the gains which the communists have achieved on the battlefield should, to the extent possible, be limited in the settlement to be negotiated. His Majesty's Government and the U.S. agree that an acceptable settlement should conform to the following principles: that the Vietminh forces evacuate Laos and Cambodia and that these countries be guaranteed their independence; that at least the southern part of Vietnam be kept non-communist; that no provisions be accepted that would substantially impair the ability of southern non-communist Vietnam to obtain military supplies and foreign advisers for its defense; that no political provisions permitting the extension of communist control over the southern part of Vietnam be included; and finally, that the possibility of eventual peaceful reunification of a free Vietnam be recognized. While we wish to see the temporary demarcation line dividing Vietnam be placed as far north as possible, we would agree to the 17th parallel. Elections should be held at least eighteen months in the future to allow the situation to stabilize.

The British government has already begun preliminary discussions with the Americans for the purpose of establishing a South East Asia Treaty Organization to act as an Asian counterpart of NATO in halting the expansion of communism. We intend to commit our military resources to this effort and to encourage the participation of Commonwealth states in the area. While a line must be drawn in Asia, it is too late to include all of Indochina on the side of the non-communist countries.

From the Historical Record

Memorandum by British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden to Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, April 30, 1954

“While we do not believe that a French collapse in Indo-China could come about as rapidly as the Americans appear to envisage, this danger reinforces the need to lay the foundations of a wider and viable defense organization for South-East Asia. We propose therefore that the United States and the United Kingdom should begin an immediate and secret joint examination of the political and military problems in creating a collective defense for South-East Asia.”

Letter by Prime Minister Winston Churchill to President Dwight Eisenhower, June 21, 1954

“I have always thought that if the French meant to fight for their empire in Indochina instead of clearing out as we did of our far greater inheritance in India, they should at least have introduced two years’ [compulsory military] service, which would have made it possible for them to use the military power of their nation. They did not do this, but fought on for eight years with untrustworthy local troops, with French cadre [officers] elements important to the structure of their home army, and with the Foreign Legion, a very large proportion of whom are Germans. The result has been thus inevitable, and personally I think Mendes-France [the French premier], whom I do not know, has made up his mind to clear out on the best terms available. If that is so, I think he is right. I have thought continually about what we ought to do in the circumstances. Here it is. There is all the more need to discuss ways and means of establishing a firm front against Communism in the Pacific sphere. We should certainly have a S.E.A.T.O. [South East Asia Treaty Organization], corresponding to N.A.T.O. [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] in the Atlantic and European sphere. In this it is important to have the support of the Asian countries. This raises the question of timing in relation to Geneva. In no foreseeable circumstances, except possibly a local rescue, could British troops be used in

Indo-China, and if we were asked our opinion we should advise against United States local intervention except for local rescue.”

Joint letter sent by Prime Minister Churchill and President Eisenhower to the French government, June 29, 1954

“The United States Government/His Majesty’s Government would be willing to respect an agreement which 1) Preserves the integrity and independence of Laos and Cambodia and assures the withdrawal of Vietminh forces therefrom. 2) Preserves at least the southern half of Vietnam.... 3) Does not impose on Laos, Cambodia, or retained Vietnam [South Vietnam] any restrictions materially impairing their capacity to maintain stable non-Communist regimes; and especially restrictions impairing their right to maintain adequate forces for internal security, to import arms and to employ foreign advisers. 4) Does not contain political provisions which would risk loss of the retained area to Communist control. 5) Does not exclude the possibility of the ultimate reunification of Vietnam by peaceful means... 6) Provides effective machinery for international supervision of the agreement.”

Joint declaration issued by the British and American governments, June 30, 1954

“We uphold the principle of self-government and will earnestly strive by every peaceful means to secure the independence of all countries whose peoples desire and are capable of sustaining an independent existence. We welcome the processes of development, where still needed, that lead to that goal. As regards formerly sovereign states now in bondage, we will not be party to any arrangement or treaty which would confirm or prolong their unwilling subordination. In the case of nations now divided against their will, we shall continue to seek to achieve unity through free elections supervised by the United Nations to insure that they are conducted fairly.”

Speech by Prime Minister Winston Churchill to Parliament, July 12, 1954

“It is hoped that should an acceptable settlement be reached on the Indo-China problem, means may be found of getting the countries which participated at the conference to underwrite it. We hope, too, that other countries with interest in the area might also subscribe to such an undertaking. This was

the basis on which the idea was put to the Americans and it is one of the problems to be examined in Washington by the Anglo-United States Study Group set up as the result of our talks.... The arrangements for collective defense in Southeast Asia will proceed whether or not agreement is reached at Geneva, though their nature will depend on the result of the conference.”

Part II: America's Deepening Commitment—1954-64

The Geneva Conference of 1954 produced a solution to the military conflict in Indochina, but did not resolve the political status of Vietnam. Hostilities halted and French forces regrouped below the 17th parallel. Within two years, they withdrew completely from Vietnam. Above the 17th parallel, in what would become known as North Vietnam, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh held undisputed power. Below the 17th parallel, the Republic of Vietnam, the former French protectorate, was led by Ngo Dinh Diem, an anti-communist Roman Catholic. Bao Dai appointed him prime minister in June 1954.

The accords signed at Geneva also called for Vietnam-wide elections to be held within two years for the purpose of achieving political unification. While the United States was clearly displeased with the apparent partial communist victory and refused to sign any formal declaration after the conference, Washington did pledge to respect the settlement and “view with grave concern any renewal of aggression in the area.” As the French withdrew from South Vietnam, their presence was replaced by the arrival of U.S. economic aid and military advisers.

Why was Diem viewed favorably in Washington?

Washington viewed Ngo Dinh Diem as the only alternative to communist control over all of Vietnam. With strong anti-communist and anti-French credentials, Diem also had the backing of the small but powerful Roman Catholic minority in South Vietnam. Many of these Catholics had fled from the north after the settlement and fiercely opposed any accommodation with the communists.

With the backing of his American advisers, Diem rejected in July 1955 the provisions of the Geneva Accords that called for Vietnam-wide elections within two years. Washington believed that the popularity of Ho Chi Minh and the Vietminh would guarantee a commu-

nist victory. Shortly thereafter, Diem defeated Bao Dai in a South Vietnamese referendum, receiving 98 percent of the vote. Diem's refusal to participate in Vietnam-wide elections by the June 1956 deadline brought no protests from either the Soviet Union or China. In fact, the Soviets proposed in 1957 that both Vietnams be admitted to the United Nations. Although it rejected this proposal, the United States continued to implement its plan to transform South Vietnam into a strong, independent, anti-communist nation which would block any further communist expansion into Southeast Asia.

How did the United States support Diem's regime?

By early 1960, the United States had sent more than \$1 billion in economic and military aid to support Diem's regime. In addition to the aid, nearly one thousand U.S. military personnel were stationed in Vietnam to serve as advisers to the Diem government and the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN).

Diem's increasingly dictatorial governing style triggered several failed coup attempts and heightened violence in the countryside. By the late 1950s, remnants of Vietminh units (now called Vietcong) in South Vietnam had begun to attack local government officials. The Vietcong campaign was supported by the National Liberation Front, a collection of groups formed in December 1960 with North Vietnam's encouragement to oppose Diem's rule. During 1961, more than four thousand government officials, mostly lower ranking village chiefs, were assassinated.

Ironically, the first Asian crisis to confront President John F. Kennedy when he took office in January 1961 was not in Vietnam, but in neighboring Laos, where a complicated civil war was raging. Britain and the Soviet Union, the co-sponsors of the 1954 Geneva Conference, organized another conference in Geneva in 1961 to resolve the Laotian situation. The negotiations resulted in an agreement to re-

spect Laos' neutrality. In contrast to the U.S. position in 1954, the Kennedy administration supported the outcome of the conference in 1961. At the same time, Kennedy had no intention of backing down from the U.S. commitment to an independent, anti-communist South Vietnam. In fact, a high-level U.S. mission headed by General Maxwell Taylor, soon to be appointed Kennedy's chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Walt Rostow, a top State Department official, went to Vietnam in October 1961 to evaluate the situation and to make recommendations for stemming the communist advance.

“...The question was how to change a losing game and begin to win, not how to call it off.”

—General Maxwell Taylor

The Taylor-Rostow report reaffirmed the U.S. commitment to South Vietnam. “If Vietnam goes,” the report argued, “it will be exceedingly difficult if not impossible to hold Southeast Asia.” General Taylor recommended the introduction of eight thousand U.S. combat troops initially. To avoid drawing too much attention to the move, he proposed that the stated purpose of their mission be flood relief. Taylor also dismissed concerns about North Vietnam's response to this action.

“North Vietnam is extremely vulnerable to conventional bombing.... There is no case for fearing a mass onslaught of Communist manpower into South Vietnam and its neighboring states, particularly if our air power is allowed a free hand against logistical targets.”

—General Maxwell Taylor

In addition, Taylor recommended increased logistical support for the ARVN, the introduction of U.S. helicopters, and increased covert operations in Laos and North Vietnam. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and Pentagon military planners saw Taylor's pro-

posal as inadequate. Instead they advocated the deployment of up to two hundred thousand U.S. combat troops.

“The fall of South Vietnam to Communism would lead to the fairly rapid extension of Communist control, or complete accommodation to Communism, in the rest of mainland Southeast Asia and in Indonesia. The strategic implications worldwide, particularly in the Orient, would be extremely serious.... The introduction of a U.S. force of the magnitude of an initial 8,000 men in a flood relief context will be of great help to Diem. However, it will not convince the other side (whether the shots are called from Moscow, Peiping [Beijing], or Hanoi) that we mean business. Moreover, it probably will not tip the scales decisively. We would be almost certain to get increasingly mired down in an inconclusive struggle. The other side can be convinced we mean business only if we accompany the initial force introduction by a clear commitment.... We can assume that the maximum U.S. forces required on the ground in Southeast Asia will not exceed six divisions, or about 205,000 men.”

—Department of Defense Report,
November 1961

What was Kennedy's compromise approach?

President Kennedy compromised and adopted an approach that fell between Taylor's and the Defense Department's recommendations. The United States sent helicopters, beefed up the aid package, and dramatically increased the number of U.S. military advisers in South Vietnam. From the end of 1961 to the end of 1962, the number of U.S. personnel rose from more than three thousand to more than eleven thousand. These advisers, who accompanied ARVN units into battle, soon began to suffer casualties. In 1961, eleven were killed

in combat; in 1962 thirty-one were killed; and in 1963 seventy-eight Americans died in the Vietnam War. The president made no strong public commitment to the war to the American people, and the Pentagon's estimate that as many as 200,000 troops would be needed was kept secret.

On the battlefield, the performance of the ARVN, guided by U.S. advisers and armed with new equipment, was mixed. Moreover, the Pentagon's "strategic hamlet program," which was designed to prevent the Vietcong from circulating freely among peasants in the countryside, was not generally successful. Nonetheless, the United States issued optimistic statements in mid-1963. "Victory in three years," predicted one. "There is a new feeling of confidence that victory is possible," said another. Kennedy himself declared, "We don't see the end of the tunnel, but I must say I don't think it is darker than it was a year ago, and in some ways [it is] lighter."

Not all U.S. decision-makers agreed with Kennedy's assessment. Mike Mansfield, the majority leader in the Senate, toured Southeast Asia in late 1962 and advised Kennedy that the United States should re-evaluate its commitment and involvement in South Vietnam.

"It is their country, their future that is at stake, not ours. To ignore that reality will not only be immensely costly in terms of American lives and resources, but it may also draw us inexorably into some variation of the unenviable position in Vietnam that was formerly occupied by the French."

—Senator Mike Mansfield

Mansfield and other critics of the war effort worried particularly about growing political opposition to Diem's rule in South Vietnam. During the spring of 1963, for example, thousands of Buddhists led by militant monks in the northern city of Hue began protesting what they perceived as discrimination practiced against them by Diem and his predominantly Roman Catholic government.

In response, government troops fired at the peaceful demonstrators, killing nine people. The Diem government ignored U.S. advice to seek reconciliation and instead insisted that the Vietcong were manipulating the Buddhists. In June 1963, the Buddhist protest hit the front pages of American newspapers when an elderly monk drenched himself with gasoline in a busy Saigon intersection and, with the assistance of other monks and nuns, burned himself to death. A written message the monk left behind requested that the Diem government respect all religions and show charity and compassion in its dealings with the Buddhists. Again the Diem government blamed the incident on the Vietcong, and more fiery suicides followed.

Why did President Kennedy appoint Henry Cabot Lodge as the new ambassador to Vietnam?

The frustration of the Kennedy administration with Diem and his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, who headed the regime's secret police, led to the appointment in June 1963 of Henry Cabot Lodge as the new U.S. ambassador to Saigon, the South Vietnamese capital. Lodge, a Republican from Massachusetts, was Kennedy's choice to direct the tough new American line in Saigon. No longer would the United States "sink or swim with Ngo Dinh Diem," as American observers had remarked. Instead, Diem would be told to reform his government and build popular support for the war against the communists—or else.

The choice of a prominent Republican for the sensitive post revealed Kennedy's desire to maintain bipartisan support for U.S. involvement. By the time Ambassador Lodge arrived in Saigon in August 1963, the situation seemed beyond hope. U.S. officials were talking about the need to replace Diem and his clique. Lodge was instructed to tell ARVN generals dissatisfied with Diem that the United States would condone a coup against the government, so long as the anti-communist struggle continued. On November 2, 1963, Diem and his brother were overthrown in a military coup and assassinated. President Ken-



nedy himself would be dead from the bullets of an assassin within three weeks.

Why did President Johnson find himself drawn deeply into the problems in Vietnam?

Before Kennedy's assassination in November 1963, Lyndon Johnson had not played a major role as vice president in the formulation of U.S. foreign policy. Although he went to South Vietnam in May 1961 and hailed Diem as "the Winston Churchill of Southeast Asia," Johnson had not been part of the inner circle of decision-makers who had shaped the growing U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia.

Rather, Johnson was a master of domestic politics. Majority leader of the Senate for many years, Johnson as president wished to focus his efforts on an ambitious agenda to create a "Great Society" at home. His idol was Franklin D. Roosevelt, the domestic reformer, not Franklin D. Roosevelt, the world leader. Inheriting most of Kennedy's foreign policy advisers, including Secretary of State Rusk, Secretary of Defense McNamara, National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy, Assistant

Secretary of State William Bundy, and top State Department planner Walt Rostow, Johnson quickly found himself drawn deeply into the worsening crisis in Vietnam.

The fact that a military government replaced Diem in Saigon did not bring the anticipated turnaround in the war effort. A series of power struggles within the South Vietnamese military leadership to determine who would exercise real power in the government complicated the situation.

Meanwhile, the number of U.S. military advisers grew to more than sixteen thousand by the end of 1963 and would surpass twenty-three thousand by the end of the next year. Frustrated by the hit-and-run tactics of the Vietcong in South Vietnam, many American military leaders were convinced that only heavy bombing of North Vietnam could stop the communists. Air Force Chief of Staff Curtis LeMay argued that "we are swatting flies when we should be going after the manure pile!"

For his part, Johnson was most concerned about winning election in the fall of 1964 to a full four-year term as president. As he reportedly told his military advisers at a White House Christmas party in December 1963, "just let me get elected, and then you can have your war."

But Johnson was unable to turn his attention away from Vietnam for long. North Vietnam continued its support for the insurgency in the south, and matched the gradual escalation of U.S. involvement. During 1964, an estimated ten thousand North Vietnamese troops infiltrated the south. Although the communist forces in the south were still overwhelmingly South Vietnamese, these regular units from the north and the supplies that they brought gave the insurgents increased capability for large-scale actions. At the same time, the United States was spending more than \$2 million a day in Vietnam and several Americans a week on average were being killed in battle. In March 1964, Secretary of Defense McNamara, returning from his second trip to Vietnam in four months, reported that:

“The situation has unquestionably been growing worse, at least since September [1963].... In terms of government control of the countryside about 40 percent of the territory is now under Viet Cong control or predominant influence.... Large groups of the population are now showing signs of apathy and indifference.... The ARVN and paramilitary desertion rates, and particularly the latter, are high and increasing.”

—Robert S. McNamara

As had become the pattern, leaders recommended increased aid in the form of more military equipment. In addition, U.S. leaders told the Saigon government that “we are prepared to furnish assistance and support to South Vietnam for as long as it takes to bring the insurgency under control.”

The Tonkin Gulf Resolution

The U.S. Constitution divides the war-making power of the United States between the executive and the legislative branches. Article II designates the president as commander-in-chief of the armed forces, while Article I grants Congress the power to declare war. In addition, Congress has the authority to appropriate money. This so-called “power of the purse” ensures that Congress will play a significant role in determining defense spending in wartime. The last time that Congress was asked to formally declare war was December 1941, after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Since World War II, presidents have repeatedly ordered military action without requesting a formal declaration of war. Even the Korean War, which cost more than 53,000 American lives, was technically a “police action” conducted under the authority of the United Nations. Almost without exception, large majorities of both Houses have strongly supported presidential decisions to send military forces abroad, at least initially. This reading explores how the administration of President Johnson obtained congressional authority for the expansion of U.S. involvement in Vietnam in 1964.

The Plan

As the 1964 presidential elections approached, President Johnson saw the need for a congressional resolution that would endorse the growing U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Such a resolution would strengthen the president’s credibility abroad and give him increased flexibility. Johnson was also worried about Barry Goldwater, the Republican nominee for president, who had taken a tough stance in dealing with communism. Johnson hoped that lining up solid majorities of both Republicans and Democrats in Congress behind his Vietnam policies would take the sting out of Goldwater’s criticisms. Accordingly, presidential aides William Bundy and Walt Rostow drafted the following resolution in June 1964:

“...Whereas the Communist regime in North Viet Nam, with the aid and support of the Communist regime in China, has systematically flouted its obligations under these [1954 Geneva] accords and has engaged in aggression against the independence and territorial integrity of South Vietnam by carrying out a systematic plan for the subversion of the Government of South Viet Nam...

“Whereas the United States has no territorial, military or political ambitions in

Southeast Asia, but desires only that the peoples of South Viet Nam, Laos and Cambodia should be left in peace by their neighbors to work out their own destinies in their own way...

“Whereas it is essential that the world fully understand that the American people are united in their determination to take all steps that may be necessary to assist the peoples of South Viet Nam and Laos to maintain their independence and political independence.... Be it resolved...

“That the United States regards the preservation of the independence and integrity of the nations of South Viet Nam and Laos as vital to its national interest and to world peace.... To this end, if the President determines the necessity thereof, the United States is prepared, upon the request of the Government of South Viet Nam or the Government of Laos, to use all measures, including the commitment of armed forces to assist that government in the defense of its independence and territorial integrity against aggression or subversion supported, controlled or directed from any Communist country...”

Johnson did not want to appear rash. During the presidential campaign, he sought to

portray Goldwater as trigger-happy and reckless. For that reason, the president decided to wait for further North Vietnamese provocation before sending his request to Congress. In the meantime, he instructed the Pentagon to prepare detailed plans for bombing North Vietnam.

The Incident

During the summer of 1964 the United States directed two ongoing naval operations in the Gulf of Tonkin, north of the 17th parallel off the coast of Vietnam. One operation involved South Vietnamese commandos, trained by the C.I.A., who would launch hit-and-run strikes on North Vietnamese coastal sites using very fast patrol boats. The other operation would send U.S. warships, equipped with sensitive electronic gear, to cruise to within eight miles of the North Vietnamese coast in order to trigger the operation of North Vietnamese radar installations. The ships would then take measurements of the radar's locations and frequencies. The U.S. destroyer *Maddox* was engaged in such a mission off the North Vietnamese coast on August 1. The day before, several South Vietnamese patrol boats had raided North Vietnamese coastal positions in the same area.

On the morning of August 2, several North Vietnamese patrol boats attacked the *Maddox*. Several torpedoes missed their target, but machine gun fire hit the U.S. warship. There were no casualties. The *Maddox* had begun firing as soon as the patrol boats approached, sinking one patrol boat and damaging two others. Planes from the nearby U.S. aircraft carrier *Ticonderoga* assisted by strafing the enemy boats. When Johnson received word of the incident, he sent a stern warning to North Vietnamese leaders in Hanoi. He also informed Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev that, while he did not wish to widen the war, the United States would not tolerate attacks by the North Vietnamese on U.S. warships in international

Questions for class discussion:

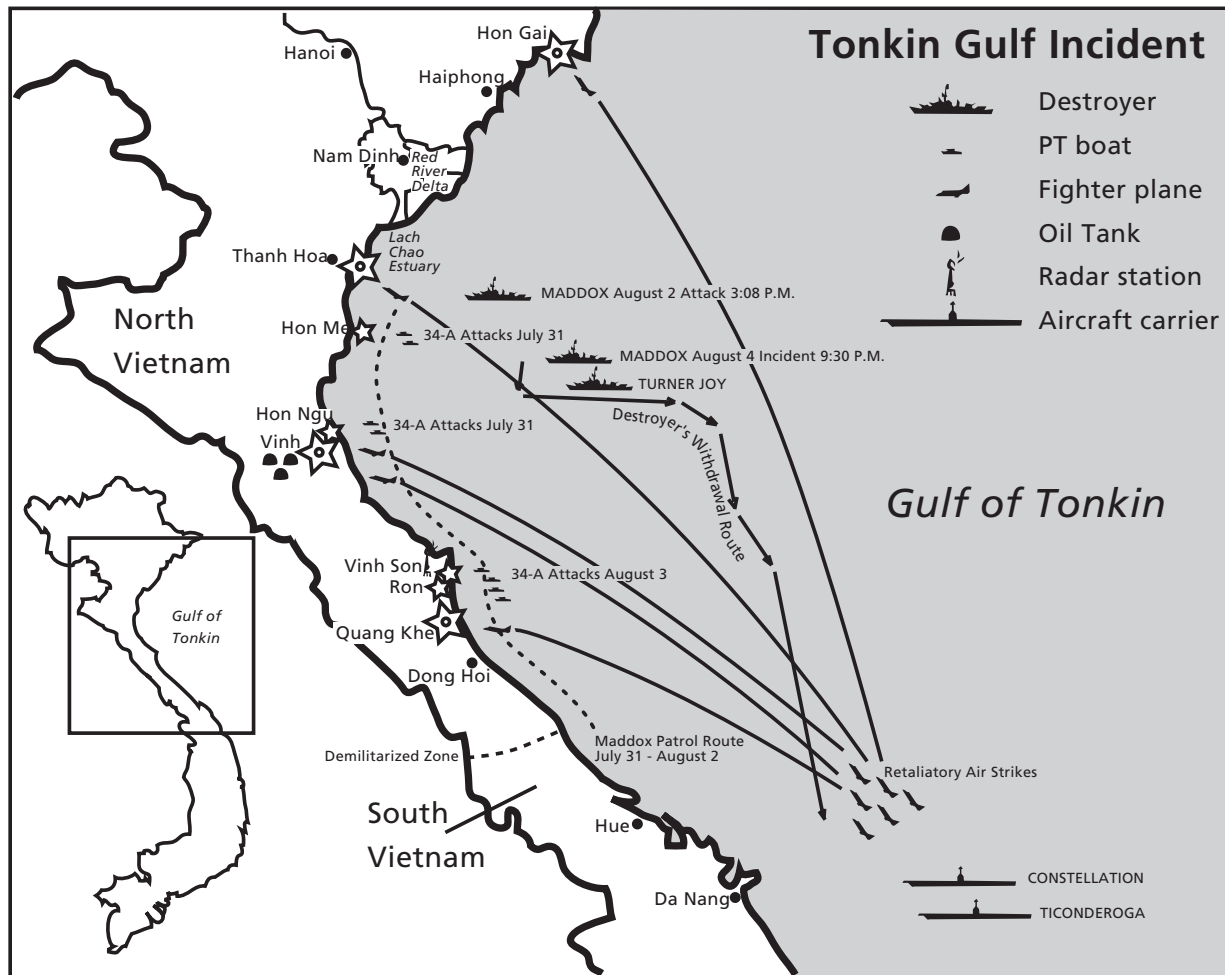
1. Why did Johnson believe that bipartisan congressional support for his policies in Vietnam was so important?
2. Does the government of a democracy have to operate under a different set of rules from those of a dictatorship when formulating foreign policy?

waters. No acts of reprisal were ordered at the time.

To underscore American determination, the *Maddox*, joined by a second destroyer, the *C. Turner Joy*, were ordered back into the same area the next day. Several South Vietnamese patrol boats also staged another hit-and-run mission in the area. During that evening, radar and sonar readings taken by the crews of the destroyers seemed to indicate that both U.S. destroyers were under attack. No enemy boats were actually seen and no hostile gunfire was heard. Nevertheless, both destroyers fired for several hours at the unseen attackers. Heavy rain that evening in the Tonkin Gulf contributed to the confusion. When Johnson learned of the situation, he decided to order retaliation, and to ask Congress immediately for a resolution of support. Several days later, analysis of the incident raised doubts that the two destroyers had actually come under attack. Johnson himself remarked to an aide, "Hell, those dumb stupid sailors were just shooting at flying fish."

Questions for class discussion:

1. Some have argued that the North Vietnamese were to blame for the incident, while others have maintained the United States was at fault. Discuss the case that both sides might make.
2. Why do you think that President Johnson went to Congress and the American people immediately, rather than waiting for a full investigation of the second "attack"?



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The Request

On the evening of August 4, the day of the controversial second “attack” on U.S. naval vessels in the Tonkin Gulf, President Johnson went on national television to announce that he had ordered reprisal bombing of North Vietnamese naval facilities and to declare that “repeated acts of violence against the armed forces of the United States must be met not only with alert defense, but with positive reply.” The next day Congress began consideration of the following resolution:

“Whereas the 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;

“Whereas these 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;

“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 the international peace and security in southeast Asia. Consonant with the Constitution 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, as the President determines, to take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force, to assist any member or protocol state [South Vietnam] 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.”

Questions for class discussion:

1. How do the changes in wording from the June draft (page 28) change the President's ability to direct U.S. policy in Vietnam? Explain by comparing specific phrases from the two documents.
2. Sometime later, Johnson remarked to aides that this resolution was “like grandma's night-shirt—it covered everything.” What did he mean by this?

The Action

After two days of debate, both Houses of Congress, with only Senators Wayne Morse and Ernest Gruening dissenting, passed the Tonkin Gulf resolution. The administration would cite this congressional action as the necessary and sufficient legal authority for its actions in Vietnam during the next several years. Congress regularly approved subsequent annual requests for funds to continue the war. Even congresspeople who opposed the war were reluctant to deny the funds and resources necessary to support the U.S. effort. The Sen-

ate repealed the Tonkin Gulf resolution in June 1970. U.S. involvement in the war continued until January 1973, although no president ever requested a formal declaration of war.

Question for class discussion:

If the administration had foreseen how long and costly the war would be, do you think that it would have chosen the same means to obtain congressional support and legal authority?

Extra Challenge

One of the major reasons for studying history is to discover connections and recurring patterns. Several previous incidents in U.S. history are worth comparing to the passage of the Tonkin Gulf resolution, including the incident which sparked the declaration of war against Mexico in 1846 and Congressman Lincoln's “spot resolutions,” the sinking of the battleship *Maine* in Havana harbor in 1898 and the subsequent war with Spain, the attack on the destroyer *Greer* by a German submarine in September 1941, when the United States was still a neutral, as well as the controversy surrounding weapons of mass destruction and the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Summer 1965: The Moment of Decision

The military situation in South Vietnam worsened rapidly during the first six months of 1965. The United States initiated a campaign of limited bombing against selected targets in North Vietnam (Operation Rolling Thunder) in February, but there was no indication that it diminished either Hanoi's determination or the flow of supplies to the Vietcong in the south. The ARVN continued to lose territory to Vietcong control and the Saigon government appeared to have little support among the South Vietnamese in the countryside. The military dispatched U.S. combat units in March for the specific purpose of defending U.S. installations in South Vietnam. Despite the deployment of more U.S. military personnel, large amounts of economic aid, and American logistical support, the Vietcong, in the opinion of some experts, controlled as much as 50 percent of the South Vietnamese countryside by the summer of 1965 and would soon possess the capability to cut the country in half.

As the situation in Vietnam deteriorated, Johnson administration officials recognized the need for a thorough re-examination of American policy, tactics, and strategy in Southeast Asia. The basic questions raised were: What was the nature of the conflict in Southeast Asia? What U.S. interests were at stake? What should be the chief objectives of the United States in Vietnam? What steps should the United States take to achieve these objectives?

Look carefully at the cartoons below.



"We've got to operate, and fast!"



1. Who are the three doctors in the cartoon on the left? Who is the patient?
2. In portraying the American leaders as doctors, what is the cartoonist suggesting about the ability of the United States to diagnose and cure the problems of South Vietnam and other countries?
3. What does this cartoon imply about the seriousness of the situation?
4. In contrast, what does the cartoon on the right suggest about the situation in Vietnam and the ability of U.S. leaders to understand and resolve the problem?

Options in Brief

Option 1: Americanize the War, and Fight to Win!

The survival of free, independent, non-communist South Vietnam is necessary to protect U.S. strategic interests in the Western Pacific and East Asia. The United States must take whatever steps are necessary to defend South Vietnam against communist aggression and to demonstrate that the communists cannot succeed in using these so-called “wars of national liberation” to enslave more people. We have no choice: we must stop the advancing wave of communist aggression in Southeast Asia now! The United States must take over the war. We must not repeat the mistake of Korea, where the U.S. military was denied the political backing to achieve victory. U.S. forces in Vietnam should not be asked to fight a war with one hand tied behind their backs. There is no substitute for military victory. We must fight to win.

Option 3: Limit Our Involvement and Negotiate a Withdrawal

The risks of increasing U.S. military involvement in Vietnam now outweigh any benefits of our presence. The military situation has deteriorated to the point that even massive American troop reinforcements cannot guarantee victory. The present government in Saigon is an unstable military dictatorship that has little popular support. The longer that we are in Vietnam and the larger our involvement, the greater the stakes become and the more difficult it will be to withdraw. U.S. prestige and credibility would be seriously damaged by such an outcome. No American forces beyond those promised should be sent to Vietnam. The bombing campaign against North Vietnam should be reduced, as should the scope of U.S. operations in the South. We should seek a negotiated settlement that would enable the U.S. to gradually reduce our presence in South Vietnam. We must cut our losses, but not at the cost of seriously damaging American honor and credibility.

Option 2: Escalate Slowly and Control the Risks

The honor, determination, and credibility of the United States are at stake in South Vietnam. What ally could rely on American assurances in the future if we allow South Vietnam to fall under communist control? What potential enemy would be deterred by our pledge to oppose aggression if we fail to stand up to North Vietnam? We must take effective measures to convince the North Vietnamese and the insurgents in the south that they will not be permitted to achieve control of South Vietnam. Slowly and steadily squeezing harder on North Vietnam by increasing our bombing in a calculated manner would be the most effective approach. At the same time, we would avoid provoking increased involvement by the Soviet Union and China, and alarming the American people with a hasty, and perhaps unnecessary, crash buildup. We must control the pace of U.S. involvement.

Option 4: Unilateral Withdrawal—Pull Out Now!

The involvement of the U.S. in the Vietnamese civil war is contrary to American values and interests. We have no right to impose upon the people of Vietnam a government of our choosing. We have no strategic interests in Vietnam which require any U.S. military involvement. To assume that we know what is best for a people halfway across the world with different traditions and values, and to employ our overwhelming military might to impose our solution on them, is unjustified, arrogant, and immoral. The United States cannot preserve its democratic values at home while it is betraying them abroad. The U.S. government should begin to withdraw its forces. Americans will understand that the principles that have guided this nation from its birth are more important than a poorly conceived policy based on an incomplete understanding of a complex situation thousands of miles away.

Option 1: Americanize the War, and Fight to Win!

The survival of free, independent, non-communist South Vietnam is necessary to protect U.S. strategic interests in the Western Pacific and in East Asia. For the last ten years, this small U.S. ally has been the victim of aggression by armed minorities within South Vietnam who are directed and supplied by communist North Vietnam. More recently, communist North Vietnam has sent into South Vietnam trained military units that have launched unprovoked armed attacks against the government of South Vietnam. The United States must take whatever steps are necessary to defend South Vietnam against this communist aggression and to demonstrate that the communists cannot succeed in using these so-called “wars of national liberation” to enslave more people. If South Vietnam were to fall to the communists, its immediate neighbors—Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand—would become subject to increased communist subversion and aggression. Just as a row of dominos will topple one by one if the first domino goes down, so the free nations of Southeast Asia could fall under communist control. Even our allies in the Philippines and Malaysia would find it difficult to resist this pressure. Ultimately, all of our country’s strategic, political and economic interests in this vital area of the world would be endangered. Our avowed enemies, China and Soviet Russia, would expand their influence and increase their strength. We have no choice: we must stop the advancing wave of communist aggression in Southeast Asia now!

We learned from the events leading up to World War II, specifically from the appeasement of Adolf Hitler at Munich



Warren King in *Time*, 1966.

in 1938, that if aggression is not checked immediately, the aggressors are encouraged. The American people have met similar challenges in the recent past. The Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, and NATO stopped Soviet communism from expanding into Western Europe after World War II. Communist guerrilla forces were defeated with U.S. aid in Greece (1946-7), Malaysia (1948-52), and the Philippines (1946-54). In addition, in South Korea in 1950-53, The United States and its free world allies repulsed overt communist armed aggression.

The situation today in South Vietnam is critical. The United States must take over the war. Our troop commitment should be immediately increased from the present level of seventy thousand to four hundred thousand, if necessary, by the end of this year. U.S. military operations in the south should shift away from the passive defense of static positions and adopt aggressive search-and-destroy tactics against communist forces. In addition, sustained, massive bombing of military targets in North Vietnam will slow the infiltration of troops and supplies and punish the aggressor. We must not repeat the mistake of Korea, where the U.S. military was denied the political backing to achieve victory. U.S. forces in Vietnam should not be asked to fight a war with one hand tied behind their backs. There is no substitute for military victory. We must fight to win.

The United States should take the following steps

1. Turn over primary responsibility for directing and prosecuting the war to the U.S. military.
2. Rapidly increase the U.S. troop commitment to four hundred thousand, if necessary, and pursue an aggressive search-and-destroy campaign against the communist forces in the south.
3. Increase the bombing of North Vietnam to include all targets involved in the war effort.
4. Mobilize the reserves and shift U.S. economic resources toward the war effort.
5. Explain to the American people the gravity of the situation in Vietnam, the values that are at risk, and the anticipated costs and duration of the effort required.

Lessons from History

- The failure of the Western democracies at Munich in 1938 to check the aggression of Hitler led to further Nazi aggression and World War II.
- Communist-led insurgencies in Greece, Malaysia, and the Philippines were defeated with the assistance of the United States and its free world allies.
- The expansion of communist power into Western Europe in the late 1940s was thwarted with a determined combination of U.S. political, economic, and military efforts.
- The Soviet Union abandoned its attempt to force the United States out of Berlin during the early 1960s when convinced of American determination and military superiority.

Arguments for Option 1

- Only immediate, massive U.S. intervention can prevent the collapse of the ARVN and the fall of the pro-American Saigon government.
- Preserving a strong, free South Vietnam will stop the further expansion of communism into Southeast Asia and protect U.S. strategic interests.
- Defeating the communist-led insurgency in South Vietnam will deter the communists

from launching similar “wars of national liberation” in other parts of the world.

- A major military effort by the United States now will prevent the need for a more costly effort later on.
- North Vietnam, a third-rate military power, will inevitably cease its aggression in the face of determined U.S. military action.

From the Historical Record

*Speech by President Harry Truman, March 12, 1947
(known as the “Truman Doctrine”)*

“At the present moment in world history nearly every nation must choose between alternative ways of life. The choice is too often not a free one. One way of life is based upon the will of the majority, and is distinguished by free institutions, representative government, free elections, guarantees of individual liberty, freedom of speech and religion, and freedom from political oppression. The second way of life is based upon the will of a minority forcibly imposed upon the majority. It relies upon terror and oppression, a controlled press and radio, fixed elections, and the suppression of personal freedoms. I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.”

Speech by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, March 29, 1954

“If the Communist forces won uncontested control over Indochina or any substantial part thereof, they would surely resume the same pattern of aggression against other free peoples in the area. The propagandists of Red China and Russia make it apparent that the purpose is to dominate all of Southeast Asia. Southeast Asia is the so-called ‘rice bowl’ which helps to feed the densely populated region that extends from India to Japan. It is rich in many raw

materials, such as tin, oil, rubber, and iron ore. It offers industrial Japan potentially important markets and sources of raw materials. The area has great strategic value. Southeast Asia is astride the most direct and best developed sea and air routes between the Pacific and South Asia. It has major naval and air bases. Communist control of Southeast Asia would carry a grave threat to the Philippines, Australia and New Zealand, with whom we have treaties of mutual assistance. The entire Western Pacific area, including the so-called ‘offshore island chain’ would be strategically endangered.”

Speeches by President Dwight Eisenhower, April 1954 and April 1959

“Strategically, South Vietnam’s capture by the Communists would bring their power several hundred miles into a hitherto free region. The remaining countries in Southeast Asia would be menaced by a great flanking movement. The freedom of 12 million people would be lost immediately and that of 150 million others in adjacent lands would be seriously endangered. The loss of South Vietnam would have grave consequences for us and for freedom.... You have a row of dominos set up, you knock over the first one, and what will happen to the last is the certainty that it will go over very quickly.”

Speech by Senator John Kennedy, June 1956

“[Vietnam is] the cornerstone of the free world in Southeast Asia, the keystone to the arch, the finger in the dike. Burma, Thailand, India, Japan, the Philippines and obviously Laos and Cambodia are among those whose security would be threatened if the red tide of Communism overflowed into Vietnam.”

National Security Action Memorandum, March 17, 1964

“We seek an independent, non-communist South Vietnam...unless we can achieve this objective in South Vietnam, almost all of Southeast Asia will probably fall under Communist dominance.”

Memorandum written by Walt Rostow, Chairman of the State Department Policy Planning Council, November 1964

“[T]he critical moves are, I believe, these: the introduction of some ground forces in South Viet Nam and, possibly, in the Laos corridor; a minimal installation of the principle that from the present forward North Viet Nam will be vulnerable to retaliatory attacks for continued violation of the 1954-1962 Accords. Perhaps most important of all, the introduction into the Pacific Theater of massive forces to deal with any escalatory response, including forces evidently aimed at China as well as North Viet Nam, should the Chinese Communists enter the game.... Their judgment [the North Vietnamese] will depend not merely on our use of force and force dispositions but also on the posture of the President, including commitments he makes to our own people and before the world, and on our follow-through.... They will not actually accept a setback until they are absolutely sure that we really mean it. They will be as searching in this manner as Khrushchev [the Premier of the Soviet Union] was before he abandoned the effort to break

our hold on Berlin and as Khrushchev was in searching us out on the Turkish missiles before he finally dismantled and removed his missiles [from Cuba in 1962]. Initial rhetoric and military moves will not be enough to convince them.... Compliance [from North Vietnam] should include the following: the removal of Viet Minh troops from Laos; the cessation of infiltration of South Viet Nam from the north... and the overt statement on Hanoi radio that the Viet Cong should cease their operations and pursue their objective in South Viet Nam by political means.... The odds are pretty good, in my view, that, if we do these things in this way, the war will either promptly stop or we will see the same kind of fragmentation [gradual loss of effectiveness] of the Communist movement in South Viet Nam that we saw in Greece after the Yugoslav frontier was closed.... At this stage of history we are the greatest power in the world—if we behave like it.”

Speech by President Lyndon Johnson, April 7, 1965

“Let no one think for a moment that retreat from Vietnam would bring an end to conflict. The battle would be renewed in one country and then another. The central lesson of our time is that the appetite of aggression is never satisfied. To withdraw from one battlefield means only to prepare for the next. We must say in Southeast Asia, as we did in Europe, in the words of the Bible: ‘Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further!’...Over this war, and all Asia, is another reality: the deepening shadow of Communist China. The rulers in Hanoi are urged on by Peking [Beijing].... [China] is a nation which is helping the forces of violence in almost every continent. The contest in Vietnam is part of a wider pattern of aggressive purpose.”

Option 2: Escalate Slowly and Control the Risks

The honor, determination, and credibility of the United States are at stake in South Vietnam. Since 1950, successive U.S. governments under Presidents Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson have pledged to protect South Vietnam from communist aggression. When South Vietnam was created in 1954 at the Geneva Conference, the United States declared its opposition to any attempts to alter the settlement by force. Shortly afterward, the United States and its South East Asian Treaty Organization allies pledged to protect South Vietnam and its neighbors, Laos and Cambodia. U.S. economic, political, and military aid helped this young nation in its infancy. Our country is internationally recognized as the “godfather” and patron of South Vietnam. The increasingly visible U.S. commitment over the past four years has linked our country’s prestige and credibility with the fate of South Vietnam. What ally could rely on American assurances in the future if we allow South Vietnam to fall under communist control? What potential enemy would be deterred by our pledge to oppose aggression if we fail to stand up to North Vietnam? Could the Western Europeans be expected to trust us with their fate in the face of Soviet nuclear threats when we cannot defend the South Vietnamese from insurgents armed only with conventional weapons?

History shows us that when nations lose their credibility, their power to influence others and protect their national interests suffer. When the Western European democracies reneged on their commitments to Czechoslovakia at Munich in 1938 and allowed Adolf Hitler to pressure that country into submission, they also cast doubt on their promise to defend Poland from German attack. World War II was the result. Similarly, the failure of the United States to back up its warnings to Japan in the 1930s emboldened Japanese militarists to extend their aggression to Pearl Harbor. In contrast, U.S. successes in the late 1940s and 1950s in thwarting Soviet expansion into Western Europe were due to the credibility of our pledge to counter Soviet



Bill Mauldin in the Chicago Sun-Times. Copyright © 1966. North America Syndicate.

aggression with massive, overwhelming retaliation. Likewise, our success in 1962 in forcing the Soviets to remove their missiles from Cuba demonstrated that a measured, credible response to aggression will convince even the most powerful of enemies to back down.

We must take effective measures to convince the North Vietnamese and the insurgents in the south that they will not be permitted to achieve control of South Vietnam and we must take whatever actions necessary to do so. Slowly and steadily squeezing harder on North Vietnam by increasing our bombing of military targets in a graduated, calculated manner would be the most effective approach. Such a strategy will convince the communists of our determination and overwhelming military superiority. At the same time, we would avoid provoking increased involvement by the Soviet Union and China, and alarming the American people with a hasty, and perhaps unnecessary, crash buildup. In addition to stepped-up bombing, additional American troops should be dispatched into South Vietnam to check the tide of government defeats and buy enough time for our campaign against North Vietnam to achieve its objectives. We should cut communist supply lines from Laos and the north by bombing, and we should initiate long-range programs to strengthen the ARVN and build public support for the Saigon government.

Although the American people must understand the need for increased U.S. military involvement in Vietnam, we should not put the economy on a war footing, nor should we call up the reserves. These actions could endanger our domestic programs and provoke demands for more drastic military action. We must control the pace of U.S. involvement.

The United States should take the following steps

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Send additional American ground troops to South Vietnam to check the tide of communist advances. 2. Undertake a stepped-up bombing campaign against military targets in North Vietnam to convince North Vietnamese leaders to halt their involvement in the war. 3. Initiate long-term programs to strengthen the ARVN, and increase support for the Saigon government by involving U.S. forces in building schools, hospitals, and other civilian projects. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Assure our allies and the Soviet Union that, while not seeking to widen the war, we will not accept the defeat of the South Vietnamese government through communist aggression. 5. Remind the American people of our commitment to South Vietnam and ask them to continue to support all measures necessary, while avoiding the dangers raised by mobilizing the reserves and shifting to a war economy. |
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Lessons from History

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The failure of the British and French to honor their commitment to Czechoslovakia in 1938 led Hitler in 1939 to believe that Britain and France would not defend Poland from a German invasion. • Japanese aggression in the Pacific before Pearl Harbor was not deterred by U.S. warnings because we failed to back up our words with action. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credible commitments to Western Europe backed up by our willingness to employ all military measures necessary contained Soviet expansion after 1947. • Carefully controlled military escalation and credible threats convinced the Soviet Union in 1962 to reverse its aggressive policies in Cuba and to withdraw its missiles. |
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Arguments for Option 2

- By carefully controlling the escalation of our military involvement in Vietnam, we will minimize the risk of greater Soviet or Chinese participation in the conflict.
- Without more American troops in South Vietnam, the communists will soon overthrow the Saigon government.
- By reaffirming our commitment to South Vietnam and taking additional steps to

back up our commitment, we are bolstering American honor, prestige, and credibility.

- U.S. determination and overwhelming military superiority will force the North Vietnamese to abandon their campaign to take over South Vietnam through armed aggression, thus cutting off the insurgent movement in the south from its main source of support.

From the Historical Record

Speech by Senator John Kennedy, June 1956

"[Vietnam is] a proving ground for democracy in Asia...a test of American responsibility and determination in Asia.... [I]f we are not the parents of little Vietnam, then surely we are the godparents. We presided at its birth, we gave assistance to its life, we helped to shape its future."

Letter by President Dwight Eisenhower to South Vietnamese President Diem, October 26, 1960

"For so long as our strength can be useful, the United States will continue to assist Vietnam in the difficult yet hopeful struggle ahead."

Inaugural address by President John Kennedy, January 1961

"Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty.... To those peoples in the huts and villages of half the globe struggling to break the binds of mass misery, we pledge our best efforts to help them help themselves, for whatever period is required."

Letter by President John Kennedy to South Vietnamese President Diem, December 14, 1961

"They [the communists] have violated the provisions of the Geneva Accords designed to ensure peace in Vietnam and to which they bound themselves in 1954.... Although not a party to the Accords, [the United States] de-

clared that it 'would view any renewal of the aggression in violation of the Agreements with grave concern and as seriously threatening international peace and security'.... In accordance with that declaration, and in response to your request, we are prepared to help the Republic of Vietnam to protect its people and to preserve its independence."

National Security Action Memorandum, April 6, 1965

"5. The President approved an 18-20,000 man increase in U.S. military support forces to fill out existing units and supply needed logistic personnel. 6. The President approved the deployment of two additional Marine Battalions and one Marine Air Squadron and associated headquarters and support elements. 7. The President approved a change of mission for all Marine Battalions deployed to Vietnam to permit their more active use under conditions to be established and approved by the Secretary of Defense in consultation with the Secretary of State.... We should continue the present slowly ascending tempo of ROLLING THUNDER [the air campaign against North Vietnam]. The target systems should continue to avoid the effective GGI range of MIGs. We should continue to vary the types of targets, stepping up attacks on lines of communication in the near future and possible moving in a few weeks to attacks on the rail lines north and northeast of Hanoi.... Blockade or aerial mining of North Vietnamese ports need further study and should be considered for future

operations. It would have major political complications, especially in relation to the Soviets and other third countries, but also offers many advantages. Air operation in Laos, particularly route blocking operations...should be stepped up.... The President desires that with respect to the actions in paragraphs 5 through 7, premature publicity be avoided by all possible precautions. The actions themselves should be taken as rapidly as practicable, but in ways that should minimize any appearance of sudden changes of policy.... The President's desire is that these movements and changes should be understood as being gradual and wholly consistent with existing policy."

Speech by President Lyndon Johnson, April 25, 1965

"Why are we in South Vietnam? We are there because we have a promise to keep. Since 1954 every American President has offered support to the people of South Vietnam. We have helped to build, and we have helped to defend. Thus, over many years, we have made a national pledge to help South Vietnam defend its independence. And I intend to keep our promise. To dishonor that pledge, to abandon this small and brave nation to its enemy, and to the terror that must follow, would be an unforgivable wrong.... We will not be defeated! We will not grow tired! We will not withdraw, either openly or under the cloak of a meaningless agreement."

Memoranda by Assistant Secretary of Defense John McNaughton, March 24, 1965 and January 19, 1966

"U.S. aims: 70 percent to avoid a humiliating U.S. defeat (to our reputation as a guarantor); 20 percent to keep SVN [South Vietnam] (and the adjacent) territory from Chinese hands; 10 percent to permit the people of SVN to enjoy a better, freer way of life. ALSO to emerge from crisis without unacceptable taint from methods used. NOT to 'help a friend,' although it would be hard to stay in if asked out.... The present U.S. objective in Vietnam is to avoid humiliation. The reasons why we went into Vietnam to the present depth are varied; but they are largely academic. Why we have not withdrawn from Vietnam is, by all odds, one reason: (1) to preserve our reputation as a guarantor, and thus to preserve our effectiveness in the rest of the world.... At each decision point we have gambled; at each point, to avoid the damage to our effectiveness of defaulting on our commitment, we have upped the ante.... It is important that we behave so as to protect our reputation.... The 'softest' credible formulation of the U.S. commitment is the following: DRV [North Vietnam] does not take over South Vietnam by force.... This does not necessarily rule out: a coalition government including Communists, [or] a free decision by the South to succumb to the VC [Vietcong] or to the North, [or] a neutral (or even anti-U.S.) government in SVN...if the Communist takeover was fuzzy and very slow."

Option 3: Limit Our Involvement and Negotiate a Withdrawal

The potential risks of increasing U.S. military involvement in Vietnam now clearly outweigh any likely benefits of our presence. The military situation has deteriorated to the point that even massive American troop reinforcements cannot guarantee victory. The present government in Saigon is an unstable military dictatorship that has little popular support. South Vietnam is not essential to the national security of the United States. Moreover, the fall of South Vietnam to the communists would not inevitably mean that the rest of Southeast Asia would follow, like a row of mindless dominos. Each nation in this region has a unique political, economic, and strategic position. Many will continue to remain strong U.S. allies regardless of the fate of Vietnam. Our most important global interests, which lie in Western Europe and the Western Hemisphere, will be threatened if our economic and military resources are committed to a costly, and probably hopeless, land war in Asia. The longer that we are in Vietnam and the larger our involvement, the greater the stakes become and the more difficult it will be to withdraw. Such an outcome will seriously damage U.S. prestige and credibility.

History warns us of the difficulty of fighting a successful war against insurgents in the jungles and rice paddies of Asia. Even though the French had overwhelming military superiority, they were unable to suppress the revolt of the Vietminh, and eventually pressures at home forced them to retreat in a humiliating manner. Experts on guerrilla warfare maintain that defeating an insurgency requires a ten to one advantage in troops. For the United States, that means a commitment of more than five hundred thousand soldiers in South Vietnam for many years. In 1954, U.S. army commanders and congressional leaders argued convincingly against sending in American forces to stave off the French defeat in Indochina. Their arguments hold true today. Even the proponents of increased American military involvement offer no prospect of a quick victory. The steady decline of public support during the Korean War demonstrates that the American people are unlikely to tolerate a long, costly, indecisive

The "Containment" Policy in Asia



Scott Long in the Minneapolis Star and Tribune. Reprinted with permission.

war for limited objectives in Asia again. Finally, the Strategic Bombing Survey done by the U.S. Army in Germany after World War II showed that even massive bombing by itself does not destroy the will to fight in a determined opponent. North Vietnam, which is less industrialized than Germany was, is less likely to bend before such an air campaign. In fact, bombing might heighten the country's resolve. Pentagon studies have estimated that U.S. bombing missions cost the United States \$10 for \$1 worth of damage to North Vietnam.

No additional American forces beyond those already promised should be sent to Vietnam. The bombing campaign against North Vietnam should be reduced, as should be the scope of U.S. military operations in the south. Meanwhile, we should seek a negotiated settlement that would enable us to gradually reduce our presence in South Vietnam. We must cut our losses, but not at the cost of seriously damaging American honor and credibility.

Since the initial U.S. commitment to South Vietnam in the mid-1950s was clearly linked to the development of a free, democratic Vietnam, the American people will understand that the present military dictatorship in Saigon no longer can justly claim that commitment. How can American soldiers be expected to die for a government that the South Vietnamese people themselves are reluctant to fight for? The United States has done all that could reasonably be expected. Gradually withdrawing now represents not a retreat, but a realistic reappraisal of a situation that has changed drastically since our commitments in 1956-1961.

The United States should take the following steps

1. Halt any further buildup of American forces in Vietnam beyond those already promised.
2. Reduce the bombing against North Vietnam and the scope of American military operations in South Vietnam.
3. Seek a negotiated settlement with Hanoi that would permit U.S. forces to turn over their duties to the South Vietnamese gradually.
4. Distance itself from the present Saigon government.
5. Assure the American people that our original commitment to a democratic South Vietnam has been fulfilled and, given the nature of the present military dictatorship in Saigon, is no longer binding.

Lessons from History

- The disastrous French experience in Indochina showed the difficulty of a non-Asian army defeating a native guerrilla force with popular backing.
- The French Indochina War also illustrated the domestic political unrest that such a war can generate in a democratic society.
- Successful anti-guerrilla campaigns require substantial troop commitments and a long-term effort.
- The Korean War demonstrated that the American people will not support a drawn-out, costly, inconclusive war for limited objectives.

Arguments for Option 3

- The loss of American lives and the expenditure of American resources will be halted if we disengage.
- Even with massive American military involvement, the war in South Vietnam is likely to be unwinnable.
- An overcommitment of American resources in a country which is not

essential to our security endangers U.S. strategic interests elsewhere.

- U.S. interests in East Asia can be protected even if South Vietnam falls under communist control.
- Continued involvement in Vietnam will raise the stakes and make disengagement in the future far more difficult and costly.

From the Historical Record

Memorandum by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, May 26, 1954

“The Joint Chiefs of Staff desire to point out their belief that, from the point of view of the United States, with reference to the Far East as a whole, Indochina is devoid of decisive military objectives and the allocation of more than token U.S. armed forces in Indochina would be a serious diversion of limited U.S. capabilities.”

Letter by President Dwight Eisenhower to South Vietnamese President Diem, October 1, 1954

“I am accordingly instructing the American Ambassador to Vietnam to examine with you in your capacity as Chief of Government, how an intelligent program of American aid given directly to your government can serve to assist Vietnam in its present hour of trial, provided that your Government is prepared to give assurances as to the standards of performance it would be able to maintain.”

Campaign speech by President Lyndon Johnson, fall 1964

“We are not about to send American boys nine or ten thousand miles away from home to do what Asian boys ought to be doing for themselves.”

Memorandum by C.I.A. Director John McCone, April 2, 1965

“I feel that the latter decision [to increase U.S. ground forces in the South] is correct only if our air strikes against the North are sufficiently heavy and damaging really to hurt the

North Vietnamese.... The strikes to date have not caused a change in the North Vietnamese policy of directing Viet Cong insurgency, infiltrating cadres and supplying material. If anything, the strikes to date have hardened their attitude.... On the other hand, we must look with care to our position under a program of slowly ascending tempo of air strikes. With the passage of each day and each week, we can expect increasing pressure to stop the bombing. This will come from various elements of the American public, from the press, the United Nations and world opinion. Therefore time will run against us in this operation and I think the North Vietnamese are counting on this.”

Memorandum by Under Secretary of State George Ball, July 1, 1965

“The South Vietnamese are losing the war to the Viet Cong. No one can assure you [President Johnson] that we can beat the Viet Cong or even force them to the conference table on our terms, no matter how many hundred thousand white, foreign (U.S.) troops we deploy. No one has demonstrated that a white ground force of whatever size can win a guerilla war—which is at the same time a civil war between Asians—in jungle terrain in the midst of a population that refuses cooperation to the white forces (and the South Vietnamese) and thus provides a great intelligence advantage to the other side.... Should we limit our liabilities in South Vietnam and try to find a way out with minimal long-term costs? The

alternative—no matter what we may wish it to be—is almost certainly a protracted war involving an open-ended commitment of U.S. forces, mounting U.S. casualties, no assurance of a satisfactory outcome, and a serious danger of escalation at the end of the road.... Once large numbers of U.S. troops are committed to direct combat, they will begin to take heavy casualties in a war they are ill-equipped to fight in a non-cooperative if not downright hostile countryside. Once we suffer large casualties, we will have started a well-nigh irreversible process. Our involvement will be so great that we cannot—without national humiliation—stop short of achieving our complete objectives. Of the two possibilities I think humiliation would be more likely than the achievement of our objectives—even after we have paid terrible costs.... We [should] seek a compromise settlement which achieves less than our stated objectives and thus cut our losses while we still have freedom of maneuver to do so...I strongly urge the following program... [to] complete all deployments already announced...but decide not to go beyond a total of seventy-two thousand men represented by this figure. Restrict the combat role of the American forces.... Continue bombing in the North but avoid the Hanoi-Haiphong area and any targets nearer to the Chinese border than those already struck.... In any political approaches so far, we have been the prisoners of whatever South Vietnamese government that was momentarily in power. If we are ever to move toward a settlement, it will probably be because the South Vietnamese government pulls the rug out from under us and makes its own deal or because we go forward quietly without advance prearrangement with Saigon. So far we have not given the other side a reason to believe there is any flexibility in our negotiating approach. And the other side has been unwilling to accept what in their terms is complete capitulation. Now is the time to start some serious diplomatic feelers looking towards a solution based upon some application of a self determination principle...that would permit the Viet Cong some hope of achieving some of their political objectives through

local elections or some other device.... Before moving to any formal conference we should be prepared to agree once the conference is started: the U.S. will stand down its bombing of the North, the South Vietnamese will initiate no offensive operations in the South, and the DRV [North Vietnam] will stop terrorism and other aggressive action against the South.... On balance, I believe we would more seriously undermine the effectiveness of our world leadership by continuing the war and deepening our involvement than by pursuing a carefully plotted course towards a compromise solution.... We have not persuaded either our friends or allies that our further involvement is essential to the defense of freedom in the cold war. Moreover, the [more] men we deploy in the jungles of South Vietnam, the more we contribute to a growing world anxiety and mistrust."

Summary of private remarks by Clark Clifford, unofficial presidential advisor and friend to President Johnson, July 25, 1965

"We must not create an impression that we have decided to replace the South Vietnamese and win a ground war in Vietnam.... What happened in Vietnam is no one person's fault. The bombing might have worked, but it hasn't.... A failure to engage in an all-out war will not lower our international prestige. This is not the last inning in the struggle against communism. We must pick those spots where the stakes are highest for us and we have the greatest ability to prevail...[I] don't believe we can win in South Vietnam. If we send in one hundred thousand more, the North Vietnamese will meet us. If the North Vietnamese run out of men the Chinese will send in volunteers. Russia and China don't intend for us to win this war. If we don't win [then], it is a catastrophe. If we lose fifty thousand men it will ruin us. Five years, billions of dollars, fifty thousand men, it is not for us. At the end of the monsoon [season], quietly probe and search out with the other countries—by moderating our position—to allow us to get out. [I] can't see anything but catastrophe for my country."

Testimony by George Kennan, architect of the "containment" policy toward the Soviet Union, before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, February 1966, in which he repeats the criticisms that he had voiced the previous year

"If it were not for the considerations of prestige that arise precisely out of our present involvement, even a situation in which South Vietnam was controlled exclusively by the Vietcong, while regrettable, and no doubt morally unwarranted, would not, in my opinion, present dangers great enough to justify our

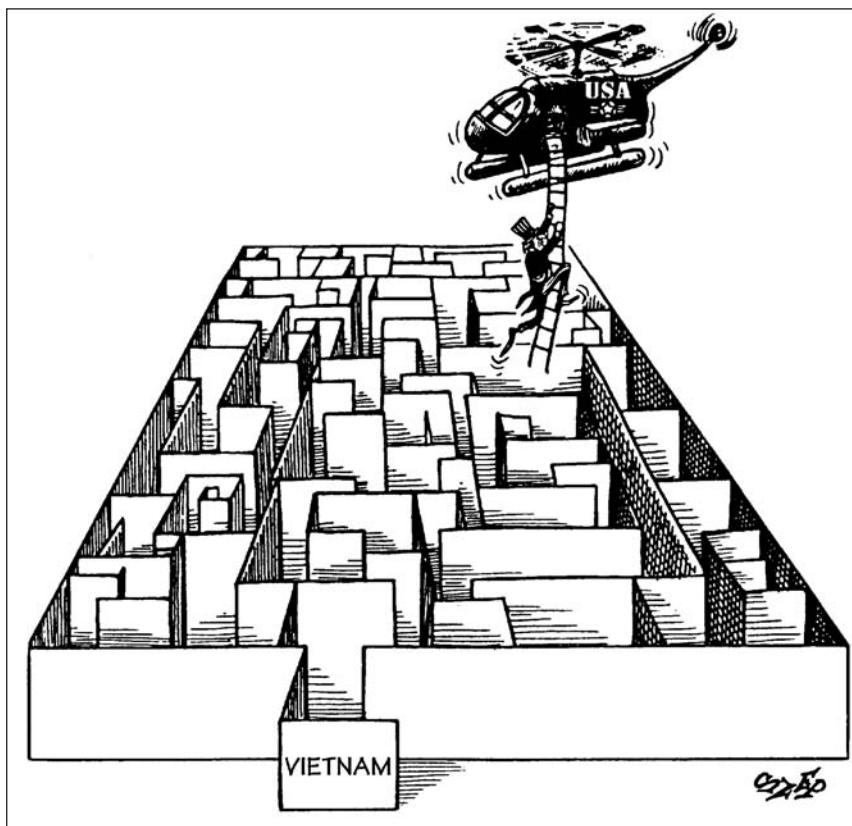
direct military involvement.... I think it should be our government's aim to liquidate this involvement just as soon as this can be done without inordinate damage to our own prestige or to the stability of conditions in that area.... I have a fear that our thinking about this whole problem is still affected by some sort of illusions about invincibility on our part, that there is no problem in the world which we, if we wanted to devote enough of our resources to it, could not solve."

Option 4: Unilateral Withdrawal—Pull Out Now!

The present involvement of the United States in the Vietnamese civil war is contrary to American values and interests. Originally motivated by high ideals, we now find ourselves spending American lives and resources to keep in power an unpopular, undemocratic, military dictatorship. We have no right to impose upon the people of Vietnam a government of our choosing. The present government in Saigon is kept in power only by the support of the United States. The Vietnamese must be allowed to decide their own destiny. We have no strategic interests in Vietnam which would require even minimal American military involvement. To assume that we know what is best for a people halfway across the world having completely different traditions and values, and to employ our overwhelming military might to impose our solution on them, is unjustified, arrogant, and immoral. The United States cannot preserve its democratic values at home while it is betraying them abroad. Continued involvement in this mistaken effort will demonstrate to the world and to the American people the folly of this policy.

One of the fundamental principles upon which this nation was built was the determination to avoid involvement in the internal disputes of other nations, even when parties to these disputes were invoking the cause of freedom and liberty. Our stature in the world has been built upon our example, not our standing armies. An examination of the history of Indochina reveals that the current conflict is the continuation of the national struggle which began against the French in 1946. In assuming the role that the French abandoned in 1954, we are seen by the Vietnamese as another white, imperialistic power seeking to impose its will. Just as the French were forced to accept a humiliating defeat after a long and costly struggle, so

we run a terrible risk if our present policy is not reversed. By ignoring its obligations under the Charter of the United Nations, the United States is undermining the principle of the rule of law, which forms the cornerstone of the United Nations system, one the United States and its allies erected after World War II. The United States, as well as North Vietnam, is guilty of violating this principle. The terrible costs of international lawlessness were tragically revealed in World War II and in the Korean War. If we continue



Paul Szep in *The Boston Globe*. Reprinted courtesy of *The Boston Globe*.

on this misguided course, the world will blame us for the tragedy that will follow. Three times this century, American boys have been called upon to fight and die under the banner of freedom and world peace. We cannot ask them to die in the jungles of Asia for a corrupt dictatorship that even the Vietnamese people are unwilling to fight for.

The U.S. government should immediately halt the deployment of additional American troops to Vietnam, and should begin withdrawing those forces currently there. The responsibility for resolving the conflict in Vietnam should be brought before the United Nations, where it belongs. Our economic and military aid to the Saigon government, which feeds the continued carnage in this unhappy country, should also be reduced.

The U.S. government should explain to the American people that our values, security concerns, and responsibility to world peace and order do not permit the continued support of what has become an increasingly repressive government. Americans will understand that the principles which have guided this nation from its birth are more important than a poorly conceived policy based on an incomplete understanding of a complex situation thousands of miles away.

The United States should take the following steps

1. Halt any further deployment of U.S. military forces to South Vietnam.
2. Begin to withdraw those U.S. military forces already in South Vietnam.
3. Reduce our economic and

military assistance to the military dictatorship in Saigon.

4. Call on the United Nations to take responsibility for resolving the conflict in Vietnam.

Lessons from History

- The decision of U.S. leaders before World War II to avoid involvement in the internal disputes of other nations was a foundation of our country's peace and prosperity.

- As the national revolutions that have taken place in Asia since the end of World War II have indicated, attempts by Western countries to impose their power in the region inevitably triggers a fierce backlash.

- Violation of the rule of law by resorting to force, regardless of provocation, has led to increased international lawlessness and threats to world peace.

- The defeat of the French in 1954 indicated that a white, Western army, even with numerical superiority, cannot defeat insurgents that the people in Southeast Asia support.

Arguments for Option 4

- Withdrawing from Vietnam immediately means that no more American lives or resources will be lost.
- A U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam will lessen the chances of confrontation with China and the Soviet Union.
- It is immoral for the United States to use its military power to impose its values on an unreceptive people halfway across the globe.

- The rule of law will be strengthened internationally if the United States ceases its military actions in Vietnam and refers the problem to the United Nations.

- It is impossible for the United States to achieve through any means its current objectives in Vietnam.

From the Historical Record

Speech by Secretary of State John Quincy Adams, July 4, 1821

“Wherever the standard of freedom and independence has been or shall be unfurled, there will be America’s heart, her benedictions, and her prayers. But she goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy. She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the champion and vindicator only of her own. She will recommend the general cause by the countenance of her voice, and by the sympathy of her example. She well knows that by once enlisting under other banners than her own, were they even the banners of foreign independence, she would involve herself beyond the power of extrication, in all the wars of interest and intrigue, of individual avarice, envy and ambition, which assume the colors and usurp the standards of freedom. The fundamental maxims of her policy would insensibly change from liberty to force.... She might become the dictatress of the world. She would no longer be the ruler of her own spirit.”

Speech by Senator John Kennedy regarding the French war in Indochina, April 6, 1954

“Despite any wishful thinking to the contrary, it should be apparent that the popularity and prevalence of Ho Chi Minh and his following throughout Indochina would [in the case of a negotiated peace] cause either partition or a coalition government to result in eventual domination by the Communists....

To pour money, material, and men into the jungles of Indochina without at least a remote prospect of victory would be dangerously futile and self-destructive.... I am frankly of the belief that no amount of American military assistance in Indochina can conquer an enemy which is everywhere and at the same time nowhere, ‘an enemy of the people’ which has the sympathy and covert support of the people.”

Recollections by General Matthew Ridgway, written in 1956, regarding the proposed U.S. intervention in Indochina in 1954

“I felt it was essential therefore that all who had any influence in making the decision on this grave matter should be fully aware of all the factors involved.... The area they found [Indochina] was practically devoid of those facilities which modern forces such as ours find essential to the waging of war.... We could afford an Indochina, we could have one, if we had been willing to pay the tremendous cost in men and money that such intervention would have required, a cost that, in my opinion, would have eventually been as great as or greater than that we paid in Korea. In Korea we had learned that air and naval power alone could not win a war and that inadequate ground forces cannot win one either. It was incredible to me that we had forgotten the bitter lesson so soon. We were on the verge of making that same tragic error. That error, thank God, was not repeated.... [W]hen the day comes for me to face my Maker and account

for my actions, the thing I would be most humbly proud of was the fact that I fought against, and perhaps contributed to preventing, the carry out of some hare-brained tactical schemes which would have cost the lives of thousands of men. To that list of tragic accidents that fortunately never happened I would add the Indo-China intervention.”

Speech by Senator Wayne Morse, August 5, 1964

“In our time a great struggle...is going on in the world between freedom on the one hand and the totalitarianism of communism on the other. However, I am satisfied that that struggle can never be settled by war. I am satisfied that if the hope of anyone is that the struggle between freedom and communism can be settled by war, and that course is followed, both freedom and communism will lose, for there will be no victory in that war. Because of our own deep interest in the struggle against communism, we in the United States are inclined to overlook some of the other struggles which are occupying others. We try to force every issue into the context of freedom versus communism. That is one of our great mistakes in Asia.... We say we are opposing communism there, but that does not mean we are advancing freedom, because we are not.... There is no hope for permanent peace in the world until all the nations...are willing to establish a system of international justice through law, to the procedures of which will be submitted each and every international dispute that threatens the peace of the world.... For ten years the role of the United States in South Vietnam has been that of a provocateur, every bit as much as North Vietnam has been a provocateur. For ten years the United States, in South Vietnam, has violated the Geneva agreement of 1954.... The American effort to impose by force of arms a government of our own choosing upon a segment of the old colony of Indochina has caught up with us.... [We have] marched in the opposite direction from fulfilling our obligations under the United Nations Charter.... Our charges of aggression against North Vietnam will be greeted by considerable snickering abroad. So too will the pious phrases of the

resolution about defending freedom in South Vietnam. There is no freedom in South Vietnam.... We are defending a clique of military generals and their merchant friends who live well in Saigon, and who need a constantly increasing American military force to protect their privileged position.... We have threatened war where no direct threat to American security is at stake...A war in Asia should be recognized as unthinkable.... We cannot justify the shedding of American blood in that kind of war in Southeast Asia. France learned that lesson. France tried to fight it for eight years and with 240,000 casualties. The French people finally pulled down the French government and said they had had enough. I do not believe that any number of American conventional forces in South Vietnam, or in Asia generally, can win a war.... Our moral position, which we claim as leader of the free world, will be undermined and our capacity for calling others to account for breaches of the peace will be seriously compromised.... The ‘fight now, negotiate later’ line is based on the wholly illusory assumption that Red China and North Vietnam will do what we refuse to do—negotiate when they are losing.... We need the world with us.... Whoever fights a war without taking the matter to the United Nations is in violation of the charter, whether that party started the fighting or not.... The day of the Westerner is finished in Asia, just as much as in Africa. And it no longer matters whether the Westerner is French, Dutch, British, or American. The pressure will always be against us and against our front in South Vietnam.”

Speech by Senator Ernest Gruening, August 6, 1964

“[I urge] that the United States get out of South Vietnam.... American security is not involved, the allegation that we are supporting freedom in South Vietnam has a hollow sound.... I do not consider this is our war and I feel that all Vietnam is not worth the life of a single American boy. We inherited this putrid mess from past administrations, and we should make every effort to disengage ourselves.”

Part III: America's Vietnam Ordeal—1965-1975

From the summer of 1965 to the beginning of 1968, the Vietnam War became America's War. U.S. troop strength in South Vietnam steadily increased, peaking at 536,100 men in early 1968. The bombing campaign against North Vietnamese and Vietcong bases and supply routes in the south intensified.

By late 1967, General William Westmoreland, the chief of U.S. military operations in Vietnam, predicted that the forces of the Vietcong and the North Vietnamese army would soon buckle under the growing military pressure. "I have never been more encouraged

in my four years in Vietnam," Westmoreland told American reporters.

Less than three months after Westmoreland's optimistic forecast, the Vietcong launched a large-scale attack against cities throughout South Vietnam. What came to be known as the Tet offensive (named for the Vietnamese New Year, or Tet) produced the heaviest fighting of the war. In Saigon, a Vietcong unit briefly held the compound of the U.S. embassy. In the northern city of Hue, communist forces drove the South Vietnamese army out of the city center.

March 1968—Seeds of Doubt

By late February 1968, U.S. forces had reversed most of the Vietcong's military gains. Politically and psychologically, however, the Tet offensive had delivered a serious blow to the American war effort. Although President Johnson publicly tried to minimize the significance of the attack, privately he and other top U.S. officials were stunned. They had believed army assessments that the communists were nearing the breaking point. Suddenly, they were faced with the prospect of a longer, bloodier war.

The Tet offensive marked a turning point in the Vietnam War. After February 1968, the United States began to retreat gradually from the policy set in the summer of 1965. In this part of the reading, you will follow the course of U.S. involvement from the aftermath of the Tet offensive to the peace agreement of January 1973 that brought an end to American military operations. As you will see, the reading revolves around four key documents from the period. For homework, quickly skim the documents. You will review them more thoroughly in class.

The Tet offensive forced General Westmoreland to recognize that the United States would have to increase its military presence in Vietnam to overcome the communists. In late February 1968, he called on President Johnson

to send 206,000 more troops to Vietnam. The request deepened Johnson's quandary. The president was hesitant to overrule Westmoreland in military matters. At the same time, he realized that the troop build-up would spark wider opposition at home to the war and damage his chances for re-election.

Johnson asked his new defense secretary, Clark Clifford, to guide him in the decision-making process. He called on Clifford to prepare an "A to Z reassessment" of U.S. policy in Vietnam within a week.

Clifford found that his task required him to perform a balancing act of his own. On the one hand, the military wanted to press ahead with its plan to drive the Vietcong out of the South Vietnamese countryside. On the other hand, civilian analysts in the Defense Department's International Security Affairs section cast doubt on hopes to defeat the communists militarily and instead proposed that U.S. forces pull back to protect the coastal cities of South Vietnam. Both sides agreed that the communists could not be stopped unless the South Vietnamese government did more to win the support of its people.

The memorandum Clifford submitted to the president on March 4, 1968 represented a compromise between the two contrasting viewpoints. It recommended taking the first

step toward Westmoreland's requested troop build-up, but proposed a more extensive study before going further. In the appendix of the memorandum, Clifford included the pessimistic evaluation of the International Security Affairs section.

Clifford's memorandum did not resolve Johnson's quandary. Rather, the president continued to waver. If anything, the memorandum planted additional seeds of doubt over U.S. policy in Vietnam.

In late March, Johnson brought together a group of fourteen veteran advisers to assess the war. The group, known as the "wise men," included a former secretary of state and

prominent retired generals. At their meeting, most of the group's members concluded that the United States should find a way out of Vietnam. Many conceded that the events of the preceding weeks had changed their minds about the war.

Reluctantly, Johnson accepted their advice. On March 31, 1968, he announced that he would halt U.S. bombing over most of North Vietnam and called for peace negotiations to begin. Johnson also declared that he would not run for re-election. In the following document, identify the passages that may have changed the president's thinking toward the Vietnam War.

Document #1—Memorandum to President Lyndon Johnson March 4, 1968, prepared by Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford

[Recommendations to the president regarding General Westmoreland's request for additional troops.]

1. An immediate decision to deploy to Vietnam an estimated total of twenty-two thousand additional personnel (approximately 60 percent of which would be combat). An immediate decision to deploy the three tactical fighter squadrons from Program 3 (about one thousand men)...
2. Either through Ambassador [to South Vietnam] Bunker or through an early visit by Secretary [of Defense] Clifford, a highly forceful approach to the GVN [government of South Vietnam] ([President] Thieu and [Vice-President] Ky) to get certain key commitments for improvement, tied to our own increased effort and to increased U.S. support for the ARVN [army of the Republic of South Vietnam]....
3. Early approval of a [armed forces] reserve call-up and an increased end strength adequate to meet the balance of the Westmoreland request and to restore a strategic reserve in the United States, adequate for possible contingencies world-wide....
4. Reservation [delay] of the decision to meet the [General] Westmoreland request in full. While we would be putting ourselves in a position to make these additional deployments, the future decision to do so would be contingent upon:
 - a. Reexamination on a week-by-week basis of the desirability of further deployments as the situation develops;
 - b. Improved political performance by the GVN [government of South Vietnam] and increased contribution in effective military action by the ARVN [army of the Republic of South Vietnam];
 - c. The results of a study in depth, to be initiated immediately, of possible new political and strategic guidance for the conduct of U.S. operations in South Vietnam, and of our Vietnamese policy in the context of our world-wide politico-military strategy....

[Assessment of the U.S. war effort in Vietnam, included in an appendix of the memorandum.]

There can be no assurance that this very substantial additional deployment [requested by General Westmoreland] would leave us a year from today in any more favorable military position. All that can be said is that the additional troops would enable us to kill more of the enemy and would

provide more security if the enemy does not offset them by lesser reinforcements of his own. There is no indication that they would bring about a quick solution in Vietnam and, in the absence of better performance by the GVN [government of South Vietnam] and the ARVN [army of the Republic of South Vietnam], the increased destruction and increased Americanization of the war could, in fact, be counter-productive....

[No matter what the result in Vietnam, we will have failed in our purpose if]:

- a. The war in Vietnam spreads to the point where it is a major conflict leading to direct military confrontation with the U.S.S.R. [Soviet Union] and/or China;
- b. The war in Vietnam spreads to the point where we are so committed in resources that our other world-wide commitments—especially NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization]—are no longer credible;
- c. The attitudes of the American people towards “more Vietnams” are such that our other commitments are brought into question as a matter of U.S. will;
- d. Other countries no longer wish the U.S. commitment for fear of the consequences to themselves as a battlefield between the East and the West....

Under these circumstances, we should give intensive study to the development of new strategic guidance to General Westmoreland. This study may show that he should not be expected either to destroy the enemy forces or to rout them completely from South Vietnam. The kind of American commitment that might be required to achieve these military objectives cannot even be estimated. There is no reason to believe that it could be done by an additional two hundred thousand American troops or double or triple that quantity....

The exact nature of the strategic guidance which should be adopted cannot now be predicted. It should be the subject of a detailed interagency study over the next several weeks....

November 1969: Vietnamization of America's War

By the time President Richard Nixon took office in January 1969, more than thirty thousand Americans had died in Vietnam. In 1968, Nixon had won a narrow victory over Johnson's vice-president, Hubert Humphrey, in part on the appeal of his pledge to end the Vietnam War.

Nixon hoped to find a middle way out of Vietnam. He rejected plans to pursue a military victory relentlessly. At the same time, he opposed calls for a settlement “that would amount to a disguised American defeat.” In the war zones of South Vietnam, communist forces were quick to test Nixon's resolve. In the spring of 1969, they launched a string of fierce attacks. Before the year was over, nearly ten thousand Americans would die in the fighting.

Nixon's main initiative focused on gradually turning the war effort over to the South Vietnamese army. The president called his

program “Vietnamization.” In July 1969, he withdrew twenty-five thousand American soldiers—the first cut in U.S. troop strength since the start of the conflict.

While Vietnamization won public support, the anti-war movement nonetheless gained momentum. In October 1969, protestors held large, well-organized anti-war demonstrations in several major cities. In Washington D.C., 250,000 protesters called for an immediate U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam.

Nixon resented the anti-war movement. He argued that the protests undermined the U.S. position in Vietnam. To bolster public support for his strategy, Nixon frequently addressed the country over national television. During his first term as president, the speeches generally improved Nixon's standing among the American people. In the following document, identify the main elements of Nixon's policy in Vietnam.

Document #2—Speech by President Richard Nixon November 3, 1969, delivered over national television

...The question facing us today is—now that we are in the war, what is the best way to end it? In January [1969], I could only conclude that the precipitate [sudden] withdrawal of all American forces from Vietnam would be a disaster not only for South Vietnam but for the United States and for the cause of peace.

For the South Vietnamese, our precipitate withdrawal would inevitably allow the Communists to repeat the massacres which followed their takeover in the North fifteen years before. They then murdered more than fifty thousand people and hundreds of thousands more died in slave labor camps....

For the United States, this first defeat in our nation's history would result in a collapse of confidence in American leadership not only in Asia but throughout the world....

In 1963, President Kennedy with his characteristic eloquence and clarity said we want to see a stable government there [in South Vietnam], carrying on the struggle to maintain its national independence.

We believe strongly in that. We are not going to withdraw from that effort. In my opinion, for us to withdraw from that effort would mean a collapse not only of South Vietnam but Southeast Asia. So we're going to stay there....

A nation cannot remain great if it betrays its allies and lets down its friends. Our defeat and humiliation in South Vietnam without question would promote recklessness in the councils of those great powers who have not yet abandoned their goals of world conquest.

This would spark violence wherever our commitments help maintain the peace—in the Middle East, in Berlin, eventually even in the Western Hemisphere. Ultimately, this would cost us more lives. It would not bring peace. It would bring more war....

At the Paris peace conference [former] Ambassador [to South Vietnam] Lodge has demonstrated our flexibility and good faith in forty public meetings. Hanoi has refused even to discuss our proposals. They demand our unconditional acceptance of their terms which are that we withdraw all American forces immediately and unconditionally and that we overthrow the government of South Vietnam as we leave....

At the time we launched our search for peace, I recognized we might not succeed in bringing an end to the war through negotiation. I therefore put into effect another plan to bring peace—a plan which will bring the war to an end regardless of what happens on the negotiating front....

Let me briefly explain what has been described as the Nixon Doctrine—a policy which not only will help end the war in Vietnam but which is an essential element of our program to prevent future Vietnams....

We shall furnish military and economic assistance when requested in accordance with our treaty commitments. But we shall look to the nation directly threatened to assume the primary responsibility of providing the manpower for its defense....

In the previous [Johnson] administration, we Americanized the war in Vietnam. In this administration, we are Vietnamizing the search for peace.... Under the new orders, the primary mission of our troops is to enable the South Vietnamese forces to assume the full responsibility for the security of South Vietnam....

After five years of Americans going into Vietnam we are finally bringing American men home.... The South Vietnamese have continued to gain strength. As a result, they have been able to take over combat responsibilities from our American troops.... United States casualties have declined during the last two months to the lowest point in three years.

Let me now turn to our program for the future. We have adopted a plan which we have worked out in cooperation with the South Vietnamese for the complete withdrawal of all United States combat ground forces and their replacement by South Vietnamese forces on an orderly scheduled timetable....

As I've indicated on several occasions, the rate of withdrawal will depend on developments on three fronts. One of these is the progress which can be, or might be, made in the Paris talks....

The other two factors on which we will base our withdrawal decisions are the level of enemy activity and the progress of the training programs of the South Vietnamese forces....

My fellow Americans, I am sure you can recognize from what I have said that we really have only two choices open to us if we want to end this war. I can order an immediate precipitate withdrawal of all Americans from Vietnam without regard to the effects of that action. Or we can persist in our search for a just peace through a negotiated settlement, if possible, or through continued implementation of our plan for Vietnamization, if necessary....

I have chosen this second course. It is not the easy way. It is the right way. It is a plan which will end the war and serve the cause of peace, not just in Vietnam but in the Pacific and the world....

April 1971—Light at the End of the Tunnel

Like Johnson, Nixon found that there was no easy way out of Vietnam. In his first two years in office, he cut U.S. troop strength in Vietnam nearly in half and sharply reduced casualties. To maintain America's military weight, he relied heavily on air attacks. Nixon, however, made little progress in achieving his broader policy goals. The South Vietnamese government remained unpopular and corrupt, while its army proved incapable of defending the country against the communists. In early 1971, the South Vietnamese army suffered a serious defeat in its first large-scale military operation. In a drive to destroy communist supply bases in Laos, the South Vietnamese crumbled under communist counter-attacks. (In 1970, Congress had prohibited U.S. ground troops from entering Laos or Cambodia.)

North Vietnamese leaders added to Nixon's predicament. They repeatedly rejected

Nixon's call for a simultaneous withdrawal of U.S. and North Vietnamese forces from South Vietnam. Instead, they held firm to their demand that the Vietcong be given a role in a new coalition government in South Vietnam. Negotiations between the United States and North Vietnam—both at the public level and in secret sessions—went nowhere.

Despite setbacks to his strategy, Nixon felt compelled to continue withdrawing American troops. Even as the U.S. presence in Vietnam shrank, protests against the war grew louder. By 1971, many of Nixon's staunchest supporters were urging the president to push for a quick end to the war. In the following document, identify the arguments Nixon presented to justify his declaration that "Vietnamization has succeeded."

Document #3—Speech by President Richard Nixon April 7, 1971, delivered over national television

...I am glad to be able to begin my report tonight by announcing that I have decided to increase the rate of American troops withdrawals for the period from May 1 to December 1 [1971]....

By the first of next month, May 1, we will have brought home more than 265,000 Americans—almost half of the troops in Vietnam when I took office.... Casualties were five times as great in the first three months of 1969 as they were in the first three months this year, 1971....

Let me review now two decisions I have made which have contributed to the achievements of our goals in Vietnam.... The first was the destruction of enemy bases in Cambodia.... American troops were out of Cambodia in sixty days, just as I pledged they would be. American casualties did not rise; they were cut in half. American troop withdrawals were not halted or delayed; they continued at an accelerated pace.

Now let me turn to the Laotian operation. As you know, this was undertaken by South Vietnamese ground forces with American air support against North Vietnamese troops which had been using Laotian territory for six years to attack American forces and allied forces in South Vietnam....

Did the Laotian operation contribute to the goals we sought? I have just completed my assessment of that operation and here are my conclusions:

First, the South Vietnamese demonstrated that without American advisers they could fight effectively against the very best troops North Vietnam could put in the field.

Second, the South Vietnamese suffered heavy casualties, but by every conservative estimate, the casualties suffered by the enemy were far heavier.

Third, and most important, the disruption of enemy supply lines, the consumption of ammunition and arms in the battle, has been even more damaging to the capability of the North Vietnamese to sustain major offensives in South Vietnam than were the operations in Cambodia ten months ago.

Consequently, tonight I can report that Vietnamization has succeeded. Because of the increased strength of the South Vietnamese, because of the success of the Cambodian operation, because of the achievements of the South Vietnamese operation in Laos, I am announcing an increase in the rate of American withdrawals. Between May 1 and December 1 of this year, one hundred thousand more American troops will be brought home from South Vietnam....

As you can see from the progress we have made to date and by this announcement tonight, the American involvement in Vietnam is coming to an end. The day the South Vietnamese can take over their own defense is in sight. Our goal is a total American withdrawal from Vietnam. We can and we will reach that goal through our program of Vietnamization if necessary. But we would infinitely prefer to reach it even sooner—through negotiations....

Let me turn now to a proposal which at first glance has a great deal of popular appeal. If our goal is a total withdrawal of all our forces, why don't I announce a date now for ending our involvement?...

The issue very simply is this: Shall we leave Vietnam in a way that—by our own actions—consciously turns the country over to the Communists? Or shall we leave in a way that gives the South Vietnamese a reasonable chance to survive as a free people? My plan will end American involvement in a way that would provide that chance. And the other plan would end it precipitately and give victory to the Communists....

January 1973—The Final Chapter

Nixon emphasized the need to achieve “peace with honor” in Vietnam. For him, that meant reaching an agreement that recognized the independence of South Vietnam, at least on paper. The United States spent much of 1971 and 1972 devoted to pressuring North Vietnam to accept U.S. peace terms.

However, the tools at Nixon’s disposal were limited. The withdrawal of American soldiers from South Vietnam continued at a steady pace. By August 1972, the last ground troops had gone home. Meanwhile, communist forces advanced against the South Vietnamese army. Nixon turned increasingly to air power to gain leverage against Vietnam. In May 1972, he stepped up air strikes against North Vietnam and ordered the mining of Haiphong harbor.

As the 1972 presidential election neared, the Nixon administration pressed harder for a settlement. In October 1972, North Vietnamese negotiators dropped their demand that a new coalition government be formed in South Vietnam. Within a few weeks, leaders drafted the outlines of a peace treaty. Henry Kissinger, Nixon’s national security adviser, announced that “peace is at hand.”

Expectations of a peace treaty helped Nixon win a landslide victory in the November elections. Peace, however, proved more difficult to attain. South Vietnamese President Thieu strongly objected to the draft agreement, claiming that the treaty would pave the way for a communist takeover of his country. Kissinger raised Thieu’s objections with his North Vietnamese counterparts. In turn, the North Vietnamese sought changes in the settlement that would have allowed their troops to remain in South Vietnam.

To break the deadlock, Nixon launched in December 1972 the most intense bombing campaign of the war against North Vietnam. After twelve days of attacks and the loss of fifteen American B-52 bombers, the two sides returned to negotiations and agreed in large part to accept the draft treaty they had prepared in October 1972.

Ultimately, Thieu’s fears turned out to be well-founded. After the release of the last American prisoners of war (POWs) in April 1973, fighting in South Vietnam gradually increased. In early 1975, three hundred thousand North Vietnamese troops spearheaded a massive offensive. Within three months, they had overwhelmed the South Vietnamese army and were tightening the noose around Saigon.

Thieu again appealed to the United States for support, but by then his regime had few backers in Washington. Nixon had resigned in disgrace in August 1974 because of the Watergate scandal. The influence of top military officials had been tarnished by the Vietnam experience. After North Vietnam’s offensive, Congress turned down President Gerald Ford’s request for \$552 million in emergency military aid to South Vietnam.

In the end, the United States was forced to evacuate by helicopter the remaining American personnel in Saigon. On April 30, 1975, the last Americans lifted off from the roof of the U.S. embassy to close the final chapter in the United States’ involvement in Vietnam.

In the following document, identify the portions of the peace treaty that you believe raised the sharpest disagreements during negotiations between the U.S. and North Vietnam.

Document #4—Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam, signed January 27, 1973, in Paris by representatives of the United States, North Vietnam, South Vietnam, and the Vietcong

Chapter I

The Vietnamese People's Fundamental National Rights

Article 1: The United States and all other countries respect the independence, sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity of Viet-Nam as recognized by the 1954 Geneva Agreements on Vietnam.

Chapter II

Cessation of Hostilities—Withdrawal of Troops

Article 2: A cease-fire shall be observed throughout South Viet-Nam as of 2400 hours G.M.T., on January 27, 1973. At the same hour, the United States will stop all its military activities against the territory of the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam [North Vietnam] by ground, air and naval forces....

Article 3: ...As soon as the cease-fire goes into effect:

- (a) The United States forces and those of the other foreign countries allied with the United States and the Republic of Viet-Nam shall remain in-place pending the implementation of the plan of troop withdrawal....
- (b) The armed forces of the two South Vietnamese parties [the Thieu government and the Vietcong] shall remain in-place....
- (c) The regular forces of all services and arms and the irregular forces of the parties in South Viet-Nam shall stop all offensive activities against each other and shall strictly abide by the following stipulations:
 - All acts of force on the ground, in the air, and on the sea shall be prohibited;
 - All hostile acts, terrorism and reprisals by both sides will be banned.

Article 4: The United States will not continue its military involvement or intervene in the internal affairs of South Viet-Nam.

Article 5: Within sixty days of the signing of this Agreement, there will be a total withdrawal from South Viet-Nam of troops, military advisers, and military personnel, including technical military personnel and military personnel associated with the pacification program, armaments, munitions, and war material of the United States and those of the other foreign countries mentioned in Article 3 (a)....

Article 6: The dismantlement of all military bases in South Viet-Nam of the United States and of the other foreign countries mentioned in Article 3 (a) shall be completed within sixty days of the signing of this Agreement.

Article 7: From the enforcement of the cease-fire to the formation of the government provided for in Article 9 (b) and 14 of this Agreement, the two South Vietnamese parties shall not accept the introduction of troops, military advisers, and military personnel including technical military personnel, armaments, munitions, and war material into South Viet-Nam....

Chapter III

The Return of Captured Military Personnel and Foreign Civilians, and Captured and Detained Vietnamese Civilian Personnel

Article 8: (a) The return of captured military personnel and foreign civilians of the parties shall be carried out simultaneously with and completed not later than the same day as the troop withdrawal mentioned in Article 5....

Chapter IV

The Exercise of the South Vietnamese People's Right to Self-Determination

Article 9: The Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam [North Vietnam] undertake to respect the following principles for the exercise of the South Vietnamese people's right to self-determination.

- (a) The South Vietnamese people's right to self-determination is sacred, inalienable, and shall be respected by all countries.
- (b) The South Vietnamese people shall decide themselves the political future of South Viet-Nam through genuinely free and democratic general elections under international supervision.
- (c) Foreign countries shall not impose any political tendency or personality on the South Vietnamese people.

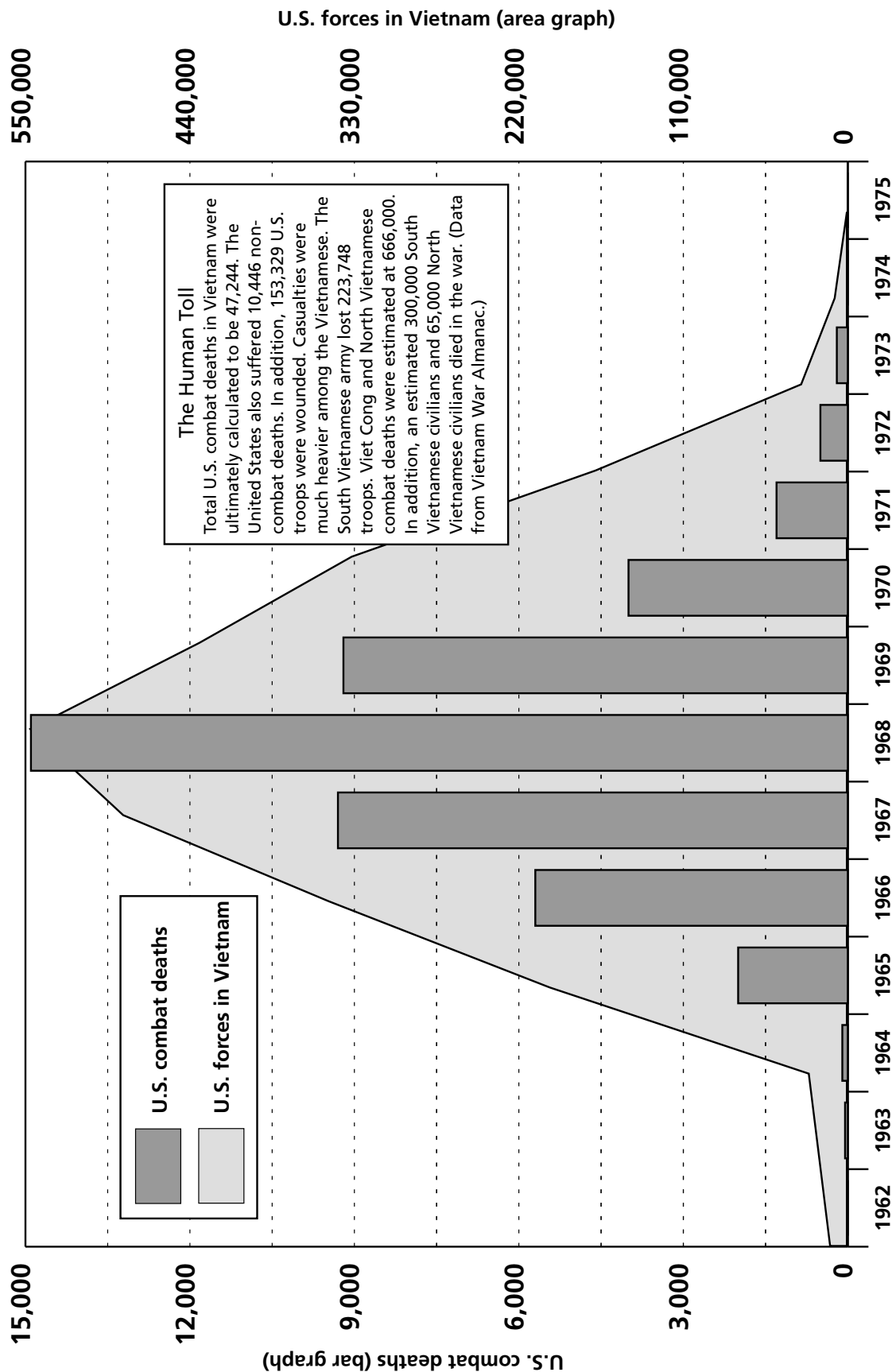
Article 10: The two South Vietnamese parties undertake to respect the cease-fire and maintain peace in South Viet-Nam, settle all matters of contention through negotiations, and avoid all armed conflict....

Chapter V

The Reunification of Viet-Nam and the Relationship between North and South Viet-Nam

Article 15: The reunification of Viet-Nam shall be carried out step by step through peaceful means on the basis of discussions and agreements between North and South Viet-Nam, without coercion or annexation by either party, and without foreign interference. The time for reunification will be agreed upon by North and South Viet-Nam.

U.S. Forces in Vietnam



Part IV: What None Knew: Misinterpretation and Failed Diplomacy

By late 1965, the Vietnam War was no longer primarily a civil war involving South Vietnamese forces. Instead, it had become a conflict between the United States and North Vietnam.

Leaders in Washington and Hanoi had long sought to avoid a direct confrontation between their two countries. Each side launched several efforts to open peace talks in the early and mid-1960s. Yet serious negotiations did not begin until 1968 and were then to drag on for nearly five years before the two sides reached a final settlement. In the meantime, both countries were devastated by a seemingly endless war.

Many historians believe that the gap in communication and understanding separating the United States and North Vietnam prolonged the Vietnam War. Top U.S. policy-makers during the war had little knowledge of Vietnamese history or culture. Most viewed North Vietnam as a pawn of the Soviet Union or China. Likewise, the North Vietnamese leadership lacked a firm grasp of the motives and goals of their American counterparts. For much of the war, they were preoccupied with the day-to-day challenges facing their country.

In this reading, you will explore the Vietnamese and American perceptions of each other's intentions in greater detail. You will examine two crucial events in 1965—a Vietcong artillery attack and a secret diplomatic initiative—to gain a deeper insight into how misinterpretation and the failed diplomacy of both sides affected the course of the war.

Case Study 1—Pleiku

By early 1965, North Vietnam had stepped up its commitment to the war in the south to match increased U.S. involvement. Hanoi, however, recognized that getting caught up in a conflict with the United States would complicate relations with the Soviet Union and China. The Soviets were not eager for a con-



frontation with the United States in Southeast Asia. In addition, they increasingly saw China as their most dangerous foe. North Vietnamese leaders were suspicious of the Chinese as well. They worried that Chinese troops would overrun their country if U.S. forces brought the war close to China's border. Nonetheless, Hanoi relied on China as its main source of military supplies.

Hanoi's Strategy

The North Vietnamese concluded that they needed to defeat the government in South Vietnam before the full weight of the United States tipped the balance of power on the battlefield. Their strategy called for send-

ing more regular North Vietnamese troops to bolster Vietcong forces. They hoped that the Vietcong would then be able to overcome the South Vietnamese army in the countryside quickly. Military success, according to their plan, would set the stage for Vietcong uprisings in the cities. As the control of the South Vietnamese government crumbled, Hanoi would put pressure on the diplomatic front to organize a neutral government in Saigon. The United States, in the view of the North Vietnamese, would have little choice but to accept the outcome.

As part of its bolder strategy, North Vietnam encouraged Vietcong field commanders to intensify attacks against enemy military targets in the northern part of South Vietnam. The goal was to split the country in two.

Aside from laying out a broad strategy, Hanoi lacked the means to direct the operations of Vietcong. Communications in Vietnam in the mid-1960s were poor under the best of circumstances. The war only made the situation worse. Typically, messengers travelling by bicycle or on foot for hundreds of miles delivered orders. Field commanders often had no contact with military leaders in Hanoi for weeks or even months at a time.

On February 7, 1965, roughly thirty Vietcong troops launched artillery strikes against an air base and a helicopter base built by American advisers at Pleiku. Nine U.S. soldiers were killed in the shelling.

What the Vietcong were not aware of was that President Lyndon Johnson had sent a high-level U.S. delegation to Saigon at the time. (In fact, they were not sure that U.S. military advisers were at Pleiku.) The delegation, headed by McGeorge Bundy, Johnson's special assistant for national security affairs, had been instructed to evaluate U.S. options in Vietnam.

U.S. officials assumed that Hanoi had engineered the attack at Pleiku to send a message during Bundy's visit. Before Bundy's departure, U.S. intelligence sources had warned that the Vietcong might attack an American target,

possibly at Pleiku, while Bundy was in South Vietnam.

Soon after news from Pleiku reached Saigon, Johnson called a meeting of the National Security Council in Washington. After four lengthy telephone conversations with Bundy, he ordered bombing strikes against North Vietnam. In the afternoon of February 7, forty-nine U.S. Navy jets took off from aircraft carriers in the South China Sea to attack a guerrilla training base just north of the border dividing North and South Vietnam.

Meanwhile, Vietcong field commanders in the north-central region of South Vietnam continued to seize the initiative. On February 10, they struck at Qui Nhon, killing 23 U.S. soldiers and wounding 21 other Americans. Again, U.S. officials viewed the operation as directed against U.S. forces. This time, Johnson decided that the United States needed a stronger response. After ordering a bombing raid on February 11, he met with his military advisers to devise a much more extensive air campaign. The result was what the president called a "program of measured and limited air action" against North Vietnam. Johnson's bombing policy, which came to be known as "Rolling Thunder," remained in effect well into 1968.

In Hanoi, North Vietnamese leaders were just as shaken as their U.S. counterparts by the sudden turn of events. They refused to believe Washington had begun heavy bombing of their country because of the U.S. losses suffered at Pleiku and Qui Nhon. Rather, most were convinced that the bombing campaign had long been part of America's strategy, and that the Pleiku and Qui Nhon attacks simply provided a convenient excuse to put the plan into action.

Case Study 2—Failed Diplomacy

The beginning of Rolling Thunder forced North Vietnamese leaders to reassess their stance. Most were convinced that the United States had embarked on a "war of destruction" aimed at annihilating North Vietnam. Many

feared that Washington ultimately sought to impose colonial rule over South Vietnam, much as the French and the Chinese had done to Vietnam in the past.

Yet the North Vietnamese had no hope of defeating the United States militarily. Rather, they believed that they could prevail only by demonstrating to Washington their determination to fight back.

Four Points

North Vietnamese leaders also recognized that achieving their goals would eventually require negotiating with the United States. To prepare for that day, they held nearly two months of meetings to develop their position on ending the war. The document that resulted, approved April 7, 1965, came to be known as the “Four Points.” In brief, the Four Points called for...

- an end to U.S. bombing of North Vietnam;
- the withdrawal of U.S. military personnel from South Vietnam;
- the creation of a South Vietnamese government “in accordance with the program of the National Liberation Front [of which the Vietcong was the military arm];”
- the reunification of Vietnam, to be decided by the South Vietnamese people without foreign interference.

“Everything depends on the Americans. If they want to make war for twenty years, then we shall make war for twenty years. If they want to make peace, we shall make peace and invite them to tea afterwards.”

—Ho Chi Minh,
President of North Vietnam

Developing a negotiating position, however, proved much easier than carrying out diplomacy with a global superpower. At the time the Four Points were issued, the North Vietnamese foreign ministry was lacking in both experience and expertise. Not a single

North Vietnamese diplomat was well-known among his counterparts in the West, other than in France.

Moreover, North Vietnam’s intelligence service could provide the foreign ministry with only the barest information about U.S. policy. Much of their knowledge came from monitoring British radio newscasts. Even obtaining copies of American newspapers on a regular basis was not possible. Hanoi could have turned to the Soviet Union or China for help and advice in conducting diplomacy, but the North Vietnamese wanted to deal with the United States directly.

On the U.S. side, Rolling Thunder also marked a turning point. Within weeks of the start of the bombing campaign, U.S. officials concluded that air strikes alone would not stop the progress of the Vietcong. They suggested that the United States would need to commit sizeable ground forces to prevent the fall of the South Vietnamese government. President Johnson, however, favored launching a diplomatic offensive before sending troops.

Over the following weeks and months, the United States tried several different approaches to draw Hanoi to the negotiating table. The most serious effort took place in May 1965, consisting of a pause in Rolling Thunder and an invitation to pursue a peace settlement. The U.S. initiative was rejected. The North Vietnamese resented the conditions attached to the bombing pause and were wary of U.S. attempts to use the Soviets as intermediaries. Convinced that Hanoi was not interested in a peaceful settlement, the United States resumed bombing North Vietnam on May 19. That same day, however, Hanoi put forward a diplomatic initiative of its own. Mai Van Bo, the highest-ranking North Vietnamese diplomat in France, asked the French foreign ministry to inform U.S. officials that Hanoi was indeed open to negotiations based on the framework of the Four Points.

Just as the North Vietnamese had done a week earlier, Washington turned a cold shoulder to the opening. Nearly a month passed before Bo again asked the French about the

U.S. response to his message. An international businessman also stepped in to arrange discussions between Bo and Americans in Paris.

President Johnson soon took an interest in promoting the talks. He appointed a former U.S. foreign service officer who had served in Vietnam, Edmund Gullion, to follow up with Mai Van Bo. In August 1965, Gullion and Bo met three times. Bo emphasized that the Four Points should be seen as general principles for negotiation, not an inflexible set of prior conditions. He also addressed Gullion's concern about the third point, which U.S. officials had interpreted as demanding the establishment of a communist government in the south.

By the end of the third meeting, Gullion was optimistic that the North Vietnamese were prepared to consider peace talks. When Gullion and Bo met on September 3, however, the discussions broke down. Bo insisted that the "bombings must stop unilaterally, immediate-

ly, totally, and definitively" before negotiations could begin. Bo cancelled a meeting that had been scheduled for September 7. Later U.S. attempts to restart the discussions were rebuffed.

While the Americans were bewildered by the collapse of the Bo-Gullion exchange, the North Vietnamese assessed the results of the meeting very differently. Hanoi felt that the meetings had served to clear up confusion about the Four Points. At the same time, they looked to the battlefield for signs of America's readiness to pursue peace talks. What they saw was steady escalation of the U.S. war effort. As a result, Hanoi believed that North Vietnam had to increase its commitment to the war. Before the year was out, Hanoi found itself in the situation it had hoped to avoid. North Vietnamese and American troops were fighting head-to-head over the future of South Vietnam.

Part V: Values and the Vietnam War

As Americans, we attach great importance to values. Usually, we think of values in connection with our personal lives. Our attitudes toward our families, friends, and communities are a reflection of our personal values.

Values are at the center of our civic lives as well. The high value Americans place on freedom, democracy, national honor, human rights, and individual liberty rings loudly throughout U.S. history. During the Cold War, many of our country's most deeply rooted values shaped U.S. foreign policy in Vietnam and elsewhere. In addition, Americans came to place a new emphasis on security and stability in foreign affairs.

Interests are the other key component of foreign policy. In contrast to values, interests are measurable and concrete. As individuals, we have personal interests associated with our comfort and well-being. Our personal property, financial success, and the safety of ourselves and our families typically rank at the top of our interests. Nations have interests too. For example, U.S. interests include promoting the sale of American exports, securing sources of energy and other raw materials, and protecting the country from attack.

In conducting foreign policy, U.S. leaders seek to promote our country's interests and values. Many of the most difficult and controversial U.S. foreign policy decisions are tied to war, when American policymakers must choose how many lives and resources they are willing to "spend" for the sake of interests and values.

National values assume particular importance in times of war. People hold them up as vital goals that justify personal and national sacrifice. For example, millions of Americans volunteered for service during World War II because they felt freedom and liberty were under threat both in America and around the world. Moreover, the aggression of Nazi Germany and Japan posed a very real threat to U.S. economic and security interests. With so

much at stake, an overwhelming majority of Americans agreed that the costs of the war (in lives, resources, manpower, and money) were justified.

The Vietnam War was different for several reasons. First, the values at stake in Vietnam for the United States changed as U.S. involvement deepened. Originally, the goal was to preserve the freedom and independence of South Vietnam by defeating the communist forces of the Vietcong and North Vietnam. By 1965, however, U.S. leaders were most concerned with preserving the credibility of America's Cold War commitments. Four years later, as American policymakers recognized their inability to defeat the communist forces in South Vietnam militarily, discussion largely turned to the need to defend American honor internationally. For many Americans, the foreign policy goals connected to Vietnam held little meaning. The values that motivated Americans to sacrifice in World War II did not ring as clearly during the Vietnam War, especially in the last years of the struggle. Meanwhile, the media regularly reported the costs in lives and money lost in Vietnam to the American people.

Second, few Americans viewed Vietnam or the other countries of Southeast Asia as areas of vital national interest. U.S. leaders made the argument that the spread of communism in Southeast Asia would mark a significant setback in the Cold War struggle. Nonetheless, there was never a question that the United States would come under attack. Southeast Asia was rich in raw materials, but the region was hardly crucial to American industry or trade.

Finally, the conflict in Vietnam frustrated efforts to measure the progress of the war. Territory that was in the hands of the South Vietnamese army during the day might be under the control of the Vietcong at night. Reports of casualty figures were unreliable, and appeared to have little relationship to the strength of the Vietcong. As the war dragged

on, pronouncements from American leaders that the United States had turned a corner, or that a light could be seen at the end of the tunnel met with increasing public skepticism.

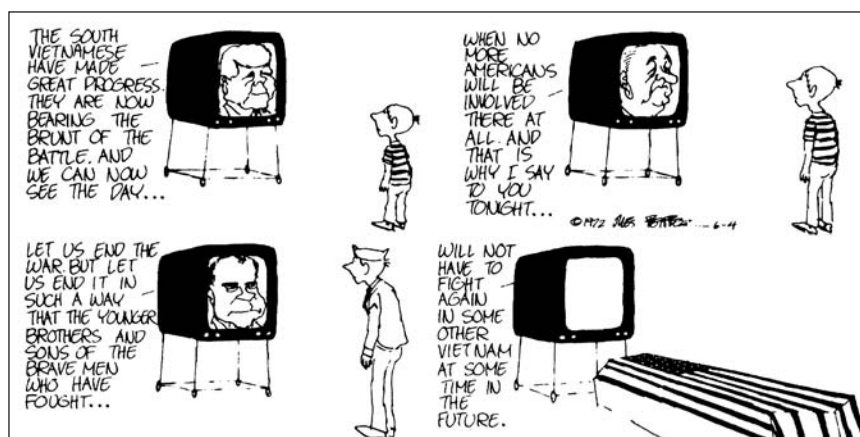
While few Americans shared the view of Senator Ernest Gruening that Vietnam was not worth a single American life, most would have agreed that there was a point beyond which the continued costs could not be justified. How to determine when and if this point had been reached became one of the central issues of the American experience in Vietnam. As George Ball predicted, the more lives and money the United States committed to achieve its goals in Vietnam, the more difficult it became to abandon the cause.

The French reached the point of exhaus-

tion in Vietnam after eight years of war, having spent more than 1.6 trillion francs and twenty-one thousand lives. Most American leaders gave up on their hopes of achieving a military victory soon after communist forces launched a large-scale offensive on the Vietnamese New Year, or Tet, in early 1968. The policy pursued after 1968 was justified primarily in terms of protecting American prestige and honor, even as decision-makers took steps toward withdrawing American troops. Whether the additional sixteen thousand American lives lost in combat after January 1969 would have been considered “well-spent” if “peace with honor” had been achieved is a difficult question to answer. The issue is likely to continue to divide Americans for many years to come.

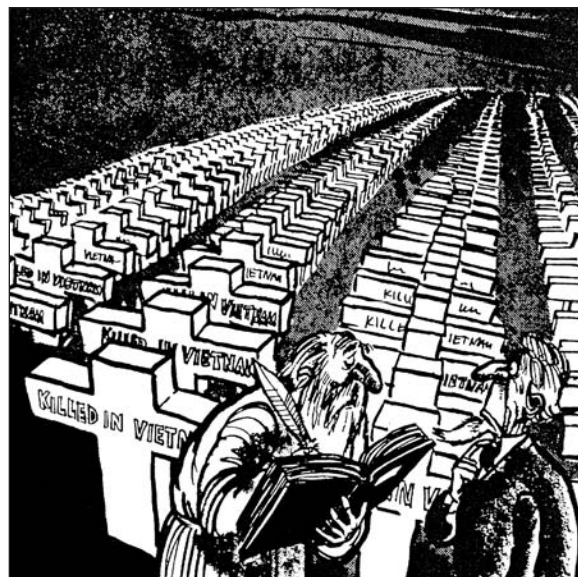
The cartoon to the right expresses one man’s opinion of this controversy. Examine it carefully.

1. What two techniques are employed to convey the passage of time?
2. How does the cartoonist express the conflict between values and interests?
3. How would the cartoon have been drawn differently if the United States had “won” in Vietnam?



Jules Feiffer. Copyright © 1972. Reprinted with permission of Universal Press Syndicate.

In the next cartoon, the man with the book is asking Uncle Sam a very difficult question. You have now studied the reasons why the United States became involved in the Vietnam War and how events unfolded from 1965 to 1975. After talking to your friends and family about this unit, answer the question being asked of Uncle Sam. (Remember, there is no right or wrong answer. You are being asked to make a personal judgment concerning a very controversial period in recent American history.)



Sanders in The Milwaukee Journal. Reprinted with permission.

“What shall I put down as the reason for dying?”

Part VI: Applying the Lessons of Vietnam

Instructions: People have long debated whether the study of history can provide useful lessons to guide future behavior. The American philosopher George Santayana warned that “those who cannot remember the lessons of the past are condemned to repeat it.” In contrast, the American inventor and father of the assembly line, Henry Ford, declared that “history is bunk!” Just as people learn from their experiences, so nations, it is argued, learn lessons from history. Many lessons from the American experience in Vietnam have been put forth by historians, politicians, and media commentators. Several of these are summarized below. Read them carefully and answer the following questions for each:

1. Explain why you think this lesson is valid or invalid.
2. If the lesson is valid, how should U.S. behavior change in the future? Are there any foreign policy issues today in which this particular lesson may be a useful guide?

Extra challenge: Can you recognize how these lessons were applied by U.S. decision-makers in subsequent cases of American military involvement abroad, such as Lebanon (1983), Grenada (1983), the Persian Gulf crisis (1990-91), Somalia (1992-93), Bosnia (1995-2004), Afghanistan (2001-) and Iraq (2003-)?



“Slow learner”

Lesson A: Fight to win; there is no substitute for victory. The American defeat was caused by the failure of the United States to apply its overwhelming military superiority without restrictions. The U.S. government did not try to win. Instead, its objective was to not lose. **Argument:** Throughout the war, the U.S. military was restricted in what tactics could be used, what targets in North Vietnam could be hit, and how many men could be deployed. Fears of negative domestic political repercussions,

the displeasure of our allies, and possible involvement by the Soviets or Chinese led the U.S. government to “pull its punches.”

Lesson B: Make it quick; make it decisive. The American people grow weary of costly, drawn-out wars that appear to be fought for limited objectives. **Argument:** The people of a democracy will initially support efforts to stop aggression and punish the aggressors. As the struggle continues with mounting costs and unclear results, domestic political opposition will limit the ability of the U.S. government to continue such a policy. There will be strong pressure to escalate or to pull out. The energy that democracies like the United States can bring to a worthy cause must be used quickly, or it will erode.

Lesson C: There is no point in thinking about Vietnam; it cannot happen again. Since the combination of circumstances encountered in Vietnam was unique, there is no “lesson of Vietnam” beyond the simple conclusion that the United States should not get involved in Vietnam again. **Argument:** The failure of the United States to achieve its objectives in Vietnam was caused by several factors, including the difficult jungle terrain, the presence of enemy supply routes that could not be effectively cut, a determined foe that had been fighting for national independence for twenty years, and the lack of popular support for the South Vietnamese government. It is extremely unlikely that the United States will ever again encounter this combination of obstacles. To become obsessed with non-existent lessons would be a mistake, and would inhibit U.S. foreign policy in the future.

Lesson D: Once you have climbed onto the back of the tiger, you have lost your ability to determine where and when you will dismount. Major foreign policy commitments, publicly repeated time and time again, significantly reduce the United States’ freedom of action. Events then tend to control U.S. policy, rather than U.S. policy-makers shaping events. **Argument:** Once the major commitments were

made in the early and mid-1960s, the United States could not have backed down and accepted the loss of international prestige and influence that such a public reversal would have entailed. Since the situation in Vietnam was far more difficult than our nation had expected, the eventual defeat and national humiliation were inevitable.

Lesson E: If you do not level with the people in the beginning, they will not follow you to the end. A government that loses its credibility with the people loses the ability to mobilize the resources of the nation effectively to achieve difficult and costly objectives. **Argument:** The Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon administrations intentionally concealed from the American people and the Congress the gravity of the battlefield situation in Vietnam, their pessimism about the chances of achieving a favorable outcome, and their estimates of the likely costs and duration of the war. As the American people and the Congress discovered that the war was not going as promised, they ceased to trust their government, and the resulting “credibility gap” fatally damaged the government’s ability to lead the nation to victory.

Lesson F: The United States is not all-powerful. Regardless of their desirability, some objectives are just not within the reach of U.S. capabilities, even when these capabilities are employed intelligently and with national determination. **Argument:** The long, nearly unbroken string of foreign policy successes after 1946 led U.S. leaders to believe in their invincibility and wisdom. At least initially, most U.S. decision-makers never seriously questioned whether the United States could and should have shaped the situation in Southeast Asia. Evidence to the contrary was ignored and criticism was dismissed. This “arrogance of power” led to the tragedy of Vietnam.

Lesson G: Be very careful what historical lessons you try to apply. By learning too well a lesson from a past experience, a nation may see present challenges through the distorted

prism of its memories. This distortion can lead to mistaken policies and ineffective strategies.

Argument: The lesson of the 1938 Munich agreement dominated the perceptions and responses of U.S. leaders during the 1950s and early 1960s. Similarly, the successes in Western Europe in containing Soviet power led the United States to apply the same methods elsewhere. The situation in Southeast Asia was quite different. The misapplication of the Hitler analogy and the containment strategy led to commitments and policies that could not work regardless of the investment in men and money. The problem in Vietnam was not one of external aggression by a militaristic neighbor, but rather was primarily one of an unresolved civil war that had begun in 1946.

Lesson H: An unrestricted press severely limits the ability of a democracy to fight effectively in a long, complicated war. Since the nature of the media is to focus on the sensational and the tragic, the American people inevitably receive a distorted picture of the war effort. Public reaction to these distortions deprives the government of the support necessary to continue the war. **Argument:** Vietnam was the first “television war.” The horrible cost of the war came into American living rooms every evening. The reporters, many of whom were critical of the policies and objectives of the U.S. government in Vietnam, chose to emphasize stories and interpretations critical of the war effort. This biased reporting shaped the perceptions of Americans at home and eroded public support for the war effort.

Lesson I: A team will not win if the players are continually squabbling with the coach, and refusing to execute his or her plays, insisting that theirs be tried instead. The separation of powers in the American system of government leads to jealousy and rivalry between the executive and legislative branches. During a difficult and complex war, congressional criticism and obstructionism can deprive the president of the prestige and tools necessary to achieve victory. **Argument:** Although the

Congress, with very few exceptions, initially supported the war effort, distrust of the White House, disappointment with the lack of progress in the war, and the suspicion that the White House was manipulating Congress caused significant vocal opposition as the war dragged on. This opposition weakened the U.S. position abroad and convinced Hanoi that it could outlast the United States and achieve its long-term goals in South Vietnam.

Lesson J: Do not go it alone when you go to war. The application of U.S. military power is most effective when it is done in the context of a joint effort involving many nations, even if the United States makes the major contribution. **Argument:** The United States failed in its half-hearted attempts to involve its allies in the Vietnam war. Since most of our allies did not perceive the situation and stakes in South Vietnam the way that the United States did, with a few exceptions (small contingents from South Korea, Australia and New Zealand) the United States fought alone with the ARVN. Because our traditional European allies were not involved, they were free to criticize the U.S. effort. These criticisms and the apparent absence of unity among the Western democracies encouraged the resistance of the communists and fed domestic unrest at home. The Korean War demonstrated that a multilateral approach can be very useful in cloaking unilateral objectives and actions.

Lesson K: Do not get involved in ground wars on the Asian mainland. Ground wars on the Asian mainland are enormously difficult and next to impossible for the United States to win. **Argument:** Since the population of Asia is many times more than that of the United States, our forces run the risk of being outnumbered. In addition, the terrain lends itself to guerrilla warfare, meaning that large numbers of U.S. troops would be tied down in a protracted conflict, while the enemy would likely enjoy popular support and benefit from resentment against Western imperialism.

Biographies from the Vietnam War Era

George W. Ball

Born on December 21, 1909 in Des Moines, Iowa. Undersecretary of State, the second-ranking post in the State Department, under Kennedy. Ball was a key adviser to the president on U.S. policy in Vietnam, although much of his advice was not followed. In late 1961, Ball strongly opposed the recommendations of presidential advisers General Maxwell Taylor and Walt Rostow to introduce combat forces into Vietnam. Ball consistently argued against deepening U.S. involvement in Vietnam, and was one of the “wise men” (a group of senior statesmen convened in March 1968 to advise Johnson) who convinced the president to de-escalate the war. Ball died in 1994.

McGeorge Bundy

Born March 30, 1919 in Boston, Massachusetts. Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, 1961-1966. Bundy became one of the chief architects of U.S. policy in Southeast Asia. When the Kennedy administration was considering withdrawal of support for South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem in 1963, Bundy advised that the United States should not thwart a potentially successful coup against Diem. Following a trip to Vietnam in February 1965, Bundy recommended that the United States rely heavily on air power, varying the intensity of bombing raids against North Vietnam according to the rate of communist troop infiltration into the south. Convinced that a major U.S. commitment was necessary to keep South Vietnam afloat and to demonstrate U.S. resolve to halt communist expansion, Bundy became a leading spokesman for the administration's position on Vietnam. However, in 1968, Bundy was one of the “wise men” who urged Johnson to de-escalate the war. Bundy died in 1996.

William Bundy

Born September 24, 1917 in Washington, D.C. Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern

Affairs under Johnson, 1964-1969. Brother of McGeorge, William Bundy served with the C.I.A. for ten years until 1961, when he shifted to the Defense Department during the Kennedy administration. As Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, William Bundy recommended an aggressive program to arrest communist expansion in South Vietnam. In May 1966, Bundy submitted a memorandum to Secretary of State Dean Rusk that would serve as a guideline for U.S. policy in Vietnam until 1969. The paper argued that bombing was a viable means of bringing North Vietnam to the bargaining table, and that the United States should cease bombing operations only if the North Vietnamese agreed to limit infiltration of troops into the south and to halt Vietcong operations there. In the spring of 1967, Bundy opposed continued escalation of the conflict, claiming that such a policy would have an adverse effect on U.S. allies and would have limited impact on Hanoi. William Bundy left government service in 1969 and died in 2000.

Clark M. Clifford

Born on December 25, 1906 in Fort Scott, Kansas. Special Counsel to President Truman, 1946-1950. Clifford was one of the architects of the Truman Doctrine. An esteemed Washington lawyer, Clifford joined the Johnson administration as secretary of defense in January 1968 after McNamara's resignation. Clifford quickly maneuvered to steer Johnson away from further escalation of the war. In March 1968, Clifford arranged the meeting of the “wise men,” the group of senior statesmen who convinced Johnson to de-escalate U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Clifford died in 1998.

Ngo Dinh Diem

Born in 1901 in the French protectorate of Annam. Ngo Dinh Diem was an intense anti-communist nationalist from a Catholic family of central Vietnam. Diem returned from exile in the United States in 1954 to become prime

minister to Bao Dai, whom he defeated the next year in a referendum in which voting fraud was suspected. Diem refused to hold nationwide elections as prescribed under the 1954 Geneva agreement. Devoting much of his energy as leader to the establishment of military and police units for his own protection and for use against his political rivals, Diem was criticized harshly for persecuting Buddhists and other dissidents. He was overthrown and assassinated by his own generals in November, 1963 with the tacit approval of the Kennedy administration.

John Foster Dulles

Born on February 25, 1888 in Washington, D.C. Secretary of State under Eisenhower from 1953 to 1959. Dulles viewed the communist insurgency in Southeast Asia as part of a Soviet plan to spread communism throughout the world and proposed using nuclear weapons to gain victory in Vietnam. However, Dulles' approach failed to generate support in Congress or from Britain and France. At the Geneva Conference of 1954, Dulles opposed a negotiated settlement, and on his order the United States did not sign the Geneva Accords. In the fall of 1954, Dulles announced that military and economic aid and advisers would be sent to South Vietnam to help the Diem government solidify its position. Terminally ill, Dulles resigned in April 1959 and died on May 24 of the same year.

Dwight D. Eisenhower

Born on October 14, 1890 in Denison, Texas. Thirty-fourth President of the United States, 1953-1961. As a presidential candidate in 1952, Eisenhower promised to end the Korean War. In 1953, he helped arrange an armistice to end the conflict. The following year, he decided not to commit ground or air forces in support of the French at Dienbienphu, although he did furnish financial aid to the French war effort. Under Eisenhower's administration, the "domino theory"—the belief that the nations of Southeast Asia could fall one after the other to communism if the

communist insurgency in Vietnam was not contained—emerged as a key element in U.S. foreign policy. Eisenhower provided economic and military aid for the government of South Vietnam, and urged his successor, John F. Kennedy, to be vigilant in Southeast Asia. Eisenhower died on March 28, 1969.

Vo Nguyen Giap

Born in 1912 in Quang Binh Province in the French protectorate of Annam. Giap is modern Vietnam's foremost military figure. He taught high school history and studied law at the University of Hanoi while engaging in communist activities. Giap created the Vietminh military organization that defeated the French at Dienbienphu. He continued as the chief communist strategist in the war against the United States and South Vietnam. While he virtually retired from public life after 1975, Giap remained influential as an elder statesman in North Vietnam.

Ho Chi Minh

Born Nguyen Tat Thanh in 1890 in central Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh as a youth traveled the world, moved to Paris in 1917, and remained there for seven years. Ho became a founding member of the French Communist party in 1920, went to Moscow four years later, and became a communist agent. He used a number of aliases, among the best known of them being Nguyen Ai Quoc (Nguyen the Patriot). Ho founded the Indochinese Communist Party in Hong Kong in 1930. He returned to Vietnam in 1941 and created the Vietminh. He soon adopted his most famous alias, Ho Chi Minh (He Who Enlightens). Ho proclaimed Vietnam's independence from France in September 1945, then fought the French for the next nine years. Ho served as president of North Vietnam—the Democratic Republic of Vietnam—from 1945 until his death in September 1969.

Lyndon B. Johnson

Born on August 27, 1908 in Stonewall, Texas. Thirty-sixth President of the United States, 1963-1969. Johnson served four terms in the

U.S. House of Representatives and was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1948. He became Senate majority leader in 1953. Chosen to be Kennedy's running mate, Johnson was elected vice president in 1960. After Kennedy's assassination, Johnson assumed the presidency and inherited the Vietnam dilemma. While trying to avoid a full-fledged war, Johnson authorized the bombing of North Vietnam and the first major deployments of U.S. ground troops in the south. After the communist offensive in early 1968, Johnson announced that he would halt the bombing of North Vietnam and would not run again for president. Johnson died in 1973.

George F. Kennan

Born on February 16, 1904 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Charges d'Affairs, Moscow Embassy, 1944-46; Ambassador to the Soviet Union under President Truman, 1951-1952. An early specialist in Soviet affairs, Kennan served as chairman of the State Department's policy planning staff, counselor to the State Department, and ambassador to the Soviet Union. After World War II, Kennan developed the strategy of "containment" to block Soviet expansion. Kennan imagined that containment would be limited to Europe and would eventually force a major shift in Soviet policies. In the mid-1960s, Kennan emerged as an important critic of U.S. policy in Vietnam. Kennan argued that Vietnam was not vital to U.S. interests, and questioned whether U.S. credibility or prestige would be seriously damaged by a withdrawal. Kennan died in 2005.

John F. Kennedy

Born on May 29, 1917 in Brookline, Massachusetts. Thirty-fifth president of the United States, 1961-1963. Served as senator from Massachusetts from 1953-1963, both supporting and criticizing U.S. policy in Southeast Asia. During his presidency, Kennedy committed the first substantial military personnel to serve as advisers to South Vietnam. He subscribed to both the containment doctrine and the domino theory in seeking to block communist

expansion into Southeast Asia. Kennedy gave his tacit approval to the coup that led to the assassination of South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem. John F. Kennedy was himself assassinated on November 22, 1963.

Henry A. Kissinger

Born on May 27, 1923 in Furth, Germany. Kissinger immigrated to the United States in 1938. Appointed national security adviser by Nixon in 1969, Kissinger held secret talks with North Vietnamese diplomats up until the end of the war. In January 1973, Kissinger negotiated with Le Duc Tho of North Vietnam to achieve the Paris peace settlement. The Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Kissinger and Le Duc Tho, who refused to accept it. Nixon later appointed Kissinger secretary of state, a position that he held under both Nixon and Ford, from 1973 to 1977.

Henry C. Lodge

Born on July 5, 1902 in Nahant, Massachusetts. Ambassador to South Vietnam under Kennedy and Johnson, 1963-1964 and 1965-1967. The grandson of an illustrious senator of the same name, Henry Cabot Lodge held several important posts, among them senator from Massachusetts and ambassador to the United Nations during the Eisenhower administration. As ambassador to Vietnam, Lodge played a key role in the Kennedy administration's decision to allow the regime of Ngo Dinh Diem to be overthrown. In March 1968, while serving as a member of the "wise men," Lodge was reluctant to vote for a dramatic change in policy. In January 1969, Nixon appointed Lodge chief negotiator to the Paris peace conference. Frustrated by North Vietnamese intransigence, Lodge asked to be relieved in October 1969. He died in 1985.

Mao Ze-dong

Born on December 26, 1893 in Shaoshan, a village in the Hunan province of China. Mao is best known for his role as Chinese Communist Party chairman. Mao led the overthrow of Chiang Kai-shek's nationalist government in 1949,

providing the Vietnamese with an important example of communist revolutionary warfare. U.S. policymakers during the Vietnam War were extremely concerned about the threat of Chinese expansionism. At the same time, they wished to avoid a direct confrontation with China. Mao supported the Vietcong and North Vietnamese with military and financial aid. In 1966, however, he turned inward, sponsoring the “Cultural Revolution” within his own country. Mao first warned the North Vietnamese against negotiating with the United States, then invited President Nixon to China in February 1972. Mao died in 1976.

Robert S. McNamara

Born on June 9, 1916 in San Francisco, California. Secretary of Defense under Kennedy and Johnson, 1961-1968. A Ford Motor Company executive from 1946 to 1961, McNamara joined the Kennedy administration in 1961. McNamara shaped U.S. policy in Vietnam—and the presentation of that policy to the American people—as much as any American with the exception of Presidents Johnson and Nixon. While publicly confident about U.S. capabilities in Vietnam, McNamara grew increasingly doubtful in private. Disenchanted with the war, he resigned as secretary of defense in 1968 and became president of the World Bank.

John T. McNaughton

Born on November 21, 1921 in Bicknell, Indiana. Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs under Johnson, 1964-1967. McNaughton served as Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara’s chief assistant in developing strategy in Vietnam. Maintaining in 1965 that changing the military situation in Vietnam might take a “massive deployment” of U.S. troops, McNaughton advised Johnson to employ marine units in active combat operations against communist forces. In April 1966, McNaughton reversed his previous endorsement of the domino theory. By May 1967, he had become alarmed by the growing public protest against the war

and advised Johnson to refuse the military’s request that an additional eighty thousand U.S. troops be sent to Vietnam. In June 1967, McNaughton became secretary of the navy. On July 19, 1967, he was killed in an airplane crash in North Carolina along with his wife and son.

Pierre Mendes-France

Born on January 11, 1907 in Paris, France. Mendes-France was a maverick political figure who warned against French involvement in Indochina. He was elected prime minister in June 1954 during the Geneva Conference and met a self-imposed deadline to reach an armistice there. He was ousted from office soon after. Mendes-France died in 1982.

Richard M. Nixon

Born on January 9, 1913 in Yorba Linda, California. Thirty-seventh President of the United States, 1969-1974. Nixon was elected to the House of Representatives from California following service in the navy during World War II. In 1950, he won a seat in the Senate. Advocating a strong anti-communist stance, Nixon served two terms as vice president under Eisenhower, but was narrowly defeated by John Kennedy in the presidential election of 1960. In 1968, Nixon won the presidency. While he ran on a campaign of ending the Vietnam war, Nixon did not actually achieve a settlement until January 1973. “Vietnamization” and the Nixon Doctrine were instituted during the Nixon presidency. Intensive bombing of Hanoi and diplomatic overtures to China and the Soviet Union also occurred during the Nixon presidency. Nixon won reelection in 1972, but the Watergate scandal forced him to resign in August 1974. Nixon died in 1994.

Walt W. Rostow

Born on October 7, 1916 in New York City. National Security Adviser under Johnson, 1966-1968. Rostow went from a distinguished academic position at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to a top State Department

job during the Kennedy administration. In 1961, Rostow participated in an official fact-finding mission in South Vietnam. Upon his return, he recommended that the United States substantially increase its military commitment to South Vietnam. As Johnson's national security adviser, Rostow favored forceful action in Vietnam. He argued that externally supported insurgencies could be stopped only by escalating military measures against the external source of support. Thus, he favored bombing North Vietnam and maintained that position until Johnson's decision to de-escalate the war. After serving under Johnson, Rostow taught at the University of Texas. He died in 2003.

Dean D. Rusk

Born on February 9, 1909 in Cherokee County, Georgia. Secretary of State under Kennedy and Johnson, 1961-1968. Rusk devoted more years to Vietnam than any other senior U.S. official, having faced the problem as assistant secretary of state for Far Eastern affairs as early as 1950. Rusk consistently favored strong U.S. involvement, arguing that "Chinese expansionism" and "aggression" had to be stopped. He helped President Johnson make important decisions on escalation of the conflict. In 1964 and 1965, Rusk opposed attempts to negotiate a settlement, arguing that with the Vietcong controlling more than half of South Vietnam, the United States could not bargain from a position of strength. Rusk left office in January 1969 and died in 1994.

Maxwell D. Taylor

Born on August 26, 1901 in Keytesville, Missouri. Maxwell Taylor served as chairman of the joint chiefs of staff under Kennedy and Johnson, 1962-1964. An advocate of "flexible response" rather than "massive retaliation," Taylor was known as Kennedy's favorite general. In 1961, after participating in a fact-finding mission in South Vietnam, Taylor recommended deepening the U.S. military commitment in Southeast Asia. Kennedy appointed Tay-

lor as chairman of the joint chiefs of staff in 1962. Johnson appointed him ambassador to South Vietnam in 1964. As ambassador, Taylor pressed for a return to civilian rule after the military coup that overthrew Ngo Dinh Diem. In July 1965, Taylor was named as a special consultant to Johnson. As a member of the "wise men" convened in March 1968 to advise the president on the war, Taylor was opposed to the policy of disengagement recommended by a majority of the group. Taylor died in 1986.

Nguyen Van Thieu

Born on April 5, 1923 near Phan Rang in the French protectorate of Annam. Thieu served briefly in the Vietminh before joining the Vietnamese army created by the French. He trained in France and later in the United States and took part in a coup orchestrated by Air Vice Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky in December 1964. Thieu became chairman and chief of state of South Vietnam in 1965 and maneuvered to become president in 1967. Indecisive and mistrustful, Thieu fled Vietnam just before the fall of Saigon in late April 1975. He lived thereafter in Britain and the United States, and died in 2001.

William C. Westmoreland

Born on March 26, 1914 in Spartanburg County, South Carolina. Chief tactical commander of U.S. forces in Vietnam under Johnson, 1964-1968. Westmoreland served as deputy commander and commander of the MACV (U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam) in June, 1964. After the Gulf of Tonkin incident, Westmoreland assumed the responsibility of commanding U.S. combat forces in Vietnam. Westmoreland drew strong criticism when he requested a large number of additional troops for deployment to Vietnam after the communist offensive in early 1968. Westmoreland became chief of staff of the army in 1968. He died in 2005.

Vietnam Timeline: 1965-1975

1965

July

President Johnson increases U.S. ground forces in Vietnam.

1966

January

President Johnson resumes bombing of North Vietnam.

March

Buddhist monks protest against South Vietnamese government.

1967

June

President Johnson meets Soviet Premier Kosygin.

September

General Thieu elected president of South Vietnam.

November

General Westmoreland predicts communist forces nearing breaking point.

1968

January

North Korea seizes U.S. warship.

February

Communist Tet offensive raises fighting to new level of intensity.

March

Clark Clifford replaces Robert McNamara as defense secretary.

March

President Johnson quits re-election campaign; halts bombing of North Vietnam.

November

Richard Nixon wins presidency with pledge to end war.

1969

June

Nixon begins withdrawing U.S. troops; seeks to turn war effort over to South Vietnam.

July

"Nixon Doctrine" defines limits of U.S. role in Asia.

November

U.S. forces implicated in My Lai massacre.

1970

April

U.S. troops enter Cambodia to destroy communist bases.

May

Anti-war protesters killed at Kent State University.

1971

June

Secret Pentagon study, known as "Pentagon Papers," published.

1972

February

President Nixon visits China.

May

United States mines North Vietnamese harbors.

October

U.S. officials report peace settlement near.

November

President Nixon re-elected in landslide.

December

President Nixon escalates bombing of North Vietnam.

1973

January

Peace agreement signed.

April

North Vietnam releases last American POWs.

August

Nixon ends bombing of Cambodia.

November

Congress limits presidential war powers.

1974

August

Watergate scandal forces President Nixon to resign.

1975

February

North Vietnam launches large-scale offensive against South Vietnam.

April

Communists capture Saigon; United States evacuates last personnel.

Supplementary Resources

Books

Appy, Christian. *Patriots: The Vietnam War Remembered From all Sides* (New York: Viking Press, 2003) 604 pages.

Karnow, Stanley. *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Viking Press, 1991). 768 pages.

McNamara, Robert S. *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Times Books, 1995). 414 pages.

McNamara, Robert S., James G. Blight, and Robert K. Brigham with Thomas J. Biersteker and Herbert Y. Schandler. *Argument Without End: In Search of Answers to the Vietnam Tragedy* (New York: Public Affairs, 1999). 479 pages.

Sheehan, Neil. *The Pentagon Papers* (New York: Bantam Books, 1971). 677 pages.

World Wide Web

Critical Oral History: The American War in Vietnam <http://www.watsoninstitute.org/project_detail.cfm?id=34> An overview of the research on the Vietnam War conducted by the Watson Institute for International Studies.

The Cold War International History Project <http://wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?topic_id=1409&fuseaction=library.Collection&class=New%20Evidence%20on%20the%20Vietnam%2FIndochina%20Wars> Newly released documents and analysis of events relating to the Vietnam War, much from the Chinese perspective.

The Miller Center of Public Affairs White House Tapes <<http://www.whitehousetapes.org>> Transcripts and audio from Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon recordings, plus online exhibits to help students and teachers navigate the volume of material available.

The Choices Program <<http://www.choices.edu/vietnam.cfm>> Links to additional resources for teachers on the Vietnam War and current research.

Vietnam Online <<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/vietnam/index.html>> PBS website with primary sources, maps, teacher guides, and more that complements the series *Vietnam: A Television History*.

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The Limits of Power: The United States in Vietnam



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History and Current Issues for the Classroom

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November 2005

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Thomas J. Biersteker
Director, Watson Institute for International Studies

Acknowledgments

The Limits of Power: The United States in Vietnam was developed by the Choices Program with the assistance of the research staff of the Thomas J. Watson Jr. Institute for International Studies and scholars at Brown University. We wish to thank the following researchers for their invaluable input:

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The research of the Watson Institute's Critical Oral History Project on the American War in Vietnam was central to the writing of this unit. Led by James G. Blight, the Project's contributors include Robert S. McNamara, Robert K. Brigham, Thomas J. Biersteker and Herbert Y. Schandler.

We wish to thank Don Bakker of Nauset Regional High School in Eastham, Massachusetts for his work as the unit author of the first edition of *The Limits of Power: The United States in Vietnam*.

The Limits of Power: The United States in Vietnam is part of a continuing series on international public policy issues. New units are published each academic year and all units are updated regularly.

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THE CHOICES FOR THE 21ST CENTURY EDUCATION PROGRAM is a program of the Watson Institute for International Studies at Brown University. CHOICES was established to help citizens think constructively about foreign policy issues, to improve participatory citizenship skills, and to encourage public judgement on policy issues.



The Watson Institute for International Studies was established at Brown University in 1986 to serve as a forum for students, faculty, visiting scholars, and policy practitioners who are committed to analyzing contemporary global problems and developing initiatives to address them.

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The Choices Approach to Historical Turning Points

Choices curricula are designed to make complex international issues understandable and meaningful for students. Using a student-centered approach, Choices units develop critical thinking and an understanding of the significance of history in our lives today—essential ingredients of responsible citizenship.

Teachers who use Choices units say the collaboration and interaction in Choices units are highly motivating for students. Studies consistently demonstrate that students of all abilities learn best when they are actively engaged with the material. Cooperative learning invites students to take pride in their own contributions and in the group product, enhancing students' confidence as learners. Research demonstrates that students using the Choices approach learn the factual information presented as well as or better than those using a lecture-discussion format. Choices units offer students with diverse abilities and learning styles the opportunity to contribute, collaborate, and achieve.

Choices units on historical turning points include student readings, a framework of policy options, primary sources, suggested lesson plans, and resources for structuring cooperative learning, role plays, and simulations. Students are challenged to:

- understand historical context
- recreate historical debate
- analyze and evaluate multiple perspectives at a turning point in history
- analyze primary sources that provide a grounded understanding of the moment
- understand the internal logic of a viewpoint
- identify the conflicting values represented by different points of view
- develop and articulate original viewpoints
- recognize relationships between history and current issues
- communicate in written and oral presentations
- collaborate with peers

Choices curricula offer teachers a flexible resource for covering course material while actively engaging students and developing skills in critical thinking, persuasive writing, and informed citizenship. The instructional activities that are central to Choices units can be valuable components in any teacher's repertoire of effective teaching strategies.

Historical Understanding

Each Choices curriculum resource provides students with extensive information about an historical issue. By providing students only the information available at the time, Choices units help students to understand that historical events often involved competing and highly contested views. The Choices approach emphasizes that historical outcomes were hardly inevitable. This approach helps students to develop a more sophisticated understanding of history.

Each Choices unit presents the range of options that were considered at a turning point in history. Students understand and analyze these options through a role play activity.

In each unit the setting is the same as it was during the actual event. Students may be role playing a meeting of the National Security Council, a town gathering, or a Senate debate. Student groups defend their assigned policy options and, in turn, are challenged with questions from their classmates playing the role of "decision-makers" at the time. The ensuing debate demands analysis and evaluation of the conflicting values, interests, and priorities reflected in the options.

The final reading in a Choices historical unit presents the outcome of the debate and reviews subsequent events. The final lesson encourages students to make connections between past and present.

Note To Teachers

Few topics are more difficult to teach, or more important for our students to understand, than our country's involvement in Vietnam. Just as the Great Depression and World War II were defining experiences for Americans, so was the Vietnam War.

The Limits of Power: The United States in Vietnam takes students back into history to evaluate how successive U.S. administrations perceived the situation in Vietnam, weighed the stakes, gauged the options, and implemented the policy decisions. The readings and activities put students in the positions of the chief U.S. decision-makers at the time. The unit seeks to revive the uncertainty, the complexity, and the tension of the history-making process as it occurred. Students become active participants in, rather than passive observers of, the decision-making process.

The Limits of Power: The United States in Vietnam stresses interactive, group-oriented learning. Skills that are emphasized and reinforced in the lessons are: distinguishing facts from opinions and assumptions; interpreting information presented in graphic form; reasoning logically from cause (or assumption) to effect (or action); presenting oral and written arguments clearly and convincingly; listening carefully to and analyzing the positions of others; extracting information from primary sources; interpreting visual presentations of opinion (cartoons); recognizing patterns in the historical record and drawing conclusions from these patterns; and clarifying the connection between basic values and policy choices.

Suggested Ten-Day Lesson Plan: The Teacher Resource Book accompanying *The Limits of Power: The United States in Vietnam* contains a day-by-day lesson plan and student activities. As you will see, the unit relies heavily on primary sources, such as speeches, newspaper articles and editorials, political cartoons, songs, and policy memoranda. It

avoids after-the-fact memoirs and post-mortem analyses. Rather, students have an opportunity to work through difficult foreign policy questions, just as U.S. policymakers tried to work through and solve the Vietnam “problem.” At the conclusion of the unit, students are called upon to examine and evaluate the often contradictory lessons that have been drawn from the U.S. experience in Vietnam. You may also find the “Alternative Five-Day Lesson Plan” useful.

• **Alternative Study Guides:** Each section of background reading is accompanied by two study guides. The standard study guide helps students harvest the information from the background readings in preparation for analysis and synthesis in class. The advanced study guide requires the student to tackle analysis and synthesis prior to class activities.

• **Vocabulary and Concepts:** The background reading addresses subjects that are complex and challenging. To help your students get the most out of the text, you may want to review with them “Key Terms” found in the Teacher Resource Book (TRB) on page TRB-48 before they begin their assignment. An “Issues Toolbox” is also included on page TRB-49. This provides additional information on key concepts.

• **Primary Source Documents:** Materials are included throughout the student text that are an integral part of all lessons.

• **Additional Online Resources:** More resources are available online at www.choices.edu/vietnam.cfm

The lesson plans offered here are provided as a guide. Many teachers choose to devote additional time to certain activities. We hope that these suggestions help you tailor the unit to fit the needs of your classroom.

Integrating This Unit into Your Curriculum

Units produced by the Choices for the 21st Century Education Program are designed to be integrated into a variety of social studies courses. Below are a few ideas about how to fit *The Limits of Power: The United States in Vietnam* into your curriculum.

U.S. History: While the background reading of this unit makes the point that the road to Vietnam began in 1947 in Greece and Turkey, others would place the origins of the Vietnam War in the Philippines after the Spanish-American War. Acquisition of the Philippines created a new set of American interests that would have far-reaching consequences for U.S. foreign policy. At the same time, the fighting between U.S. troops and Filipino guerrillas served as America's first introduction to the perils of warfare in East Asia. Like the Vietnam War, a conflict between local rebels and European colonial forces preceded America's involvement in the Philippines. U.S. leaders entered the fighting with little consideration of their long-term goals and soon were caught up in a village-to-village struggle. After more than three years of war, 4,200 Americans and 100,000 to 200,000 Filipinos had died in battle or from disease. On the home front, the war generated vocal protests from opponents of imperialism. More than half a century later, however, the American experience in the Philippines had little influence on U.S. policy in Vietnam.

The first stages of the Vietnam War marked

the apogee of U.S. power on the world stage. In the early 1960s, the United States still held a decisive edge over the Soviet Union in long-range nuclear weapons and had developed a global network of alliances and military bases. By the time the last U.S. troops had left Vietnam, there was a rough military parity between the two superpowers, and the United States was pursuing a policy of détente with the Soviet Union and China. Many scholars have attributed the relative decline in U.S. strength to imperial overstretch, and draw parallels to the evolution of great empires of the past. From ancient Rome, to the empires of Jenghiz Khan and Timur Lenk (Tamerlane), to Great Britain, history offers many possibilities to explore in the classroom. Teachers may also consider comparing the impact of the Vietnam War on the United States with the Soviet Union's experience in Afghanistan.

International Relations: Although U.S. military involvement in Vietnam ended more than three decades ago, the war remains a central reference point for U.S. decision-makers today. When Americans considered going to war to force Iraq out of Kuwait in early 1991, lessons from Vietnam were frequently cited. More recently, the Vietnam experience has been injected into the debate over U.S. involvement in Iraq. At the highest levels of government, as well as in the classroom, the Vietnam War will clearly remain relevant for years to come.

The French Indochina War and the Roots of U.S. Involvement

Objectives:

Students will: Analyze the roots of conflict in Indochina after World War II.

Explore the positions of leading delegations at the 1954 Geneva Conference on Vietnam.

Collaborate with classmates to develop a group presentation.

Required Reading:

Before beginning the unit, students should have read the Introduction and Part I of the background reading in the student text (pages 1-7) and completed “Study Guide—Part I” (TRB 4-5) or “Advanced Study Guide—Part I” (TRB 6-7).

Handouts:

“Geneva Conference” (TRB-8) for participant groups

“Background Briefing” in the student text (pages 8-22) for appropriate participant groups

“Geneva Conference: Instructions to Recorders” (TRB-9) for recorders

In the Classroom:

1. Review of Reading—Using the maps included in Part I of the background reading, ask students to identify the locations of Indochina,

Japan, Korea, and China. Review student responses to the study guide questions for “Study Guide—Part I.” Using the map on page 6 of the student text, review the battlefield situation on the eve of the Geneva Conference.

2. Planning Ahead—Explain that on Day Two students will be simulating the Geneva Conference of 1954. Divide the class into six groups. Five of the groups will represent the major participants at the conference (the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, France, the People’s Republic of China, the United States, and Britain) while members of the sixth group will function as recorders.

3. Preparing for the Role Play—Distribute “Geneva Conference” and the appropriate “Background Briefing” to members of the participant groups. The participant groups should begin by reading the instructions on the worksheet and studying their respective “Background Briefing.” Distribute “Geneva Conference: Instructions to Recorders” to the sixth group. Note that the recorders should use their worksheet to record the presentations of the participant groups on Day Two. They may prepare for their assignment by skimming the five briefings.

Homework:

Students should complete preparations for the Geneva Conference role play.

Study Guide—Part I

1. George Kennan, the State Department’s principal expert on the Soviet Union, proposed that the United States work to contain:

a.

b.
2. Fill in the chart below based on the background reading.

U.S. Policy	Years	Purpose of Policy
The Truman Doctrine		
The Marshall Plan		
The Berlin Airlift		
Founding of NATO		

3. Why was France involved in Indochina following World War II?

Name: _____

4. What two events recast the U.S. attitude toward the war in Indochina? Why?

a.

b.

5. List two components of the “Navarre Plan.”

a.

b.

6. Name at least four countries or groups that participated in the Geneva Conference.

7a. What was the result of the battle at Dienbienphu?

b. How did it affect France’s attitude at the Geneva Conference?

8. List two reasons why the United States was reluctant to participate in the Geneva Conference.

a.

b.

Advanced Study Guide—Part I

1. Describe the actions taken by the United States after World War II to halt what was seen as the threat of Soviet communism.
2. What was the U.S. attitude toward France's initial efforts to reassert its control over Indochina after World War II?
3. Explain why and how U.S. attitudes toward the French colonial war in Indochina changed in 1950.
4. In what sense were the United States and France "uneasy allies" from June 1950 to July 1954?
(Hint: Did they share the same perceptions and objectives in Indochina?)

Name: _____

5. What does the cartoon to the right, drawn in 1954, suggest about the nature of the war in Indochina? If the cartoon had been drawn in 1947, how might the cartoonist have portrayed the war?



Fred Q. Seibel in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*. Reprinted with permission.

6. Why were the U.S. proposals to intervene in Indochina in 1954 during the siege of Dienbienphu never carried out?

7. Explain why the United States was reluctant to attend the Geneva Conference.

Extra Challenge: Explain the meaning of the statement at the beginning of the background reading: “The American road to Vietnam began in early 1947 in the villages of Greece and in the mountains of Turkey.”

Geneva Conference

Instructions: You are representing your country at the Geneva Conference convened in May 1954 to deal with the crisis in Indochina. In attendance are the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (representing the Vietminh forces fighting against French rule), France, the People's Republic of China (communist China), the United States, Britain and the Soviet Union (the conference co-sponsors), delegations representing the Associated States of Laos and Cambodia (both of which have royal governments under French protection), and the Republic of Vietnam (an anti-communist government allied with the French).*

The outcome of this conference will affect your country's vital interests and shape its future. Your country has invested much in the events leading up to this conference, and now you must achieve specific objectives to justify these investments of money, prestige, and in some cases, lives. To prepare a convincing presentation of your delegation's objectives, read the background briefing material carefully, then answer the following questions. Keep in mind that your presentation should be frank, honest, and direct.

1. What is at stake for your country in this situation?
2. What is your view of the historical events that led up to this crisis?
3. What are the principal objectives that your country wishes to achieve at the conference regarding Southeast Asia?
4. How do you perceive the actions and objectives of the other major participants?
5. What specific decisions, designed to achieve your objectives, will you try to persuade the other delegations to accept?

*The countries with the greatest influence in deciding the outcome of the Geneva Conference were the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, France, the People's Republic of China, the United States, and Britain. The Soviet Union, an active participant whose objectives were very close to those of the People's Republic of China, frequently played the role of mediator. The remaining three delegations played a secondary role in shaping the settlement.

Geneva Conference: Instructions to Recorders

Instructions: You are a reporter assigned to cover the Geneva Conference on Indochina. At the conclusion of the presentations by the principal delegations (the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, France, the People's Republic of China, the United States, and Britain) you will be asked to compare and contrast the positions and objectives of these participants. Each delegation sees the situation in Indochina very differently. With this in mind, listen carefully to the presentations of each delegation and answer the following questions.

1. What are the values at stake in Indochina as expressed by each delegation?
 - a. Democratic Republic of Vietnam:
 - b. France:
 - c. People's Republic of China:
 - d. United States:
 - e. Britain:
2. How does each delegation view the historical events that led up to this conference?
 - a. Democratic Republic of Vietnam:
 - b. France:
 - c. People's Republic of China:
 - d. United States:
 - e. Britain:
3. What are the principal objectives of each delegation?
 - a. Democratic Republic of Vietnam:
 - b. France:
 - c. People's Republic of China:
 - d. United States:
 - e. Britain:
4. What specific proposals is each delegation presenting to achieve its objectives?
 - a. Democratic Republic of Vietnam:
 - b. France:
 - c. People's Republic of China:
 - d. United States:
 - e. Britain:
5. Based on your understanding of the conflicting objectives of the participants, what is the likely outcome of the conference?

The 1954 Geneva Conference on Indochina

Objectives:

Students will: Articulate the viewpoints of the participants at the Geneva Conference of 1954 in a role-play setting.

Identify the divisions concerning values among the participants at the Geneva Conference.

Assess the impact of the Geneva Conference on the U.S. role in Vietnam.

Required Reading:

Students should have completed preparations for the Geneva Conference role play.

In the Classroom:

1. Setting the Stage—Call on the participant groups to organize their presentations and select group spokespersons. If necessary, appoint a spokesperson for each group. Remind the recorders that they should answer the questions on their worksheet as the participant groups make their presentations.

2. Presentation and Review—Allow each participant group three to five minutes to

present its position and objectives. At the conclusion of the presentations, ask the recorders to summarize the positions of the five groups. If time permits, encourage the participant groups to challenge the presentations of other delegations.

3. Comparing Positions—Call on students to articulate the core values underlying the positions of the five delegations. For example, which values distinguished the presentations of the communist delegations from those of other countries? How did the U.S. position differ from that of the French and the British? Ask students to predict the likely outcomes of the conference. How would the differences among the democracies have influenced the final settlement? What was the likely role of the Chinese in determining the outcome?

Homework:

Students should read Part II of the background reading in the student text (pages 23-27) and complete “Study Guide—Part II” (TRB 12-13) or “Advanced Study Guide—Part II” (TRB-14).

The Tonkin Gulf Resolution

Objectives:

Students will: Evaluate the factors underlying the growing U.S. commitment in Vietnam.

Analyze the significance of the Tonkin Gulf crisis on U.S. policy.

Weigh the options available to U.S. leaders at the time of the Tonkin Gulf crisis.

Required Reading:

Students should have read Part II of the background reading in the student text (pages 23-27) and completed “Study Guide—Part II” (TRB 12-13) or “Advanced Study Guide—Part II” (TRB-14).

In the Classroom:

1. Beyond Geneva—Ask students to contrast the proceedings of the Geneva Conference role play with the actual outcome of the conference. What issues were resolved in 1954? Why did the conference fail to lay the foundation for a lasting political settlement? Review student responses to the study guide questions. Make sure that students understand the concept of incremental decision-making that led to the gradual expansion of the U.S. commitment in Vietnam.

2. The Tonkin Gulf Crisis—Instruct students to read “Case Study—The Tonkin Gulf

Resolution: The Plan” (page 28) and “The Incident” (page 29). Call on them to share their responses to the discussion questions with the class. How did the 1964 presidential campaign influence the Johnson administration’s policy in Vietnam? How did developments in Vietnam color the perceptions of U.S. policymakers toward the Tonkin Gulf incident? Ask students to imagine that they are members of Congress at the time of the Tonkin Gulf crisis. How would they have responded to the incident? What factors would have entered into their decisions?

3. Weighing the U.S. Response—Instruct students to read “The Request” (page 30) and “The Action” (page 31). Call on them to share their responses to the discussion questions with the class. Why did the Tonkin Gulf incident represent a turning point for U.S. policy in Vietnam? How did the U.S. position in Vietnam in the summer of 1964 fit into the overall strategy of U.S. foreign policy? Why did the Tonkin Gulf resolution encounter virtually no opposition in Congress?

Homework

Students should read “Summer 1965: The Moment of Decision” in the student text (page 32) and answer the discussion questions, and read “Options in Brief” in the student text (page 33)

Study Guide—Part II

1. List four outcomes of the Geneva Conference.

a.

b.

c.

d.

2. Washington viewed Diem as the only _____ to _____ control over all of _____. With strong anti-_____ and anti-_____ credentials, Diem also had the backing of the small but powerful _____ minority in South Vietnam.

3. Why did the United States and Diem ignore the provisions in the Geneva Accords that called for national elections in 1956? Explain your answer.

4. Explain the following quotation from the Taylor-Rostow report in your own words. “If Vietnam goes, it will be exceedingly difficult if not impossible to hold Southeast Asia.”

Name: _____

5. Why did the United States become disillusioned with the Diem government in the early 1960s?
6. In August 1963, Ambassador Lodge was instructed to tell the generals dissatisfied with Diem that the United States would condone a coup so long as the _____ continued.
7. President Johnson is described in the reading as a master of domestic politics. Explain this idea. What effect did it have on his policy towards Vietnam?
8. The assassination of Diem by a military government in Saigon brought about a significant turn around in the war effort. TRUE or FALSE. List three things that support your answer.
- a.
- b.
- c.
9. In 1964, the United States was spending more than \$_____ per day in Vietnam and _____ Americans were being killed per week in battle.

Advanced Study Guide—Part II

1. Why did the United States decide to give its support to the Diem government in South Vietnam after the Geneva Conference?
2. Why did the United States and Diem ignore the provisions in the Geneva Accords that called for national elections in 1956? Do you think that such elections could have been fair?
3. Explain why the United States became disillusioned with the Diem government in the early 1960s.
4. Many historians have second-guessed the actions of the Kennedy Administration in the fall of 1963. Discuss these actions in the context of the adage “don’t change horses in mid-stream.”

Extra Challenge: While no one can say what President Kennedy might have done had he lived, his advisers continued to plan and direct U.S. involvement in Vietnam under President Johnson. Does this shed any light on the long-standing debate among historians as to whether great figures shape events or whether the actions of people are determined by events beyond their control?

Role Playing the Four Options: Organization and Preparation

Objectives:

Students will: Analyze the issues that framed the debate on U.S. policy in Vietnam.

Identify the core underlying values of the options.

Integrate the arguments and beliefs of the options and the background reading into a persuasive, coherent presentation.

Work cooperatively within groups to organize effective presentations.

Required Reading:

Students should have read “Summer 1965: The Moment of Decision” in the student text (page 32) and answered the discussion questions, and read “Options in Brief” (page 33).

Handouts:

“Presenting Your Option” (TRB-16) for option groups

“President Johnson” (TRB-17) for committee representing Johnson

In the Classroom:

1. Reaching a Critical Juncture—Review the discussion questions from “Summer 1965: The Moment of Decision” with students. Emphasize that the summer of 1965 was one of the most decisive turning points for U.S. policy in Vietnam.

2. Planning for Group Work—In order to save time in the classroom, form student groups before beginning Day Four. During

the class period, students will be preparing for the Day Five simulation. Remind them to incorporate the background reading into the presentations and questions. Emphasize that group presentations must be based only on information available at the time of the actual debate.

3a. Option Groups—Form four groups of three to four students each. Assign an option to each of the four option groups. Inform students that each option group will be called upon on Day Five to present the case for its assigned option to the president. Students should follow the instructions in “Presenting Your Option” to develop their group presentations.

3b. President Johnson—The remainder of the class will represent the role of President Johnson. Distribute “President Johnson” to each committee member. While the option groups are preparing their presentations, students playing the role of the president should develop cross-examination questions for Day Five. Remind these students that they are expected to turn in their questions at the end of the simulation.

Extra Challenge:

Ask the groups to design posters illustrating the best case for their options.

Homework:

Students should complete preparations for the simulation.

Presenting Your Option

The Setting: It is the early summer of 1965. The situation in Vietnam has worsened in the last six months. It appears the Vietcong now control as much as 50 percent of the South Vietnamese countryside, despite American and South Vietnamese efforts.

Your Assignment: Your group has been called upon to advise President Johnson concerning the situation in Vietnam. Your assignment is to persuade the president that the United States should adopt your option. On Day Five, your group will present a persuasive three-to-five minute summary of your option to the president. You will be judged on how well you present your option. This worksheet will help you prepare. Keep in mind that your group's presentation may include only information that was available in the summer of 1965.

Organizing Your Group: Each member of your group will take a specific role. Below is a brief explanation of the responsibility of each role. Before preparing your sections of the presentation, work together to address the questions below. The **group director** is responsible for organizing the presentation of your group's option to the president. The **political expert** is responsible for explaining why your option is most likely to succeed in the current domestic and international climates. The **historian** is responsible for explaining how the lessons of history justify your option. The **military expert** is responsible for explaining how the group's option represents the best case militarily.

Consider the questions below from your option's perspective as you prepare your presentation.

1. What is the nature of the conflict in Vietnam?
2. What are the U.S. interests and concerns in this area?
3. What should be the objectives of the United States in Vietnam?
4. What lessons from history should shape our policy toward Vietnam?
5. What specific actions should the United States take?
6. How is this option influenced by the political scene?
7. What are the two most important values underlying your option?

President Johnson: U.S. Policy in Vietnam

Your Role

It is the early summer of 1965. You have asked your advisors for their recommendations on U.S. policy in Vietnam. These presentations will introduce you to four distinct approaches to U.S. policy in Vietnam in the summer of 1965. The decision faced by the president is a serious one and of vital importance to the nation.

Your Assignment

While the four option groups are organizing their presentations, each of you should prepare two questions regarding each of the options. Your teacher will collect these questions at the end of Day Five.

Your questions should be challenging and critical. For example, a good question for Option 1 might be:

In light of the huge number of troops that would be required to execute this option, how would the government explain this action to the increasingly disheartened American people?

On Day Five, the four option groups will present their positions. After their presentations are completed, your teacher will call on you and your fellow committee members to ask questions. The “Evaluation Form” you will receive is designed for you to record your impressions of the option. Part I should be filled out in class as the option groups make their presentations. Part II should be completed as homework. After this activity is concluded, you may be called upon to explain your evaluation of the options.

Role-Playing the Four Options: Debate and Discussion

Objectives:

Students will: Articulate the leading values that framed the debate on U.S. policy in Vietnam.

Explore, debate, and evaluate multiple perspectives on U.S. foreign policy.

Sharpen rhetorical skills through debate and discussion.

Cooperate with classmates in staging a persuasive presentation.

Handouts:

“Evaluation Form” (TRB-19) for Johnson committee members

In the Classroom:

1. Setting the Stage—Organize the room so that the four option groups face a row of desks reserved for the Johnson committee members. Distribute “Evaluation Form” to Johnson committee members.

2. Managing the Simulation—Explain that the simulation will begin with three-to-five minute presentations by each option group. Encourage all to speak clearly and convincingly.

3. Guiding Discussion—Following the presentations, invite Johnson committee members to ask cross-examination questions. Make sure that each member of this group has an opportunity to ask at least one question. If time permits, encourage members of the option groups to challenge the positions of the other groups. During cross-examination, allow any member of the option group to respond. (As an alternative approach, permit cross-examination following the presentation of each option.)

Homework:

Students should read “Songs of the Vietnam War” (TRB 22-30) and complete the “Songs of the Vietnam War” (TRB-21) worksheet.

Name: _____

Evaluation Form: President Johnson

Part I

What was the most persuasive argument presented in favor of this Option?

What was the most persuasive argument presented against this Option?

Option 1:

Option 1:

Option 2:

Option 2:

Option 3:

Option 3:

Option 4:

Option 4:

Part II

Which group presented its option most effectively? Explain your answer.

Songs of the Vietnam War

Objectives:

Students will: Explore the relationship between political events and popular culture.

Compare and contrast Vietnam-era songs from different cultures.

Assess the place of political themes in popular music today.

Required Reading:

Students should have read “Songs of the Vietnam War” (TRB 22-30) and completed the “Songs of the Vietnam War” (TRB-21) worksheet.

In the Classroom:

1. Student Interpretations—Call on students to offer their interpretations of the songs presented. (If possible, play recordings of the songs to demonstrate how music reinforces the message of the lyrics.) Ask students to organize the songs by themes and types. Compare and contrast the American songs with those composed by French and Vietnamese singers.

2. Identifying Values—Call on students to identify the most salient values in the Ameri-

can songs. For example, how do the values of “Lyndon Johnson Told the Nation” compare to those of “Soldier’s Last Letter”? Invite students to reflect on the connection between the songs and the public mood during the Vietnam era. To what extent did the songs mirror, or shape, public attitudes? Which segments of the public would have been most likely attracted to “The Ballad of the Green Berets”? What about “Fixin’ to Die Rag”?

3. Comparing Past and Present—Ask students to compare songs of the Vietnam era with popular music today. Call on them to give examples of current protest songs. How have the themes changed since the Vietnam era? How are feelings of patriotism expressed in today’s music? In what respects has the Vietnam legacy influenced present-day musicians?

Homework:

Students should read Part III of the background reading of the student text (pages 51-60) and complete “Study Guide—Part III” (TRB 32-33) or “Advanced Study Guide—Part III” (TRB-34).

Songs of the Vietnam War

Instructions: Answer the questions below for four of the songs. You should consider at least one American, one Vietnamese, and one French song.

1. When was the song written and what events were happening at that time?

song #1:

song #2:

song #3:

song #4:

2. What is the mood of the song? Is it angry, sad, hopeful, sarcastic, joyful, triumphant, etc.? (Remember that songs are meant to be heard, not read. The music may play an important part in conveying the meaning. If you have access to recordings of any of these songs, bring them in to class.)

song #1:

song #2:

song #3:

song #4:

3. What attitude toward the war is being expressed? Do you think the songwriter is expressing his or her personal feelings, or the general attitudes of his or her society?

song #1:

song #2:

song #3:

song #4:

Songs of the Vietnam War

Introduction: Throughout American history, the strong feelings raised by the sacrifices, ideals, heartbreaks, and triumphs of war have often been expressed by poets and artists in songs. Songs that best captured the strong feelings of Americans became very popular and lived on long after the details of the conflict were forgotten. Whether they expressed patriotism and national ideals such as in *The Star-Spangled Banner* and *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*, sacrifice and heroism such as in *When Johnny Comes Marching Home*, or disappointment and loss such as *All Quiet Along the Potomac Tonight*, these songs have become part of the history. The Vietnam War was no exception. Below is a small selection of the many songs written by Americans and others involved in the Vietnam War.

Lyndon Johnson Told the Nation

By Tom Paxton (1965, folk)

I got a letter from L.B.J., it said, "This is your lucky day.
 It's time to put your khaki trousers on. Though it may seem very queer,
 we've got no jobs to give you here, so we are sending you to Viet Nam"

chorus

*And Lyndon Johnson told the nation, "Have no fear of escalation,
 I am trying ev'ryone to please. Though it isn't really war,
 we're sending fifty thousand more to help save Viet Nam from Viet Nameese."*

I jumped off the old troop ship, I sank in mud up to my hips,
 And cussed until the captain called me down, "never mind how hard it's raining,
 Think of all the ground we're gaining, just don't take one step outside of town."

Every night the local gentry slip out past the sleeping sentry
 They go out to join the old V.C. in their nightly little dramas,
 They put on their black pajamas and come lobbing mortar shells at me.

We go 'round in helicopters like a bunch of big grasshoppers
 Searching for the Viet Cong in vain. They left a note that they had gone,
 They had to get back to Saigon, their government positions to maintain.

Well, here I sit in this rice paddy, wondering about Big Daddy,
 And I know that Lyndon loves me so; yet how sadly I remember
 Way back yonder in November when he said I'd never have to go.

The word came from the very top that soon the shooting war would stop
 The pockets of resistance were so thin. There just remained some trouble spots,
 Like Viet Nam, Detroit and Watts, Gene McCarthy and Ho Chi Minh.

They sent me to some swampy hole we went out on a night patrol.
 Just who was who was very hard to tell. With Martha Raye and 13 Mayors,
 Half of Congress, 6 ball players and Ronald Reagan yelling, "Give 'em hell!"

Le Déserteur (The Deserter)

By Boris Vian (1954, ballad), translated by Lucille Duperron

Monsieur le Président	<i>Mister President</i>	Quand j'étais prisonnier	<i>When I was a prisoner</i>
Je vous fais une lettre	<i>I'm writing you a letter</i>	On m'a volé ma femme	<i>They stole my wife</i>
Que vous lirez peut-être	<i>That you might read</i>	On m'a volé mon âme	<i>They stole my soul</i>
Si vous avez le temps	<i>If you have time</i>	Et tout mon cher passé	<i>And all my dear past</i>
Je viens de recevoir	<i>I just received</i>	Demain de bon matin	<i>Tomorrow at dawn</i>
Mes papiers militaires	<i>My military orders</i>	Je fermerai ma porte	<i>I close my door</i>
Pour partir à la guerre	<i>To go to war</i>	Au nez des années	<i>To the face of the dead</i>
Avant mercredi soir	<i>Before Wednesday night</i>	mortes	<i>years</i>
		J'irai sur les chemins	<i>And I go on the road</i>
Monsieur le Président	<i>Mister President</i>	Je mendierai ma vie	<i>I will beg for my life</i>
Je ne veux pas la faire	<i>I don't want to do it</i>	Sur les routes de France	<i>On the roads of France</i>
Je ne suis pas sur terre	<i>I'm not on earth</i>	De Bretagne en Provence	<i>From Brittany to Provence</i>
Pour tuer des pauvres	<i>To kill poor people</i>	Et je dirai aux gens	<i>And I'll tell the people</i>
gens			
C'est pas pour vous	<i>It is not that I want to make</i>	Réfusez d'obeir	<i>Don't obey</i>
fâcher	<i>you angry</i>	Réfusez de la faire	<i>Don't do it</i>
Il faut que je vous dise	<i>But I have to tell you</i>	N'allez pas à la guerre	<i>Don't go to war</i>
Ma décision est prise	<i>My decision is made</i>	Réfusez de partir	<i>Don't go!</i>
Je m'en vais désertier	<i>I'm going to desert</i>		
Depuis que je suis né	<i>Since I was born</i>	S'il faut donner son sang	<i>If one has to shed blood</i>
J'ai vu mourir mon père	<i>I've seen my father die</i>	Allez donner le votre	<i>Then go and shed yours</i>
J'ai vu partir mes frères	<i>I've seen my brothers</i>	Vous êtes bon apôtre	<i>Practice what you preach</i>
	<i>leave</i>	Monsieur le Président	<i>Mister President</i>
Et pleurer mes enfants	<i>And my children cry</i>		
Ma mère a tant souffert	<i>My mother suffered so much</i>	Si vous me poursuivez	<i>If you search for me</i>
Qu'elle est dedans sa	<i>That she is in her grave</i>	Prevenez vos gendarmes	<i>Tell your policemen</i>
tombe		Que je n'aurai pas d'armes	<i>That I'll be unarmed</i>
Et se moque des bombs	<i>And laughs at bombs</i>	Et qu'ils pourront tirer	<i>And that they can shoot</i>
Et se moque des vers	<i>And laughs at decay</i>		

The Ballad of the Green Berets

By Barry Sadler and Robin Moore (1966, country)

Fighting soldiers from the sky, fearless men who jump and die,
Men who mean just what they say, the brave men of the Green Beret.

chorus

*Silver wings upon their chest. These are men, America's best.
One hundred men will test today, but only three win the Green Beret.*

Trained to live off nature's land, trained in combat hand to hand,
Men who fight by night and day, courage big from the Green Beret.

Back at home a young wife waits. Her Green Beret has met his fate.
He has died for those oppressed, leaving her his last request.

Put silver wings on my son's chest. Make him one of America's best.
He'll be a man they'll test one day. Have him win the Green Beret.

The March of Liberation

By Luu Nguyen and Long Hung, North Vietnamese (1966, march), translation

Our native land is shuddering, filled with hate for him who causes
So much suffering for our people. It calls on us for vengeance,
To repay the debt of blood. Workers and farmers rise up!
Intellectuals rise up! A thundering storm gathers in the China Sea
The tide is rising, and the whole people rise up as high as the tide!

chorus

*For our people we march to the front! We'll wipe out the very last Yankee,
And proudly fly our Liberation flag! Let's raise our voices together,
Determined to fight and to win. Our people await the great day
When we sing the song of victory in freedom!*

Our hearts are filled with wrath, broken from too much suffering,
From seeing the countryside burnt into ashes, and our cities turned into flames!
We long to be back in our hometowns, but we swear never to go home
Until the enemy is driven out forever, and our land is set free!

We must overcome all our problems! More exploits dared and won,
We must push forward! The golden star lights our road,
The path of revolution! At Kontum we avenge all the suffering.
At Ap Bac the blood debt is paid. We turn our hate into energy,
To make the enemy tremble and fall!

Dawn is breaking everywhere! We grasp our rifles firmly,
And resolutely press on forward. We will have a new life, or die!
The day is not far away, when our people will be happy and free.
From Ca Mau to Vinh-Linh the enemy is in his death-throes.
The sky is rosy with glory, and our golden star flies proudly in the free wind!

Soldier's Last Letter

Recorded by Merle Haggart (originally written 1944, recorded in late 1960s, country)

When the postman delivered a letter, it filled her dear heart full of joy.
But she didn't know till she read the inside, it was the last one from her darling boy.

chorus

*Dear Mom, was the way that it started. I miss you so much, it went on.
Mom, I didn't know that I loved you so, but I'll prove it when this war is won.*

I'm writing this down in a trench, Mom. Don't scold if it isn't so neat.
You know as you did when I was a kid and I'd come home with mud on my feet.

The captain just gave us our orders, and Mom we will carry them through.
I'll finish this letter the first chance I get, but now I'll just say I love you.

Then the mother's old hands began to tremble and she fought against tears in her eyes.
But they came unashamed for there was no name, and she knew that her darling had died.

That night as she knelt by her bedside, she prayed Lord above hear my plea.
And protect all the sons that are fighting tonight, and dear God, keep America free!

Missing In Action

By Arthur Smith and Helen Kaye, recorded by Ernest Tubb (written in 1951, recorded in the late 1960s, country)

The warship had landed and I came ashore, The fighting was over for me evermore;
For I had been wounded, they left me for dead, a stone for my pillow and snow for my bed.
The enemy found me and took me away and made me a prisoner of war so they say;
But God in his mercy was with me one day; the gate was left open and I ran away.

I returned to the old home, my sweet wife to see, the home I had built for my darling and me.
The door I then opened and there on a stand, I saw a picture of her and a man.
The clothes she was wearing told me a sad tale, my darling was wearing a new bridal veil.
Then I found a letter and these words I read: "Missing in action;" she thought I was dead.

So I kissed her picture and whispered goodbye; my poor heart was breaking but my eyes were dry.
I knew she'd be happy if she never learned, I knew she must never know I had returned.
A vagabond dreamer, forever I'll roam, because there was no one to welcome me home;
The face of my darling no more will I see, for missing in action forever I'll be.

A Tale of Two Soldiers

By Pham Duy, South Vietnamese folk singer (1968, folk), translation

There were two soldiers who lived in the same village
Both loved the fatherland—Vietnam.
There were two soldiers who lived in the same village
Both loved the fields and the earth of Vietnam.

There were two soldiers, both of one family,
Both of one race—Vietnam.
There were two soldiers, both of one family,
Both of one blood—Vietnam.

There were two soldiers who were of one heart,
Neither would let Vietnam be lost.
There were two soldiers, both advancing up a road,
Determined to preserve Vietnam.

There were two soldiers who traveled a long road,
Day and night, baked with sun and soaked with dew.
There were two soldiers who traveled a long road,
Day and night they cherished their grudge.

There were two soldiers, both were heroes,
Both sought out and captured the enemy troops.
There were two soldiers, both were heroes,
Both went off to “wipe out the gang of common enemies.”

There were two soldiers who lay upon a field,
Both clasping rifles and waiting.
There were two soldiers who one rosy dawn
Killed each other for Vietnam
Killed each other for Vietnam.

Pulling Our Artillery

Author unknown, Vietminh work song (1954), translation

How do we sing, two three how.
How do we sing, pulling our artillery through mountain passes.
How do we sing, two three how, pulling our artillery across streams.
How do we sing, two three how, pulling our artillery across mountains.

The mountains are steep,
But the determination in our hearts is higher than mountains.
The chasms are deep and dark,
But what chasm is as deep as our hatred?

How do we sing, two three how,
The fowl are about to crow on the mountain tops.
Pulling our artillery across mountain passes, before the early dawn.

Song of the Coats*By Xuan Hong, Vietcong (date uncertain), translation*

Brothers brave the rain and sun, heat of day and cold of night.
Coats we sew for ev'ry one, help to warm your will to fight.
Brothers risking death each day as winter hurries on its way.
Oh know that we will do our best, Oh faster sisters take no rest.

chorus

*Early to the front they'll go, still, while we hold the coats in our hands,
We pray the sun soon will rise on free Vietnam.*

In the forest, dark and green, like a stream of silk our vengeance runs,
Little speedy sewing machines move as one with distant guns,
Oh my fingers, nimbly sew, that our fighters warmly may go.
All of us must do our best, flying fingers, take no rest.

Winter is here, the coats are done. One to warm each fighting girl and boy.
We've sewn our love in every one, filling them with courage, hope and joy.
Early to the front they'll fly, still while we hold them in our hands,
With every coat we pledge our lives to drive the invaders from our land.

Bring the Boys Home*By Freda Payne (1971, soul)*

Fathers are pleading, lovers are all alone.
Mothers are praying—Send our sons back
home.
They marched them away on ships and planes,
To a senseless war, they see death in vain.

chorus

*Bring the boys home,
Bring the boys home,
Bring the boys home,
Bring the boys home.*

Turn the ships around, lay your weapons
down.
Can't you see them march across the sky,
The soldiers that have died, trying to get
home.

Cease all fire, on the battle field.
Enough men have already, been wounded and
killed!

A Souvenir for You

By Linh Phuong, South Vietnamese army officer later killed in combat (1970, folk ballad), translation

You ask me, you ask me when will I return?

Let me reply, let me reply, that I will soon return.

I will return, perhaps as a wreath of flowers.

I will return to songs of welcome upon a helicopter painted white.

You ask me, you ask me when will I return?

Let me reply, let me reply, that I will soon return.

I will return on a radiant afternoon, avoiding the sun,

Wrapped tightly in a poncho which covers all my life.

I will return, I will return upon a pair of wooden crutches.

I will return, I will return as one with a leg blown off.

And one fine spring afternoon you shall go down the street

To sip a cold drink beside your crippled lover.

You ask me, you ask me when will I return?

Let me reply, let me reply that I will soon return.

I will return and exchange a moving look with you.

I will return to shatter your life.

We shall look at each other as strangers

Try to forget the days of darkness, my dear.

You ask me, you ask me when will I return?

Let me reply, let me reply that I will soon return.

Fixin' to Die Rag

By Joe McDonald (1968, rock)

Well come on all of you big strong men Uncle Sam needs your help again,

He's got himself in a terrible jam, way down yonder in Viet Nam,

So put down your books and pick up a gun, we're gonna have a whole lot of fun.

chorus

And it's one, two, three, what are we fighting for, don't ask me I don't give a damn, next stop is Viet Nam.

And it's five six, seven, open up the pearly gates, well, there ain't no time to wonder why, whoopee! we're all gonna die.

Come on Wall Street don't be slow. Why, Man, this is war a-Go-Go.

There's plenty good money to be made by supplyin' the Army with the tools of their trade.

But just hope and pray that if they drop the bomb, they drop it on the Viet Cong.

Come on Mothers through the land, pack your boys off to Vietnam.

Come on fathers, don't hesitate, send your sons off before it's too late.

And you can be the first ones on your block to have your boy come home in a box.

Come on Generals, let's move fast; your big chance has come at last.

Now you can go out and get those Reds—cause the only good Commie is one that's dead.

And you know that peace can only be won, when we've blown 'em all to kingdom come.

I Must See the Sun

By Trinh Cong Son, the "Bob Dylan" of South Vietnam (1969, folk), translation

I must see a bright sun upon this homeland filled with Humanity.

I must see a day,

A day when our people rise up to obtain peace,

Calling to each other from all regions: Life!

I must see peace, the happy villages of yesterday have been deserted.

The people of Vietnam have forgotten each other amidst the bullets and bombs.

The days of Vietnam have been darkened by hatred.

I must see peace. I must see peace.

All my beloved brothers, Rise up!

Let's walk in the flickering soul of the nation.

A million pounding human hearts await a million footsteps.

Keep moving forward!

I must see,

I must see a day with peace glowing brightly all around.

Honor Our Commitment

By Jacqueline Sharpe (1966, folk)

O, gather round you bully boys and hear just what I say.

We've got a Great Society in the good old U. S. A.

So listen, nations of the earth, we give our promise true:

If you don't obey your Uncle Sam, his troops will visit you.

chorus

And we'll honor our commitment, honor our commitment,

Even if the world goes up in the smoke of a mushroom cloud.

Honor our commitment, honor our commitment.

Get buried with our brothers in one great communal shroud.

Now, widows all like candy canes, and orphans all like jam,

And Band-aids come in handy for the wounded in Vietnam.

So send your package out today to the homeless kids and wives,

We're sure the ones we haven't killed will love us all their lives.

We dream of peace 'most every night, we talk of peace each day,

And we have learned a little game we'll teach you how to play.

Now, which hand holds the olive branch and which hand holds the bomb?

You guessed it—this one offers peace, and that one drops napalm.

You marching intellectuals, you poets and you priests,

You mothers with your babes in arms, you longhaired, bearded beasts.

It's all right when you talk of beauty, love and all that pap,

But when it comes to life and death, you'd better shut your trap.

Waist Deep in the Big Muddy

By Pete Seeger (1967, folk)

It was back in nineteen forty two, I was part of a good platoon
We were on maneuvers in a-Loozianan, one night by the light of the moon
The captain told us to ford a river, and that's how it all begun
We were knee deep in the Big Muddy, but the big fool said to push on

The sergeant said, "Sir, are you sure, this is the best way back to the base?"
"Sergeant, go on; I once forded this river just a mile above this place
It'll be a little soggy but just keep slogging. We'll soon be on dry ground."
We were waist deep in the Big Muddy and the big fool said to push on.

The sergeant said, "Sir, with all this equipment, no man will be able to swim."
"Sergeant, don't be a nervous nellie," the captain said to him.
"All we need is a little determination; Man, follow me, I'll lead on."
We were neck deep in the Big Muddy and the big fool said to push on.

All of a sudden, the moon clouded over, we heard a gurgling cry.
A few seconds later, the captain's helmet was all that floated by.
The sergeant said, "Turn around men, I'm in charge from now on."
And we just made it out of the Big Muddy with the captain dead and gone.

We stripped and dived and found his body stuck in the old quicksand.
I guess he didn't know that the water was deeper than the place he'd once before been.
Another stream had joined the Big Muddy just a half mile from where we'd gone.
We'd been lucky to escape from the Big Muddy when the big fool said to push on.

Well, maybe you'd rather not draw any moral; I'll leave that to yourself.
Maybe you're still walking and you're still talking and you'd like to keep your health.
But every time I read the papers that old feeling comes on:
We're waist deep in the Big Muddy and the big fool says to push on.

Waist deep in the Big Muddy and the big fool says to push on!
Waist deep in the Big Muddy and the big fool says to push on!
Waist deep! Neck deep! Soon even a tall man'll be over his head!
Waist deep in the BIG MUDDY! AND THE BIG FOOL SAYS TO PUSH ON!

Retracing America's Withdrawal

Objectives:

Students will: Examine the key decisions that shaped U.S. involvement in Vietnam from 1968 to 1973.

Analyze the policy choices facing U.S. leaders from 1968 to 1973.

Identify the events and controversies connected to important historical documents.

Required Reading:

Students should have read Part III in the student text (pages 51-60) and completed "Study Guide—Part III" (TRB 32-33) or "Advanced Study Guide—Part III" (TRB-34).

Handouts:

"Reviewing Critical Junctures" (TRB-35)

In the Classroom:

1. America's War—Ask students to explain why the decisions made by President Johnson in the summer of 1965 turned the Vietnam conflict into "America's War." Why was the Tet offensive considered the turning point for U.S. policy in Vietnam?

2. Forming Small Groups—Divide the class into four groups and assign each group one of the four documents featured in Part III of the background reading. (In larger classes, assign two groups to each document.) Distribute "Reviewing Critical Junctures" to each student. Instruct each group to review its assigned document carefully and answer the

questions in "Reviewing Critical Junctures." (Note that Document #1 is the most difficult and will require the most intensive review.)

Assign a student from each group to record the conclusions of the group on the worksheet.

3. Sharing Conclusions—After the groups have completed their worksheets, call on group spokespersons to share their answers with the class. Focus on the connections between the documents. For example, in what respect did Clifford's memorandum presage Nixon's Vietnamization program? How did Nixon's declaration that "Vietnamization has succeeded" shape the U.S. position in peace negotiations with North Vietnam? Which values are most closely linked to the emphasis on maintaining the credibility of America's international commitments?

4. Identifying Decision Points—Call on students to consider the options that were available to U.S. leaders at the time each of the four documents was written. How do these options compare to those that were under consideration in the summer of 1965? How did U.S. attitudes change in the intervening years? How did social upheaval in the United States influence U.S. policy in Vietnam?

Homework:

Students should read Part IV of the background reading in the student text (pages 61-64) and complete "Study Guide—Part IV" (TRB-37) or "Advanced Study Guide—Part IV" (TRB-38).

Study Guide—Part III

1. From the summer of 1965 to the beginning of 1968, U.S. troop strength in South Vietnam steadily _____, peaking out at _____ men in early 1968. The _____ campaign against North Vietnamese and _____ bases and supply routes in the south _____.
2. How did the Tet offensive get its name?
3. List three results of the Tet offensive.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
4. What two points did Clark Clifford's memorandum to President Johnson make?
 - a.
 - b.
5. Did Clifford's memorandum help President Johnson make a decision? Explain your answer.
6. List two decisions made by President Johnson after the meeting of the fourteen "wise men."
 - a.
 - b.

Name: _____

7. In 1968 Richard Nixon won a narrow victory over Johnson's vice-president, _____,
in part because of the appeal of his pledge to _____.

8. Explain the purpose of Nixon's main initiative, "Vietnamization."

9. List two of President Nixon's actions regarding Vietnam during his first two years in office.

a.

b.

10. What did President Nixon mean by "peace with honor"?

11. Why did South Vietnamese President Thieu strongly object to the draft peace agreement in late 1972?

12. Examine the chart on page 60 of the text. During what year did the most Americans die in Vietnam?

Advanced Study Guide—Part III

1. Why did the Tet offensive have a major impact on the attitudes of U.S. policymakers?
2. How did Clark Clifford's March 4, 1968 memorandum plant "seeds of doubt" in the mind of President Johnson toward U.S. policy in Vietnam?
3. How did President Nixon hope to find a "middle way out of Vietnam" with his program of Vietnamization?
4. What factors contributed to the failure of Nixon's Vietnamization program? Why did Nixon continue to pursue Vietnamization in the face of mounting problems?
5. Was President Nixon's goal of achieving "peace with honor" accomplished with the signing of the January 1973 peace treaty? Explain your answer.
6. Study the chart on page 60. Which years represented the peak of U.S. involvement in Vietnam? Approximately how many American troops were killed during the Johnson administration? How many were killed during the Nixon administration?

Reviewing Critical Junctures

Instructions: In this exercise, your group has been called upon to analyze the course of U.S. involvement in Vietnam from the Tet offensive to the signing of the peace agreement in January 1973. You have been assigned a document that highlights the difficult choices facing U.S. policymakers during this period. After you have carefully read your document, you and your fellow group members should work together to answer the questions below. Be prepared to share your conclusions with your classmates.

1. Explain why your document highlights a critical juncture of the Vietnam War.
2. What were the main goals of U.S. policy in Vietnam at the time your document was written?
3. What were the main policy choices facing U.S. leaders at the time your document was written?
4. What policy choice was made regarding the issues considered in your document? How did the decision affect the course of the Vietnam War?

Misinterpretation and Failed Diplomacy

Objectives:

Students will: Evaluate North Vietnamese and U.S. perceptions of each other's intentions during the Vietnam War.

Analyze the factors shaping North Vietnamese policy in 1965.

Identify the sources of misunderstanding between Hanoi and Washington.

Required Reading:

Students should have read Part IV in the student text (pages 61-64) and completed "Study Guide—Part IV" (TRB-37) or "Advanced Study Guide—Part IV" (TRB-38).

In the Classroom:

1. Clarifying Values—Ask students to explain why many historians believe that the communication gap between Hanoi and Washington prolonged the Vietnam War. What factors accounted for the gap? What were the principal misconceptions each side had about the other?

2. Pleiku—Ask students to focus on the first case study. What were the main elements of Hanoi's wartime strategy in early 1965? How did the attack on Pleiku fit into North Vietnam's war effort? Why did the United States misinterpret the significance of the Pleiku attack?

3. Failed Diplomacy—Ask students to focus on the second case study. How did the

North Vietnamese interpret the launch of "Rolling Thunder"? Why did they rebuff U.S. peace overtures in 1965? Why did the meetings between Mai Van Bo and Edmund Gullion fail to lead to peace negotiations?

4. Hanoi's Position—Call on students to imagine that they are participating in a meeting of the North Vietnamese leadership around 1970. (Emphasize that most of the death and destruction of the Vietnam War occurred after peace talks began in 1968.) Given what students have learned about the North Vietnamese perspective, ask them to summarize Hanoi's assessment of the war effort in 1970. How had North Vietnam's strategy changed since 1965? What did the North Vietnamese perceive as the principal interests and priorities underlying U.S. policy? What should Hanoi's negotiating position have been at the peace talks?

Homework:

Students should read Part V in the student text (pages 65-66) and complete "Study Guide—Part V" (TRB-40).

Extra Challenge:

Ask students to write a policy memorandum on the war effort from the perspective of the North Vietnamese leadership in 1970.

Study Guide—Part IV

1. By late 1965, the _____ War was no longer primarily a _____ war involving South Vietnamese forces. Instead, it had become a conflict between the _____ and _____.
2. How did poor communications affect the operations of the Vietcong?
3. What did U.S. officials assume about the attack at Pleiku?
4. What was operation “Rolling Thunder?”
5. What did North Vietnamese leaders believe to be the cause of “Rolling Thunder?”
6. Summarize the “Four Points” proposed by the North Vietnamese leaders.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
7. What reason (if any) did each side give for the failure of the Bo-Guillon discussions?
 - a. North Vietnam:
 - b. United States:

Advanced Study Guide—Part IV

1. What assumptions did the United States make about the attack on Pleiku? Why were the assumptions significant?
2. Explain why North Vietnamese leaders were shaken by the beginning of “Rolling Thunder.” Why might it have signaled a need for a change in North Vietnamese military strategy?
3. What were the obstacles to successful diplomacy between the United States and Vietnam in 1965?
4. Describe the sequence of events that contributed to the failure of the Bo-Guillon exchange.

Values, Interests, and Costs in Wartime

Objectives:

Students will: Draw on personal examples to distinguish between values and interests.

Discuss the role of values in foreign policy decisions.

Identify the values that were at stake at critical junctures for U.S. policy in Vietnam.

Required Reading:

Students should have read Part V in the student text (pages 65-66) and completed “Study Guide—Part V” (TRB-40).

In the Classroom:

1. Clarifying Values—Ask students to offer personal examples to illustrate the distinction between values and interests. Discuss incidents from daily life involving values. For example, how far would students go to defend their personal honor and reputation? What sacrifices would they make to help others or stand up against wrongdoing? What values are most likely to enter into foreign policy decisions?

2. Values and Decision-Making—Ask students to consider the key decision points for U.S. policy in Vietnam—1954, 1961, 1965, 1968, and 1972—in terms of values, interests, and costs. Call on students to identify, based

on the information available to U.S. decision-makers at the time, the values at stake for each critical juncture and to anticipate the costs of proposed policies. Were the decisions made by U.S. leaders reasonable? How did the values at stake change from 1961 to 1968? Which decision points were most agonizing for American leaders?

3. Weighing Intangibles—Call on students to present their answers to the questions at the end of “Values and the Vietnam War.” Ask students to reflect on the importance of national credibility and honor in U.S. foreign policy. Are the values of national credibility and honor less valid than other values shaping America’s role in the world? Why were national credibility and honor the focus of U.S. policy in Vietnam from 1965 to 1975, especially after the Tet offensive? How have national credibility, honor, and other values entered into U.S. foreign policy decisions in Bosnia, Iraq, and elsewhere in recent years?

Homework:

Students should read Part VI of the background reading in the student text (pages 67-69) and answer the questions in the introduction for each lesson presented on a separate sheet of paper.

Study Guide—Part V

1. How do values differ from interests? Give an example from your personal life.
2. Which values were at stake in World War II for the United States? How did those values influence American attitudes toward the war effort?
3. Why did the values at stake in the Vietnam War “not ring as clearly,” compared to World War II, for many Americans?
4. Why was the U.S. decision to withdraw from Vietnam especially painful and difficult? How did the issue of values complicate the process?
5. Why has the Vietnam War divided American society like few other conflicts?

Applying the Lessons of Vietnam

Objectives:

Students will: Critically compare the suggested lessons of Vietnam with classmates.

Evaluate the legitimacy of the lessons presented.

Analyze how the lessons of Vietnam have influenced U.S. leaders.

Apply the lessons to Vietnam to current U.S. foreign policy issues.

Required Reading:

Students should have read Part VI in the student text (pages 67-69) and answered the questions in the introduction for each lesson presented on a separate sheet of paper.

In the Classroom:

1. Review—Call on students to identify the lessons that they believe are most important.

Ask students to explain the factors that led them to their decision, encouraging them to draw on historical evidence. Invite students with contrary opinions to challenge their classmates.

2. Applying Lessons—Ask the class to review the extra challenge question in “Applying the Lessons of Vietnam.” How has the Vietnam experience influenced the worldview of U.S. leaders? Ask students to cite examples in which the United States has stayed out of international conflicts or limited its military involvement because of the Vietnam War’s legacy. For example, how did U.S. policymakers apply the lessons of Vietnam in developing U.S. strategy during the Persian Gulf War? How has recent U.S. involvement in Bosnia, Iraq, and other areas of conflict been shaped by Vietnam? Call on students to relate specific lessons to contemporary crises.

Crisis and Consensus

Objectives:

Students will: Articulate a coherent option for U.S. policy in Vietnam in 1965.

Compare and contrast values and assumptions with classmates.

Explore areas of consensus with classmates to formulate a group recommendation.

Required Reading:

Students should have read each of the four options in the student text (pages 34-50), and completed “Focusing Your Thoughts” (TRB-43) and “Crafting Your Option” (TRB-44).

In the Classroom:

1. Forming Small Groups—Before beginning the lesson, divide the class into groups of six to eight students. Make sure that each group contains students who advocated each of the four options on Day Five.

2. Setting the Stage—Explain that each group is charged with the task of developing a joint recommendation on U.S. policy in Vietnam. Remind students that their recommendation should apply to the summer of 1965, and that they should consider only information available to decision-makers at the time.

3. Searching for Consensus—Instruct students to recommend to their fellow group members the policy options they developed in “Crafting Your Option.” The group as a whole should then seek to fashion a collective policy for the United States in Vietnam. If a consensus does not emerge quickly within a group, suggest that students lay the foundation for a joint recommendation by first identifying the values they share in common. Note that a consensus does not require unanimity, merely a strong majority. Ten minutes before the end of the class period, call on each group to report on its consensus recommendation.

4. Johnson’s Decision—Explain that in late July 1965, President Johnson approved sending 110,000 more troops to Vietnam by the end of 1965 and agreed to deploy another 100,000 to 200,000 during 1966. As a result, the monthly costs of the war rose from \$6.5 million to about \$20 million. At the same time, Johnson rejected the suggestion that he call up the reserves. Invite students to compare Johnson’s decision to their group recommendations. Was Johnson justified in fearing public opposition to his Vietnam policy? What other policy options should have received greater consideration at the time?

Focusing Your Thoughts

Instructions: You have had an opportunity to consider four options on U.S. policy in Vietnam in 1965. Now it is your turn to look at each of the options from your own perspective. Try each one on for size. Think about how the options address your concerns and hopes. You will find that each has its own risks and trade-offs, advantages and disadvantages.

Ranking the Options

Which of the four options do you prefer? Rank the options below, with “1” being your first choice.

- ___ Option 1: Americanize the War, and Fight to Win!
- ___ Option 2: Escalate Slowly and Control the Risks
- ___ Option 3: Limit Our Involvement and Negotiate a Withdrawal
- ___ Option 4: Unilateral Withdrawal—Pull Out Now!

Beliefs

To help you clarify the values, perceptions, and assumptions upon which you will base your recommendations, consider carefully each of the following value statements and assumptions from the perspective of 1965. Rate each according to your personal beliefs and values.

1 = Strongly Support

3 = Oppose

5 = Undecided

2 = Support

4 = Strongly Oppose

- ___ Using U.S. military force to impose our values upon small nations is immoral, even if we think that our national interest is involved.
- ___ The ability of the United States to influence other nations will be greatly reduced if we do not live up to all of our commitments.
- ___ Whenever a country falls under communist control, U.S. national security is diminished.
- ___ American lives should not be risked in areas of the world that do not affect U.S. security directly.
- ___ Since the United States is the strongest democracy in the world, we have the primary responsibility for stopping aggression wherever it occurs.
- ___ Most of the conflicts in the world cannot be solved by U.S. money, military power, or determination.
- ___ The United States should use its power to see to it that all nations enjoy the freedoms and political rights that Americans do.
- ___ To effectively deal with threats to our country’s national interests, the U.S. government often needs to conceal policy decisions and actions from the American people.

Creating Your Own Option

You have been asked by President Johnson in the summer of 1965 to recommend a policy for the United States to adopt in Vietnam. You may borrow from one of the four options studied, combine ideas from two or three options, or suggest a new approach altogether. There is no right or wrong answer. You should strive to construct an option which is logical, consistent, and persuasive.

Crafting Your Option

Instructions: To prepare your option for presentation to the president, answer the following questions concerning your analysis of the situation in Vietnam and your policy recommendations. (Keep in mind that your option should reflect only information available in the summer of 1965.)

1. What is the nature of the conflict in Vietnam?

2. What U.S. interests and concerns, if any, are at stake in Vietnam?

3. What should the U.S. objectives in Vietnam be?

4. What lessons from history have shaped your analysis?

5. What specific actions should the United States take to achieve these objectives?

6. What are the strongest arguments in favor of your option?
 - a.

 - b.

 - c.

7. What arguments might opponents make against your option?
 - a.

 - b.

 - c.

Oral History and the Vietnam Experience

Objectives:

Students will: Explore the human dimension of the Vietnam War by interviewing a participant in history.

Gain familiarity with the techniques of oral history.

Examine the personal choices confronting young people during the Vietnam era.

Required Reading:

Students should complete “Oral History and the Vietnam Experience” (TRB 46-47) before the lesson.

In the Classroom:

1. Summarizing Interviews—Call on students to summarize their interviews. What common attitudes and experiences do the interview subjects share? Which interviewees seem most remarkable? Ask students to com-

pare the experiences of veterans with those of non-veterans. How do attitudes toward the war differ between the two groups?

2. Reassessing Student Views—Ask students to reflect on how their own attitudes toward Vietnam changed as a result of their interviews. How did talking with veterans give students a different picture of military service in Vietnam? Ask students to imagine that they were eligible to be drafted during the Vietnam War. How would they have responded to a draft notice?

Extra Challenge:

As homework, ask students to use their interviews as the basis of a written report. Suggest that they develop a magazine-style profile of the interview subject, focusing on how the Vietnam War influenced the direction of his or her life.

Oral History and the Vietnam Experience Part I—Veterans

Instructions: More than 2.5 million American servicemen and servicewomen served in Vietnam from 1961 to 1972. Some of these veterans are probably among your relatives, friends, and neighbors. Their experiences and recollections are as much a part of the history of the Vietnam War as are the decisions and events that you have studied. To appreciate the human side of the war, you will be asked to talk to people who served in the conflict and record their recollections, experiences, and feelings about their involvement.

Since the Vietnam War is still a very painful memory for many Americans, sensitivity and respect on your part is essential. Try not to interrupt as people tell their stories. Use of a tape recorder may help you avoid distractions during the interview. In the course of the interview, you should seek to answer the questions below. Be prepared to discuss the results of your interview in class.

1. Whom did you interview? When did they serve in Vietnam? Did they enlist or were they drafted?
2. What do they remember about their feelings when they found out that they were going to Vietnam? Why, at the time, did they think that they and other Americans were in Vietnam?
3. What vivid memories do they have about their experiences in Vietnam?
4. Did these experiences change how they viewed what they were doing in Vietnam? If so, explain.
5. How were they treated by their friends and family when they returned from the war?
6. How do they now view their service in Vietnam and the reasons for which they were sent?
7. What lessons for Americans, if any, do they see in the Vietnam War experience?
8. Did the interview change your views and conclusions about the war? If so, explain.

Oral History and the Vietnam Experience

Part II—Non-Veterans

Instructions: In addition to the more than 2.5 million servicemen and servicewomen who served in Vietnam, millions of other Americans were deeply affected by the war and involved in the events that you have just studied. Their experiences, like the experiences of the veterans, are a part of the history of the Vietnam War period. To appreciate the human side of the war, you will be asked to talk to people who remember vividly this controversial period and record their recollections, experiences, and feelings about their involvement. The subject of your interview may have actively supported or protested U.S. policies, or may be a close friend or relative of someone who served in Vietnam.

Since the Vietnam War is still a very painful memory for many Americans, sensitivity and respect on your part are essential. Try not to interrupt as people tell their stories. Use of a tape recorder may help you avoid distractions during the interview. In the course of the interview, you should seek to answer the questions below. Be prepared to discuss the results of your interview in class.

1. Whom did you interview? What were they doing during the period of the Vietnam War?
2. What do they remember about their feelings concerning the United States' involvement in Vietnam? What, at the time, did they think was the purpose of U.S. policy?
3. Did their view of the war and opinions concerning U.S. policy during the early stages (1961-1965) of the conflict resemble one of the four options that you studied?
4. Did their view of the war and U.S. policy change with time? If so, explain how and why.
5. What vivid memories do they have about this period?
6. How have their views of the Vietnam War changed since 1973?
7. What lessons for Americans, if any, do they see in the Vietnam War experience?

Key Terms

Part I:

Axis powers
containment
communism
nationalists
puppets
United Nations
diplomatic recognition
insurgency
colonialism
armistice
imperialism
air-power
nuclear weapons

Part II:

political status
accord
protocol
coup
neutrality
conventional bombing

Part III:

military offensive
casualties
coalition government
bombing campaign

Part IV:

civic lives
foreign policy
vital national interest

Part VI:

military superiority
tactics
domestic politics
escalate

Issues Toolbox

Cold War:

The Cold War was the dominant foreign policy problem for the United States and Russia from the late 1940s to the late 1980s. Following the defeat of Hitler in 1945, Soviet-U.S. relations began to deteriorate. The United States adopted a policy of containing the spread of Soviet communism around the world, which led to, among other things, U.S. involvement in Vietnam. During this period both Russia and the United States devoted vast resources to their militaries, but never engaged in direct military action against each other. Because both the Soviet Union and the United States had nuclear weapons and were in competition around the world, nearly every foreign policy decision was intricately examined for its potential impact on U.S.-Soviet relations. The end of the Cold War forced policy makers to struggle to define a new guiding purpose for their foreign policy.

Imperialism:

The policy of extending the rule of a nation over foreign countries as well as acquiring colonies and dependencies. Imperialism has traditionally involved power and the use of coercion, whether through military force or some other form.

International State:

A state is an entity that has a defined territory and a permanent population under the control of its own government. A state has sovereignty over its territory and its nationals.

States can enter into international agreements, join international organizations, and pursue and be subject to legal remedies.

Sovereignty:

The right of a state to govern itself. The UN Charter prohibits external interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state without the state's consent.

Diplomatic Relations:

A formal arrangement between states by which they develop and maintain the terms of their relationship. This often includes establishing treaties regarding trade and investment, the treatment of each other's citizens, and the nature of their security relationship. It also includes the establishment of an embassy and consuls in each other's countries to facilitate representation on issues of concern for each nation.

Accords, Treaties, Conventions, Protocols:

Accords, treaties, conventions, and protocols are all types of international agreements. The U.S. President may sign any international agreement, but it does not become the law of the land until it is ratified by two-thirds of the Senate.

Making Choices Work in Your Classroom

This section of the Teacher Resource Book offers suggestions for teachers as they adapt Choices curricula on historical turning point to their classrooms. They are drawn from the experiences of teachers who have used Choices curricula successfully in their classrooms and from educational research on student-centered instruction.

Managing the Choices Simulation

A central activity of every Choices unit is the role play simulation in which students advocate different options and question each other. Just as thoughtful preparation is necessary to set the stage for cooperative group learning, careful planning for the presentations can increase the effectiveness of the simulation. Time is the essential ingredient to keep in mind. A minimum of 45 to 50 minutes is necessary for the presentations. Teachers who have been able to schedule a double period or extend the length of class to one hour report that the extra time is beneficial. When necessary, the role play simulation can be run over two days, but this disrupts momentum. The best strategy for managing the role play is to establish and enforce strict time limits, such as five minutes for each option presentation, ten minutes for questions and challenges, and the final five minutes of class for wrapping up. It is crucial to make students aware of strict time limits as they prepare their presentations.

Adjusting for Students of Differing Abilities

Teachers of students at all levels—from middle school to AP—have used Choices materials successfully. Many teachers make adjustments to the materials for their students. Here are some suggestions:

- Go over vocabulary and concepts with visual tools such as concept maps and word pictures.
- Require students to answer guiding questions in the text as checks for understanding.

- Shorten reading assignments; cut and paste sections.
- Combine reading with political cartoon analysis, map analysis, or movie-watching.
- Read some sections of the readings out loud.
- Ask students to create graphic organizers for sections of the reading, or fill in ones you have partially completed.
- Supplement with different types of readings, such as from trade books or text books.
- Ask student groups to create a bumper sticker, PowerPoint presentation, or collage representing their option.
- Do only some activities and readings from the unit rather than all of them.

Adjusting for Large and Small Classes

Choices units are designed for an average class of twenty-five students. In larger classes, additional roles, such as those of newspaper reporter or member of a special interest group, can be assigned to increase student participation in the simulation. With larger option groups, additional tasks might be to create a poster, political cartoon, or public service announcement that represents the viewpoint of an option. In smaller classes, the teacher can serve as the moderator of the debate, and administrators, parents, or faculty can be invited to play the roles of congressional leaders. Another option is to combine two small classes.

Assessing Student Achievement

Grading Group Assignments: Students and teachers both know that group grades can be motivating for students, while at the same time they can create controversy. Telling students in advance that the group will receive one grade often motivates group members to hold each other accountable. This can foster group cohesion and lead to better group results. It is also important to give individual grades for groupwork assignments in order to

recognize an individual's contribution to the group. The "Assessment Guide for Oral Presentations" on the following page is designed to help teachers evaluate group presentations.

Requiring Self-Evaluation: Having students complete self-evaluations is an effective way to encourage them to think about their own learning. Self-evaluations can take many forms and are useful in a variety of circumstances. They are particularly helpful in getting students to think constructively about group collaboration. In developing a self-evaluation tool for students, teachers need to pose clear and direct questions to students. Two key benefits of student self-evaluation are that it involves students in the assessment process, and that it provides teachers with valuable insights into the contributions of individual students and the dynamics of different groups. These insights can help teachers to organize groups for future cooperative assignments.

Testing: Teachers say that students using the Choices approach learn the factual information presented as well as or better than from lecture-discussion format. Students using Choices curricula demonstrate a greater ability to think critically, analyze multiple perspectives, and articulate original viewpoints. Teachers should hold students accountable for learning historical information and concepts presented in Choices units. A variety of types of testing questions and assessment devices can require students to demonstrate critical thinking and historical understanding.

For Further Reading

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Assessment Guide for Oral Presentations

Group assignment: _____

Group members: _____

Group Assessment	<i>Excellent</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Needs Improvement</i>	<i>Unsatisfactory</i>
1. The group made good use of its preparation time	5	4	3	2	1
2. The presentation reflected analysis of the issues under consideration	5	4	3	2	1
3. The presentation was coherent and persuasive	5	4	3	2	1
4. The group incorporated relevant sections of the background reading into its presentation	5	4	3	2	1
5. The group's presenters spoke clearly, maintained eye contact, and made an effort to hold the attention of their audience	5	4	3	2	1
6. The presentation incorporated contributions from all the members of the group	5	4	3	2	1
Individual Assessment					
1. The student cooperated with other group members	5	4	3	2	1
2. The student was well-prepared to meet his or her responsibilities	5	4	3	2	1
3. The student made a significant contribution to the group's presentation	5	4	3	2	1

Alternative Five-Day Lesson Plan

Day 1:

See Day One of the Suggested Ten-Day Lesson Plan. (Students should have read Part I of the student text and completed “Study Guide—Part I” before beginning the unit.)

Homework: Students should complete preparations for the Geneva Conference role play.

Day 2:

See Day Two of the Suggested Ten-Day Lesson Plan.

Homework: Students should read Part II of the student text and complete “Study Guide—Part II”

Day 3:

Assign each student one of the four options, and allow a few minutes for students to familiarize themselves with the mindsets of the options. Explain that the options apply to the summer of 1965, noting that the time marked a critical juncture for U.S. policy in Vietnam. Call on students to evaluate the benefits and trade-offs of their assigned options.

How do the options differ in their assumptions about the Cold War? Ask students to analyze the significance of the Vietnam War from the perspective of their assigned options. What U.S. interests were at stake in the conflict? Moving beyond the options, ask students to imagine they are advising President Johnson in the summer of 1965. Which values should guide the direction of U.S. policy in Vietnam? Which option would they recommend?

Homework: Students should read Part III of student text and complete “Study Guide—Part III”

Day 4:

See Day Seven of the Suggested Ten-Day Lesson Plan.

Homework: Students should read Part VI of the background reading and answer the questions in the introduction for each lesson presented.

Day 5:

See Day Ten of the Suggested Ten-Day Lesson Plan.

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