

## Presidential Decisions During the Vietnam War

### Overview

In this lesson, students will be assigned an American president during the United States' involvement in the Vietnam conflict. Using speeches, declassified memos and other primary sources, students will have to make a decision regarding the United State's actions in Vietnam. After making their decision using the available information, they must justify their actions to their small group. Students will then receive a comprehensive overview of the conflict in Vietnam via power point and class discussion. The lesson culminates with a group discussion comparing and analyzing presidential decisions regarding Vietnam. (As an alternative to this lesson or as an additional assignment on Vietnam, see also Carolina K-12's "The Vietnam War and Protest Music", available in the Database of K-12 Resources: [k12database.unc.edu](http://k12database.unc.edu))

### Grade

- High School

### Materials

- President and Vietnam Handouts (attached)
  - There are five total. One for each of the following Presidents: Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon.
  - President and Vietnam Related Documents (attached)
  - Presidential Scenario Questions Handout (attached)
- "The Vietnam War" Power Point, available in Carolina K-12's Database of K-12 Resources (in PDF format): <https://k12database.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/31/2012/05/VietnamWarPPT.pdf>
  - To view this PDF as a projectable presentation, save the file, click "View" in the top menu bar of the file, and select "Full Screen Mode"
  - To request an editable PPT version of this presentation, send a request to [CarolinaK12@unc.edu](mailto:CarolinaK12@unc.edu)
- Vietnam War Overview Guided Notes (attached)
- "The Strategist" Political Cartoon (attached)
- The Vietnam War Quiz and Answer Key (attached)
- LBJ Political Cartoon (attached)

### Essential Questions:

- Why did the United States get involved in the conflict in Vietnam?
- In what ways and why did the United States escalate the conflict in Vietnam?
- What effects did the Vietnam War have on US society?
- How does music relate to various social movements?

### Duration

Two 90 minute periods

### Teacher Note

The intent of this assignment is to simulate the Presidential decision making process regarding the Vietnam War without the benefit of hindsight. Students begin the lesson with an activity that gives them a limited amount of information and they have to make a decision using the information given.

## Procedure

### Day One

#### Difficult Decisions Warm Up

1. As a warm up, ask students if they have ever had to make a difficult decision in their life. Ask students to consider the following questions while thinking of their decisions.
  - What was the decision you had to make?
  - What information did you use to make your decision?
  - Did you ask people for advice about your decision?
  - When you made your decision did you consider all the consequences?
  - Did you regret your decision in hindsight?
2. Allow a few students to share their experiences. After discussing the above questions, explain that many presidents face difficult decisions multiple times throughout their presidency. Many times these decisions were made in a certain era when values and ideas were different. These decisions may seem foolish or misguided now, but at the time they were made they seemed like the right one. Some decisions were met with unforeseen consequences and some were made without enough information. Transition to the next activity by explaining that American involvement in Vietnam is one of the most controversial presidential decisions ever made and let students know they will be focusing on this topic in today's lesson.

#### Presidential Decisions and Vietnam

3. Divide students into groups of five and within each group assign one of the following US Presidents: Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, or Nixon. Pass out the "President \_\_\_\_\_ and Vietnam" handouts (attached) and review the instructions below and expectations for group work before allowing the students to start their independent work.

#### Presidential Decisions and Vietnam Instructions:

The purpose of this assignment is to place yourself in the shoes of your assigned US President and make a decision regarding the Vietnam Conflict. Individually read the scenario and documents provided, answer the attached questions, and create a short presentation that you will give to the remainder of your small group that will teach them the facts surrounding the scenario and your decision regarding the scenario. Your presentation should be 3 – 5 minutes and requires at least one prop (map, chart, graph, picture, cartoon, etc.) You can be creative, but make sure you cover all presentation requirements and effectively teach your classmates about the scenario.

You will have 30 minutes to complete this activity. You will be graded on having an organized, quality, and comprehensive presentation that teaches your classmates about the important points of your scenario. You will have 3-5 minutes to present your scenario and then take questions from your group mates.

4. Actively monitor students while they are working independently to ensure that they stay on task and to answer any questions that may arise.
5. Once students have completed their research and speeches, allow each group 20 minutes (approximately five minutes for each student) to present to their small groups. While the presenter is speaking his/her group mates should write down questions to ask the presenter regarding their decision. After presenting, the presenter should defend their decision to their group's questions.
6. After each student has presented within their group, bring the class back together. Debrief by asking the following questions:
  - What was the decision you had to make?
  - What information did you use to make your decision?
  - Did you value one document higher than another document?

- When you made your decision did you consider all the consequences?

### Overview of Vietnam - Power Point

- As students should now know, the situation in Vietnam is complicated and can be quite confusing. Let students know they will now learn some basic facts regarding the conflict and about the actual decisions Presidents have made regarding the conflict. Pass out the attached guided notes sheets that accompany the Power point, which will help students who have difficulty taking notes and will also streamline the note taking process in a class with limited time. Instruct students to follow along and pose questions as they have them. While students will be taking notes throughout the PPT, it is important teachers use this as a conversational piece rather than simply lecture.
- Teacher Notes:** This power point is intended to be a brief overview of the Vietnam War. It includes many of the major military and political figures, events, and terminology associated with the Vietnam War. Discussion points and corresponding slides are listed below. It is likely that teachers will want to break this presentation up over two class periods. The presentation notes a stopping place at slide 21, though teachers should use their discretion as to where to stop.)
  - Slide 3 – What other events could have influenced the creation of the Domino Theory?
    - Spread of communist governments to Eastern Europe after World War II.
    - China becoming a communist nation
    - Korean War
  - Slide 13 – Additional information regarding The Gulf of Tonkin Incident:
    - The Gulf of Tonkin Incident was actually two separate events. On August 2<sup>nd</sup> 1964 Vietnamese torpedo boats attacked a group of US destroyers. Two days later it was reported that a group of US destroyers was again “deliberately attacked.” This second attack was the impetus for the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution and for the escalation of US military presence in Vietnam. A declassified NSA report from 2005 alleged that the first attack against US ships was under questionable circumstances and that the second incident *never occurred*. At the time, it was not entirely certain to Johnson and his staff that the second attack occurred, yet they still pressed ahead in asking Congress for authorization to escalate the war. (Source: <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB132/>)
    - Why do you think that President Johnson would use faulty intelligence as a basis for troop escalation in Vietnam?
  - Slide 14 – Why do you think Congress decided to allow a resolution of force rather than officially declaring war on Vietnam?
    - Possible answers include:
      - If an official war was declared, China and/or Russia might declare war on the US leading to another potential World War.
      - The resolution allowed for a limited rather than a total war. Johnson himself said that "the United States... seeks no wider war".
      - The United States felt that the increased military presence in Vietnam would bring a quick end to the conflict and avert the need for a declaration of war.
  - Slide 16 – What other wars were VC style tactics used in?
    - Iraq War, War in Afghanistan, American Revolution
  - Slide 19– What does the Killed in Action chart tell you about the enemy the United States was facing in Vietnam?
    - The Vietnamese were ready to die to defend their homeland. This makes them an extremely difficult opponent to defeat.
- Complete part two of the Power point during the next class. If there is time remaining in the class period, write the following question on the board and have students respond in writing:
  - Le Van Bang, former Vietnamese Ambassador to the United States, said: “Vietnam is a country, not a war.” What message do you think he was trying to convey?

## Day Two

### Warm Up – Political Cartoon Analysis

10. As a warm up, project the attached political cartoon. Ask students the following questions:
- Are there any images of famous places or famous people? If not, what images are present?
  - Are any of the images being used as a symbol to stand for a larger concept or idea? If so, what is the meaning of the symbol?
  - Is the cartoonist using any other artistic techniques (e.g., irony or exaggeration) to express his or her opinion on an issue?
  - Does the writer label anything in the cartoon? If so, what is the importance of the label?
  - What message is the author trying to convey in this cartoon?
  - What evidence in the cartoon supports your opinion?
  - How do you think this cartoon relates to presidential decisions during the Vietnam War?

### Overview of Vietnam Power point – Part Two

11. Have students take out their guided notes sheets and complete part two of the power point. Below are stopping points and discussion questions to accompany the power point.
- Slide 26 – Can you think of another technology that has influenced how war is reported?
    - The internet, cell phones, twitter, etc.
  - Slide 29 – Why do you think a significant anti-War movement never developed during World War II?
    - Possible answers include:
      - Government had better control over information that was passed along to the general public.
      - American public supported the war because the United States was provoked at Pearl Harbor.
    - Try to help students make the connection between the Civil Rights Movement and the anti-war movement.
      - Mostly young people participated in both movements.
      - Protest music played a central role in both movements.
      - The timing of both movements overlapped.
      - Predominantly, peaceful protest tactics were used.
  - Pause at slide 31 and discuss the following before continuing:
    - What do you think is happening here?
    - Who do you think the man with the gun is?
    - Who do you think the man being shot is?
    - Why do you think he's being shot?
    - How does this photo make you feel?
    - How do you think Americans reacted when they first saw this photo in 1968?
    - Additional Information Regarding the Photo:
      - With North Vietnam's Tet Offensive beginning, Nguyen Ngoc Loan, South Vietnam's national police chief, was doing all he could to keep Viet Cong guerrillas from Saigon. As Loan executed a prisoner who was said to be a Viet Cong captain, AP photographer Eddie Adams opened the shutter. Adams won a Pulitzer Prize for a picture that, as much as anything else, turned public opinion against the war. Adams felt that many misinterpreted the scene, and when told in 1998 that the immigrant Loan had died of cancer at his home in Burke, Va., he said, "The guy was a hero. America should be crying. I just hate to see him go this way, without people knowing anything about him."  
*Source: <http://www.cs.brown.edu/courses/cs024/imagesHistoric.html#06.jpg>*
  - Slide 32 – Choose one student to read the quote regarding the picture on the previous slide. Ask the following questions:
    - Do you agree with the author's sentiments that "still photographs are the most powerful weapon in the world?"

- Do you feel differently about the photograph after reading the author’s quote?
- What do the photograph and the quote tell you about the nature of the media?
- Slide 37 – Ask the following questions:
  - What were some major American political events that took place in 1968?
    - The Civil Rights movement lost its most recognizable figure in Dr. King.
    - The Democratic Party lost a strong presidential candidate in Robert Kennedy.
    - The Tet Offensive helped to turn a great deal of the American public against the Vietnam War.
    - Richard Nixon wins the presidency.
    - 1968 was the deadliest year for American troops in Vietnam further turning American public opinion against the war.
- At the conclusion of the presentation:
  - How was Nixon’s Vietnam strategy similar to Johnson’s?
    - They both expanded the war, Nixon by bombing Cambodia and LBJ by increasing the amount of ground troops.
  - How was Nixon’s strategy different than Johnson’s?
    - Nixon felt that gradually withdrawing troops and turning the war over to the S. Vietnamese would bring a “peace with honor.”

### **Presidential Decisions Debriefing**

12. After concluding the power point, group students based upon their president from the previous day. Have students compare their decisions to the actual president’s decisions. Have each group answer the following questions and present their answers to the class. Students may use textbooks and other supplemental material in order to gain a deeper understanding of the events presented in the power point.
- How was your decision different from the actual decision?
  - If your decision was different, which decision do you think was better?
  - What are some limitations you felt when making your decision?
  - With the benefit of hindsight, would you change your decision?
  - What are some other difficult presidential decisions?
  - Can past presidential decisions help our current president make smarter decisions?
13. Optional culminating assignments:
- Distribute the attached quiz regarding Vietnam.
  - Have students analyze that attached LBJ political cartoon.
  - Assign the DBQ on Vietnam available at <http://www.historyteacher.net/USProjects/DBQs2001/Vietnam-Tomlin.htm>

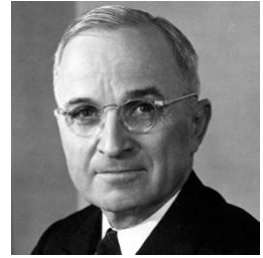
### **Resources**

- Historic Images: <http://www.cs.brown.edu/courses/cs024/imagesHistoric.html#06.jpg>
- The National Security Archive: <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB132/>

## President Truman and Vietnam

### Instructions:

The purpose of this assignment is to place yourself in the shoes of US President **Harry Truman** and make a decision regarding the Vietnam Conflict. Read the scenario and documents provided to you, answer the attached questions, and create a short presentation that teaches your small group about the facts surrounding the scenario and your decision regarding the scenario. Your presentation should be 3 – 5 minutes and requires at least one prop (map, chart, graph, picture, cartoon, etc.) You can be creative, but make sure you cover all presentation requirements and effectively teach your classmates about the scenario.



You will have 30 minutes to complete this activity. You will be graded on having an organized, quality, and comprehensive presentation that teaches your classmates about the important points of your scenario. You will have 3-5 minutes to present your scenario and then take questions from your group mates.

### Scenario:

World War Two left many global changes in its wake: the weakening of European colonial empires, the emergence of the USSR and US as superpowers, and their subsequent Cold War that dominated post-WWII global politics. After WWII, France attempted to regain control of its colonies in Indochina (present day Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia). The Viet Minh, led by Ho Chi Minh, were a communist nationalist movement that wanted to expel the French from Indochina and gain independence for the Vietnamese.

US President Harry Truman faced a difficult decision regarding the situation in Indochina. On one hand, he supported decolonization. On the other hand, he needed France as an ally against the Soviet Union. If you were President Harry Truman, what would you do?

### Important information to consider when making your decision:

- The United States practiced a policy called “containment.” This policy was intended to stop the spread of communism beyond its current borders. It was outlined in the “Truman Doctrine.”
- In 1949, China became a communist nation.
- In 1950, Communist North Korea invaded non-Communist South Korea starting the Korean War. This was the first “hot” conflict of the Cold War. The United States currently has over 100,000 troops committed in Korea.
- Seeing how the policy of “appeasement” failed to stop World War II, world leaders are of the view that aggressive expansion must be stopped quickly and decisively.
- A majority of the Vietnamese people supported Ho Chi Minh in his fight against the French.

### Important documents to read and discuss before making your decision:

- “Truman Doctrine” excerpt
- “Declaration of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam”

The Truman Doctrine, March 12, 1947 (Excerpt)

One of the primary objectives of the foreign policy of the United States is the creation of conditions in which we and other nations will be able to work out a way of life free from coercion. This was a fundamental issue in the war with Germany and Japan. Our victory was won over countries which sought to impose their will, and their way of life, upon other nations...

The people of a number of countries in the world have recently had totalitarian regimes forced upon them against their will. The Government of the United States has made frequent protests against coercion and intimidation, in violation of the Yalta agreement, in Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria. I must also state that in a number of other countries there have been similar developments.

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 the 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 outside pressures.

I believe that we must assist free peoples to work out their own destinies in their own way.

I believe that our help should be primarily through economic and financial aid which is essential to economic stability and orderly political processes.

The world is not static, and the *status quo* is not sacred. But we cannot allow changes in the *status quo* in violation of the Charter of the United Nations by such methods as coercion, or by such subterfuges as political infiltration. In helping free and independent nations to maintain their freedom, the United States will be giving effect to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

**Source:** *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States*: Harry S. Truman, 1947  
(Washington, CD: Government Printing Office, 1963), 176-80.

**Poet Nguyen Thuong Hien on the Fate of Villagers Who Pleaded With French Colonial Officials for Lower Taxes Around 1914**

In Quang Nam, a province south of our capital, the inhabitants were so heavily taxed that they came to the Resident's Headquarters to ask him to exempt them from the new tax increase. The Resident did not listen to them, but instead ordered his soldiers to charge against them. Among those driven back into the river, three drowned. The inhabitants' anger was aroused, so they brought the three corpses before the Resident's Headquarters, and for the whole week several thousand people dressed in mourning garments sat on the ground surrounding the three corpses, shouting and wailing continuously. The Resident reported the matter to the Resident General, who came and inquired of the inhabitants: "Why are you people rebelling?" The inhabitants replied: "We do not have a single stick of iron in our hands, why do you say that we are rebelling? It is only because the taxes are too high and we are not able to pay them that we must voice our opinion together." The Resident General then said: "If your people are so poor that you cannot pay taxes to the government, then you might as well all be dead." When he finished saying this, the Resident General ordered his French soldiers to fire into the crowd. Only after several hundred persons had been killed, shedding their blood in puddles, did the crowd disperse.

**Source:** Ngo Vinh Long, *Before the Revolution: The Vietnamese Peasants Under the French*, 2d ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991). 71-72

**Declaration of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, September 2, 1945. (Excerpt)**

"All men are created equal. They are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."

This immortal statement was made in the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America in 1776. In a broader sense, this means: All the peoples on the earth are equal from birth, all the peoples have a right to live, to be happy, and to be free.

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."

Those are undeniable truths.

Nevertheless for more than eighty 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 ideals of humanity and justice...

From the autumn of 1940, our country had in fact ceased to be a French colony and had become a Japanese possession.

After the Japanese had surrendered to the Allies, our whole people rose to regain our national sovereignty and to found the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

The truth is that we have wrested our independence from the Japanese and not from the French.

The French have fled, the Japanese have capitulated, Emperor Bao Dai has abdicated. Our people have broken the chains which for nearly a century have fettered them and have won independence for the Fatherland. Our people at the same time have overthrown the monarchic regime that has reigned supreme for a dozen centuries. In its place has been established the present Democratic Republic...

For these reasons, we, members of the Provision Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, solemnly declare to the world that Vietnam has the right to be a free and independent country – and in fact it is so already. The entire Vietnamese people are determined to mobilize all their physical and mental strength, to sacrifice their lives and property in order to safeguard their independence and liberty.

**Source:** Ho Chi Minh, *Selected Works*, 3: 17 – 21.



## President Eisenhower and Vietnam



### Instructions:

The purpose of this assignment is to place yourself in the shoes of US President **Dwight D. Eisenhower** and make a decision regarding the Vietnam Conflict. Read the scenario and documents provided, answer the attached questions, and create a short presentation that teaches your small group about the facts surrounding the scenario and your decision regarding the scenario. Your presentation should be 3 – 5 minutes and requires at least one prop (map, chart, graph, picture, cartoon, etc.) You can be creative, but make sure you cover all presentation requirements and effectively teach your classmates about the scenario.

You will have 30 minutes to complete this activity. You will be graded on having an organized, quality, and comprehensive presentation that teaches your classmates about the important points of your scenario. You will have 3-5 minutes to present your scenario and then take questions from your group mates.

### Scenario:

After WWII, France attempted to regain control of its colonies in Indochina (present day Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia). The Viet Minh, led by Ho Chi Minh, were a communist nationalist movement that wanted to expel the French from Indochina and gain independence for the Vietnamese. In 1954, following a defeat at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu, the French granted the Vietnamese their independence.

The Geneva Accords, signed in 1954, officially ended the fighting between France and the Viet Minh. It laid out the following conditions:

- Divided Indochina into three separate nations: Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.
- Divided Vietnam into two separate sections: Communist North, led by Ho Chi Minh, and the Pro-Western South led by Ngo Dinh Diem.
- Free elections were to be held in Vietnam in 1956 to reunify the country under one government.

Ngo Dinh Diem, the president of South Vietnam, was an ardent nationalist and anti-communist. Although he was unpopular among the Vietnamese people, his anti-communist credentials guaranteed him American support. When it came time for the 1956 elections, American intelligence analysts predicted that Diem would lose, and as a result, Diem refused to participate.

A communist rebel group in the South, known as the National Liberation Front (NLF), committed themselves to overthrowing Diem and uniting Vietnam. The NLF fighters, called Vietcong, launched an insurgency where they killed government officials and destroyed infrastructure. With backing from the North Vietnamese, they essentially started a civil war.

Diem did little to help his popularity in South Vietnam. He was a Roman Catholic in a largely Buddhist nation. He enacted anti-Buddhist legislation and refused to enact land reforms. The only thing keeping him in power was the support of the United States.

President Eisenhower faced a difficult decision regarding the situation in Vietnam. On one hand, he theoretically supported the idea of self-determination, or the right of a people to choose their own government. On the other hand, he did not want to allow Vietnam to fall to communism. If you were President Dwight D. Eisenhower, what would you do?

### Important information to consider when making your decision:

- The United States practiced a policy called “containment.” This policy was intended to stop the spread of communism beyond its current borders. It was outlined in the “Truman Doctrine.”
- The US also believed in the “Domino Theory,” or the idea that if one country falls to communism, the surrounding countries will fall too.
- In 1949, China became a communist nation.
- In 1950, Communist North Korea invaded non-Communist South Korea starting the Korean War. The conflict ended in a stalemate with the original dividing line between North Korea and South Korea remaining intact.
- Seeing how the policy of “appeasement” failed to stop World War II, world leaders are of the view that aggressive expansion must be stopped quickly and decisively.

### Important documents to read and discuss before making your decision:

- Dwight D. Eisenhower’s “Falling Domino” Statement to the Press on the Strategic Importance of Indochina, April 7, 1954
- Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty, September 8, 1954
- Dwight D. Eisenhower’s Speech on the “Need for Mutual Security in Waging the Peace,” May 21, 1957
- Manifesto of the South Viet Nam National Front for Liberation, December 1960

**Dwight D. Eisenhower's "Falling Domino" Statement to the Press on the Strategic Importance of Indochina, April 7, 1954**

You have, of course, both the specific and the general when you talk about such things.

First of all, you have the specific value of a locality in its production of materials that the world needs.

Then you have the possibility that many human beings pass under a dictatorship that is inimical to the free world.

Finally, you have broader considerations that might follow what you would call the "falling domino" principle. You have a row of dominoes set up, you knock over the first one, and what will happen to the last one is the certainty that it will go over very quickly. So you could have a beginning of a disintegration that would have the most profound influences.

Now, with respect to the first one, two of the items from this particular area that the world uses are tin and tungsten. They are very important. There are others, of course, the rubber plantations and so on.

Then with respect to more people passing under this domination, Asia, after all, has already lost some 450 million of its peoples to the Communist dictatorship, and we simply can't afford greater losses.

But, when we come to the possible sequence of events, the loss of Indochina, of Burma, of Thailand, of the Peninsula, and Indonesia following, now you begin to talk about areas that not only multiply the disadvantages that you would suffer through loss of materials, sources of materials, but now you are talking about millions and billions of people.

Finally, the geographical position achieved thereby does many things. It turns the so-called island defensive chain of Japan, Formosa, of the Philippines and to the southward; it moves in to threaten Australia and New Zealand.

It takes away, in its economic aspects, that region that Japan must have as a trading area or Japan, in turn, will have only one place in the world to go – that is, toward the Communist areas in order to live.

So, the possible consequences of the loss are just incalculable to the free world.

**Source:** *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States. Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1954.* (Washington, DC. Government Printing Office, 1958), 332 – 33.

**Manifesto of the South Viet Nam National Front for Liberation, December 1960 (excerpt)**

At present, our people are urgently demanding an end to the cruel dictatorial rule; they are demanding independence and democracy, enough food and clothing, and peaceful reunification of the country.

To meet the aspirations of our compatriots, the *South Viet Nam national Front for Liberation* came into being, pledging itself to shoulder the historic task of liberation our people from the present yoke of slavery.

The *South Viet Nam National Front for Liberation* undertakes to unite all sections of the people, all social classes, nationalities, political parties, organizations, religious communities and patriotic personalities, without distinction of their political tendencies, in order to struggle for the overthrow of the rule of the US imperialists and their stooges – the Ngo Dinh Diem clique – and for the realization of independence, democracy, peace and neutrality pending the peaceful reunification of the fatherland.

**Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty, September 8, 1954 (Excerpt)**

Article IV

1. Each party recognizes that aggression by means of armed attack in the treaty area against any of the parties or against any state or territory which the parties by unanimous agreement may hereafter designate, would endanger its own peace and safety, and agrees that it will in that event act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes. Measures taken under this paragraph shall be immediately reported to the Security Council of the United Nations.
2. If, in the opinion of any of the parties, the inviolability of the integrity of the territory or the sovereignty or political independence of any party in the treaty area or of any state or territory to which the provisions of paragraph 1 of this article from time to time apply is threatened in any way other than by armed attack or is affected or threatened by any factor situation which might endanger the peace of the area, the Parties shall consult immediately in order to agree on the measures which should be taken for the common defense.
3. It is understood that no action on the territory of any state designated by unanimous agreement under paragraph 1 of this article or on any territory so designated shall be taken except at the invitation or the consent of the government concerned...

*Designation of States and Territory as to Which Provisions of Article IV and Article III Are to Be Applicable*

The parties to the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty unanimously designate for the purposes of Article IV of the Treaty the states of Cambodia and Laos, and the free territory under the jurisdiction of the state of Vietnam...

**Source:** *Department of State Bulletin* (September 20, 1954), 394-96.

**Dwight D. Eisenhower's Speech on the "Need for Mutual Security in Waging the Peace," May 21, 1957 (excerpt)**

This is a policy for America that began ten years ago when a Democratic President and a Republican Congress united in an historic declaration. They then declared that the independence and survival of two countries menaced by Communist aggression – Greece and Turkey – were so important to the security of America that we would give them military and economic aid.

That policy saved those nations. And it did so without the cost of American lives.

That policy has since been extended to all critical areas of the world. It recognizes that America cannot exist as an island of freedom in a surrounding sea of Communism. It is expressed concretely by mutual security treaties embracing 42 other nations. And these treaties reflect a solemn finding by the President and the Senate that our own peace would be endangered if any of these countries were to be conquered by International Communism.

The lesson of the defense of Greece and Turkey ten years ago has since been repeated in the saving of other lands and peoples. A recent example is the Southeast Asian country of Viet-Nam, whose President has just visited as our honored guest.

Two years ago it appeared that all of Southeast Asia might be over-run by the forces of International Communism. The freedom and security of nations for which we had fought throughout World War II and the Korean War again stood in danger. The people of Viet-Nam responded bravely – under steadfast leadership.

But bravery alone could not have prevailed.

We gave military and economic assistance to the Republic of Viet-Nam. We entered into a treaty – the Southeast Asia Security Treaty – which plainly warned that an armed attack against this area would endanger our own peace and safety, and that we would act accordingly. Thus Viet-Nam has been saved for freedom.

**Source:** *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1957* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1958), 397 – 88.

## President Kennedy and Vietnam



### Instructions:

The purpose of this assignment is to place yourself in the shoes of US President **John F. Kennedy** and make a decision regarding the Vietnam Conflict. Read the scenario and documents provided, answer the attached questions, and create a short presentation that teaches your small group about the facts surrounding the scenario and your decision regarding the scenario. Your presentation should be 3 – 5 minutes and requires at least one prop (map, chart, graph, picture, cartoon, etc.) You can be creative, but make sure you cover all presentation requirements and effectively teach your classmates about the scenario.

You will have 30 minutes to complete this activity. You will be graded on having an organized, quality, and comprehensive presentation that teaches your classmates about the important points of your scenario. You will have 3-5 minutes to present your scenario and then take questions from your group mates.

### Scenario:

When Kennedy takes over as President in 1961, the Cold War between the USSR and US has reached a critical point. There has already been a “hot” conflict: the Korean War (1950-53), which ended in stalemate. Another “hot” conflict is shaping up in Vietnam where a civil war has been raging between North and South Vietnam for 5 years.

A 1954 resolution, the Geneva Accords, divided the Vietnam into two parts: a communist North Vietnam, led by Ho Chi Minh and a non-communist South Vietnam, led by Ngo Dinh Diem. An election in 1956 was supposed to unify the country under one government. When it came time for the 1956 elections, American intelligence analysts predicted that Diem would lose, and as a result, Diem refused to participate. Although he was unpopular among the Vietnamese people, his anti-communist credentials guaranteed him American support.

A communist rebel group in the South, known as the National Liberation Front (NLF), committed themselves to overthrowing Diem and uniting Vietnam. The NLF fighters, called Vietcong, launched an insurgency where they killed government officials and destroyed infrastructure. With backing from the North Vietnamese, they essentially started a civil war.

Diem did little to help his popularity in South Vietnam. He was a Roman Catholic in a largely Buddhist nation. He enacted anti-Buddhist legislation and refused to enact land reforms. Many Vietnamese people were withdrawing their support for Diem. The only thing keeping him in power was the support of the United States, which was quickly fading.

Up until this point, the United States has had a policy of supporting Diem’s government, by sending monetary aid.

President Kennedy faced difficult decisions regarding the situation in Vietnam. On one hand, he did not want to expand the United States’ role in the war, but he felt that Diem could not handle it without US assistance. If you were President Kennedy, would you do continue on the same strategy of only sending monetary aid? Would you send military aid? Would you keep Diem in power?

### Important information to consider when making your decision:

- The United States practiced a policy called “containment.” This policy was intended to stop the spread of communism beyond its current borders. It was outlined in the “Truman Doctrine.”
- The US also believed in the “Domino Theory,” or the idea that if one country falls to communism, the surrounding countries will fall too.
- In 1949, China became a communist nation.
- In 1950, Communist North Korea invaded non-Communist South Korea starting the Korean War. The conflict ended in a stalemate with the original dividing line between North Korea and South Korea remaining intact.
- Seeing how the policy of “appeasement” failed to stop World War II, world leaders are of the view that aggressive expansion must be stopped quickly and decisively.

### Important documents to read and discuss before making your decision:

- General Maxwell Taylor’s Report to President John F. Kennedy, November 1, 1961 (excerpt)
- Secretary of State Dean Rusk Telegram to Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, October 5, 1963 (excerpt)
- John F. Kennedy Interview with Chet Huntley and David Brinkley, September 10, 1963

**General Maxwell Taylor's Report to President John F. Kennedy, November 1, 1961 (excerpt)**

The introduction of US forces may increase tensions and risk escalation into a major war in Asia.

On the other side of the argument, there can be no action so convincing of US seriousness of the purpose and hence so reassuring to the people and Government of SVN [South Vietnam] and to our other friends and allies in SEA [Southeast Asia] as the introduction of US forces in SVN...

The size of the US force introduced need not be great to provide the military presence necessary to produce the desired effect on national morale in SVN and on international opinion. A bare token, however, will not suffice; it must have a significant value...

The risks of backing into a major war by way of SVN are present but are not impressive. NVN [North Vietnam] is extremely vulnerable to conventional bombing, a weakness which should be exploited diplomatically in convincing Hanoi to lay off SVN. Both the D.R.V. [Democratic Republic of Vietnam] and the Chicoms [Chinese Communists] would face severe logistical difficulties in trying to maintain strong forces in the field in SEA, difficulties which we share but by no means to the same degree...

By the foregoing line of reasoning, I have reached the conclusion that the introduction of US military Task Force without delay offers definitely more advantage than it creates risks and difficulties. In fact, I do not believe that our program to save SVN will succeed without it. If the concept is approved, the exact size and composition of the force should be determined by the Secretary of Defense in consultation with the JCS [Joint Chiefs of Staff], the Chief MAAG [Military Assistance Advisory Group], and the CINCPAC [Commander in Chief, Pacific]. My own feeling is that the initial size should not exceed about 8,000, of which a preponderant number would be in logistical-type units

**Source:** *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945 – 1967*, 11:337-42

**Secretary of State Dean Rusk Telegram to Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, October 5, 1963 (excerpt)**

1. Following is overall instruction resulting from NSC [National Security Council] consideration of McNamara/Taylor report and recommendations together with those you have submitted in recent weeks. These instructions have the President's personal approval. At any time you feel it necessary you may state to GVN [Government of Vietnam] that you are acting under the specific instructions of the President as recommended by the National Security Council.
2. Actions are designed to indicate to Diem Government our displeasure at its political policies and activities and to create significant have at most slight impact on military or counterinsurgency effort against Viet Cong, at least in short run.
3. The recommendations on negotiations are concerned with what US is after, i.e., GVN action to increase effectiveness of its military effort; to ensure popular support to win war; and to eliminate strains on US Government and public confidence. The negotiating posture is designed not to lay down specific hard and fast demands or to set a deadline, but to produce movement in Vietnamese Government along these lines...
12. If, as we hope, Diem seeks clarification of US policies and actions, you should present an exposition of how our actions are related to our fundamental objective of victory. There are three issues at root of strained relations between GVN and US and of our judgment that victory may be jeopardized. The first concerns military effort; GVN must take steps to make this more effective. The second is a crisis of confidence among Vietnamese people which is eroding popular support for GVN that is vital for victory. The third is a crisis of confidence on part of the American public and Government. Heart of the problem is form of government that has been evolving in Viet-Nam. Diem's regime has trappings of democracy, but in reality it has been evolving into authoritarian government maintained by police terrorist methods. What GVN must do is reverse this process of evolution.

**Source:** *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, vol. 4, *Vietnam August – December 1963* (Washington DC, Government Printing Office, 1991), 372-74.

**John F. Kennedy Interview with Chet Huntley and David Brinkley, September 10, 1963**

*Mr. Huntley:* Are we likely to reduce our aid to South Viet-Nam now?

*The President:* I don't think we think that would be helpful at this time. If you reduce your aid, it is possible you could have some effect upon the government structure there. On the other hand, you might have a situation which could bring about collapse. Strongly in our mind is what happened in the case of China at the end of World War II, where China was lost – a weak government became increasingly unable to control events. We don't want that.

*Mr. Brinkley:* Mr. President, have you had any reason to doubt this so called "domino theory," that if South Viet-Nam falls, the rest of Southeast Asia will go behind it?

*The President:* No, I believe it. I believe it. I think that the struggle is close enough. China is so large, looms so high just beyond the frontiers, that if South Viet-Nam went, it would not only give them an improved geographic position for a guerrilla assault on Malaya but would also give the impression that the wave of the future in Southeast Asia was China and the Communists. So I believe it...

The fact of the matter is that with the assistance of the United States and SEATO [South East Asia Treaty Organization], Southeast Asia and indeed all of Asia has been maintained independent against a powerful force, the Chinese Communists. What I am concerned about is that Americans will get impatient and say, because they don't like events in Southeast Asia or they don't like the Government in Saigon, that we should withdraw. We should use our influence in as effective a way as we can, but should not withdraw.

**Source:** *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States. John F. Kennedy, 1963* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1964), 659 – 60.

## President Johnson and Vietnam



### Instructions:

The purpose of this assignment is to place yourself in the shoes of US President **Lyndon Johnson** and make a decision regarding the Vietnam Conflict. Read the scenario and documents provided, answer the attached questions, and create a short presentation that teaches your small group about the facts surrounding the scenario and your decision regarding the scenario. Your presentation should be 3 – 5 minutes and requires at least one prop (map, chart, graph, picture, cartoon, etc.) You can be creative, but make sure you cover all presentation requirements and effectively teach your classmates about the scenario.

You will have 30 minutes to complete this activity. You will be graded on having an organized, quality, and comprehensive presentation that teaches your classmates about the important points of your scenario. You will have 3-5 minutes to present your scenario and then take questions from your group mates.

### Scenario:

Lyndon Johnson takes over as President in 1963, after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. At this point, the Cold War between the USSR and US has reached a critical point. There has already been a “hot” conflict: the Korean War (1950-53), which ended in stalemate. Another “hot” conflict is shaping up in Vietnam where a civil war has been raging between the Communist North Vietnam and anti-Communist South Vietnam for 7 years.

Up until this point the United States had supported anti-Communist forces in Vietnam by sending monetary aid. Additionally, President Kennedy sent in over 11,000 military “advisers” to help the South Vietnamese in their fight against the North.

When Johnson takes office, the unpopular South Vietnamese President, Ngo Dinh Diem, has just been assassinated. The new leadership in South Vietnam is extremely unpopular as well and many of Johnson’s advisers feel that it is only a matter of time before Communists dominate the entire nation without US help.

President Johnson was not opposed to sending more aid or troops to Vietnam, but he was unsure if the American public would support such an increase of US involvement in a conflict half a world away.

In August of 1964, Vietnamese torpedo boats attacked a US destroyer patrolling the coasts of Vietnam in the Gulf of Tonkin. They allegedly attack a second time a few days later; there is some confusion regarding whether the Vietnamese actually attacked or if it was a misreading of information by the destroyer crew. This became known as the “Gulf of Tonkin Incident.”

President Johnson faced difficult decisions regarding the situation in Vietnam. On one hand, he did not want to expand the United States’ military role in the war, but he felt that South Vietnam would not last without US assistance. It also appeared that the Vietnamese had attacked US ships in international waters with could be considered a declaration of war. If you were President Johnson, would you increase sending monetary aid? Would you send more military aid? Would you wait for more information regarding the Gulf of Tonkin incident before acting?

### Important information to consider when making your decision:

- The United States practiced a policy called “containment.” This policy was intended to stop the spread of communism beyond its current borders. It was outlined in the “Truman Doctrine.”
- The US also believed in the “Domino Theory,” or the idea that if one country falls to communism, the surrounding countries will fall too.
- In 1949, China became a communist nation.
- In 1950, Communist North Korea invaded non-Communist South Korea starting the Korean War. The conflict ended in a stalemate with the original dividing line between North Korea and South Korea remaining intact.
- Seeing how the policy of “appeasement” failed to stop World War II, world leaders are of the view that aggressive expansion must be stopped quickly and decisively.

### Important documents to read and discuss before making your decision:

- Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, August 10, 1964
- McGeorge Bundy [National Security Advisor], “A Policy of Sustained Reprisal,” February 7, 1965 (Extract)

- George Ball [Under Secretary of State for Economic and Agricultural Affairs], Memorandum to Lyndon Johnson, July 1, 1965
- Robert McNamara [Secretary of Defense] Memorandum to Lyndon Johnson, July 20, 1965 (excerpt)

### President Johnson Documents

#### Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, August 10, 1964

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

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

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

Resolved by the Senate and the 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 measure to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.

Sec. 2. The United States regards as vital to its national interest and to world peace the maintenance of international peace and security in southeast Asia. Consonant with the Constitution of the United States and the charter of the United Nations and in accordance with its obligations under the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty, the United States is therefore, prepared, as the President determines, to take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force, to assist any member or protocol state of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty requesting assistance in defense of its freedom.

Sec3. 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 States or otherwise, except that it may be terminated earlier by concurrent resolution in Congress.

**Source:** *Congressional Record*, 88<sup>th</sup> Cong, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sess., vol. 110, part 14. P. 18,132

#### McGeorge Bundy [National Security Advisor], "A Policy of Sustained Reprisal," February 7, 1965 (Extract)

We believe that the best available way of increasing our chance of success in Vietnam is the development and execution of a policy of *sustained reprisal* against North Vietnam – a policy in which air and naval action against the North is justified by and related to the whole Viet Cong campaign of violence and terror in the South...

This reprisal policy should begin at a low level. Its level of force and pressure should be increased only gradually – and as indicated above it should be decreased if VC terror visibly decreases. The object would not be to “win” an air war against Hanoi, but rather to influence the course of the struggle in the South...

We are convinced that the political values of reprisal require a *continuous* operation. Episodic responses geared on a one-for-one basis to “spectacular” outrages would lack the persuasive force of sustained pressure. More important still, they would leave it open to the Communists to avoid reprisals entirely by giving up only a small element of their own program. The Gulf of Tonkin affair produced a sharp upturn in morale in South Vietnam. When it remained an isolated episode, however, there was a severe relapse. It is the great merit of the proposed scheme that to stop it the Communists would have to stop enough of their activity in the South to permit the probably success of a determine pacification effort...

We emphasize that our primary target in advocating a reprisal policy is the improvement of the situation in *South* Vietnam. Action against the North is usually urged as a means of affecting the will of Hanoi to direct and support the VC. We consider this an important but longer-range purpose. The immediate and critical targets are in the South – in the minds of the South Vietnamese and in the minds of the Viet Cong cadres.

**Source:** *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964 – 1965*, vol. 2, *Vietnam January – June 1965* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1996), 181 – 183.



George Ball [Under Secretary of State for Economic and Agricultural Affairs], Memorandum to Lyndon Johnson, July 1, 1965 (excerpt)

*A Compromise Solution in South Vietnam*

1. *A Losing War.* The South Vietnamese are losing the war to the Viet Cong. No one can assure you 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* (US) troops we deploy.  
No one has demonstrated that a white ground force of whatever size can win a guerrilla 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 force (and the SVN) and thus provides a great intelligence advantage to the other side...
2. *The Question to Decide:* 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 US forces, mounting US casualties, no assurance of a satisfactory solution, and a serious danger of escalation at the end of the road.
3. *Need for a Decision Now.* So long as our forces are restricted to advising and assisting the South Vietnamese, the struggle will remain a civil war between Asian peoples. Once we deploy substantial numbers of troops in combat it will become a war between the US and a large part of the population of South Viet-Nam, organized and directed from North Viet-Nam and backed by the resources of Moscow and [Beijing].  
The decision you face now, therefore, is crucial. Once large numbers of US troops are committed to direct combat they will begin to take heavy casualties in a war they are ill-equipped to fight in 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.*
4. *A Compromise Solution:* Should we commit US manpower and prestige to a terrain so unfavorable as to give a very large advantage to the enemy – or should we seek a compromise settlement which achieves less than our stated objectives and thus cut our losses while we still have the freedom of maneuver to do so?
5. *Cost of Compromise Solution:* The answer involves a judgment as to the cost of the United States of such a compromise settlement in terms of our relations with countries in the area of South Viet-Nam, the credibility of our commitments, and our prestige around the world. In my judgment, if we act before we commit substantial US forces to combat in South Viet-Nam we can, by accepting some short-term costs, avoid what may well be a long-term catastrophe. I believe we have tended greatly to exaggerate the costs involved in a compromise settlement.

**Source:** *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964 – 1965, vol 3, Vietnam June-December 1965* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1996), 106-8.

**Robert McNamara [Secretary of Defense] Memorandum to Lyndon Johnson, July 20, 1965 (excerpt)**

Recommendation of additional deployments to Vietnam:

1) *Introduction.* Our object in VN is to create conditions for a favorable outcome by demonstrating to the VC/DRV that the odds are against their winning. We want to create these conditions, if possible, without causing the war to expand into one with China or the Soviet Union and in a way which preserves support of the American people and, hopefully, of our allies and friends...

4. *Options open to us.* We must choose among three courses of action with respect to Vietnam all of which involve different probabilities, outcomes, and costs:

- a. Cut our losses and withdraw under the best conditions that can be arranged – almost certainly conditions humiliating the US and very damaging to our future effectiveness on the world scene.
- b. Continue at about the present level, with US forces limited to say 75,000, holding on and playing for the breaks – a course of action which, because our position would grow weaker, almost certainly would confront us later with a choice between withdrawal and an emergency expansion of forces, perhaps too late to do any good.
- c. Expand promptly and substantially the US military pressure against the Viet Cong in the South and maintain the military pressure against the Viet Cong in the South and maintain the military pressure against the NVNese in the North while launching a vigorous effort on the political side to lay the groundwork for a favorable outcome by clarifying our objectives and establishing channels of communication. This alternative would stave off defeat in the

short run and offer a good chance of producing a favorable settlement in the longer run; at the same time, it would imply a commitment to see a fighting war clear through at considerable cost in casualties and materiel and would make any later decision to withdraw even more difficult and even more costly than would be the case today.

My recommendation in paragraph 5 below are based on the choice of the third alternative (Option c) as the course of action involving the best odds of the best outcome with the most acceptable cost to the United States.

5. *Military recommendations.* There are now 15 US (and 1 Australian) combat battalions in Vietnam; they together with other combat and non-combat personnel, bring the total US personnel in Vietnam to approximately 75,000.

- a. I recommend that the deployment of US ground troops in Vietnam be increased by October to 34 maneuver battalions (or, if the Koreans fail to provide the expected 9 battalions promptly, to 43 battalions). The battalions --- together with increases in helicopter lift, air squadrons, naval units, air defense, combat support and miscellaneous log support and advisory personnel which I also recommend – would bring the total US personnel in Vietnam to approximately 175,000 (200,000 if we must make up for the Korean failure). It should be understood that the deployment of more men (an additional perhaps 100,000) may be necessary in early 1966 and that the deployment of additional forces thereafter is possible but will depend on developments.

**Source:** *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1965, 3:171-175.*

## President Nixon and Vietnam



### Instructions:

The purpose of this assignment is to place yourself in the shoes of US President **Richard Nixon** and make a decision regarding the Vietnam Conflict. Read the scenario and documents provided, answer the attached questions, and create a short presentation that teaches your small group about the facts surrounding the scenario and your decision regarding the scenario. Your presentation should be 3 – 5 minutes and requires at least one prop (map, chart, graph, picture, cartoon, etc.) You can be creative, but make sure you cover all presentation requirements and effectively teach your classmates about the scenario.

You will have 30 minutes to complete this activity. You will be graded on having an organized, quality, and comprehensive presentation that teaches your classmates about the important points of your scenario. You will have 3-5 minutes to present your scenario and then take questions from your group mates.

### Scenario:

Richard Nixon wins the 1968 election and becomes President. At this point, the United States has been heavily involved in Vietnam since 1965. Nixon's predecessor, Lyndon Johnson, widely increased the US' involvement by sending over 500,000 troops to Vietnam to help the anti-Communist South Vietnamese in their civil war against the Communist North Vietnamese.

In early 1968, the Vietnamese launched a surprise attack, called the Tet Offensive, against US forces and their allies in Vietnam. Although it was a military failure, this attack shocked many Americans back home and marked a turning point for American support of the war.

Although many Americans supported the US' increased military presence in 1965, public support for the War has been steadily waning since then. Many of the nightly television reports painted a grim picture of the situation in Vietnam. After reports of the Tet Offensive, American public support dropped rapidly, so much so that President Johnson chose to forego running for reelection.

Nixon was elected by promising a "peace with honor," security for America's ally South Vietnam, and international respect for US foreign policy. After more than a year in office, Nixon had grown impatient with the slow pace of peace negotiations between North Vietnam and the United States. One suggested strategy for breaking the deadlock was expanding the war into neighboring Cambodia to bomb North Vietnamese supply lines and to force the Vietnamese into a compromise.

President Nixon faced difficult decisions regarding the situation in Vietnam. On one hand, it was clear that many Americans were tired of the war and wanted to end it. On the other hand, many felt that United States could not appear to look weak and needed certain concessions from the North Vietnamese. If you were President Nixon would you end the war now? Would you expand the war into Cambodia in the hopes of forcing the North Vietnamese to negotiate? Would you attempt other diplomatic means?

### Important information to consider when making your decision:

- The United States practiced a policy called "containment." This policy was intended to stop the spread of communism beyond its current borders. It was outlined in the "Truman Doctrine."
- The US also believed in the "Domino Theory," or the idea that if one country falls to communism, the surrounding countries will fall too.
- In 1949, China became a communist nation.
- In 1950, Communist North Korea invaded non-Communist South Korea starting the Korean War. The conflict ended in a stalemate with the original dividing line between North Korea and South Korea remaining intact.
- Seeing how the policy of "appeasement" failed to stop World War II, world leaders are of the view that aggressive expansion must be stopped quickly and decisively.
- Vietnam's neighbor, Cambodia, was struggling to suppress a communist insurgency that threatened to take over the government. This insurgency was supported by the North Vietnamese.

### Important documents to read and discuss before making your decision:

- Richard Nixon's "Silent Majority" Speech, November 3, 1969 (excerpt)
- Public Opinion and the Vietnam War (March 1969)

- Memorandum for the President from Henry Kissinger: Contingency Military Operations Against North Vietnam
- National Security Decision Memorandum

### President Nixon Documents

Richard Nixon's "Silent Majority" Speech, November 3, 1969 (excerpt)

Good evening, my fellow Americans:

Tonight I want to talk to you on a subject of deep concern to all Americans and to many people in all parts of the world – the war in Vietnam...

Now, many believe that President Johnson's decision to send American combat forces to South Vietnam was wrong. And many others – I among them – have been strongly critical of the way the war has been conducted.

But the question facing us today is: Now that we are in the war, what is the best way to end it?...

My fellow Americans, I am sure you can recognize... that we really only have two choices open to us if we want to end the 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 – a plan in which we will withdraw all our forces from Vietnam on a schedule in accordance with our program, as the South Vietnamese become strong enough to defend their own freedom.

I have chosen the 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 in the world...

In San Francisco a few weeks ago, I saw demonstrators carrying signs reading: "Lose in Vietnam, bring the boys home."

Well, one of the strengths of our free society is that any American has a right to reach that conclusion and to advocate that point of view. But as President of the United States, I would be untrue to my oath of office if I allowed the policy of this Nation to be dictated by the minority who hold that point of view and who try to impose it on the Nation by mounting demonstrations in the street.

For almost 200 years, the policy of this Nation has been made under our Constitution by those leaders in the Congress and the White House elected by all of the people. If a vocal minority, however fervent its cause, prevails over reason and the will of the majority, this Nation has no future as a free society...

Let historians not record that when America was the most powerful nation in the world we passed on the other side of the road and allowed the last hopes for peace and freedom of millions of people to be suffocated by the forces of totalitarianism.

And so tonight – to you, the great silent majority of my fellow Americans – I ask for your support.

I pledged in my campaign for the Presidency to end the war in a way that we could win the peace. I have initiated a plan of action which will enable me to keep that pledge.

The more support I can have from the American people, the sooner that pledge can be redeemed; for the more divided we are at home, the less likely the enemy is to negotiate at Paris.

Let us be united for peace. Let us also be united against defeat. Because let us understand: North Vietnam cannot defeat or humiliate the United States. Only Americans can do that.

Public Papers of the President of the United States: Richard Nixon, 1969. (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1971), 901-09

**Public Opinion and the Vietnam War (March 1969)**

*Question & Responses from the Gallup Poll*

Interview Date: March 12 – 17, 1969

What do you think the United States should do next in regard to the Vietnam situation?

Escalate war, go all out	25%
Pull Out, let South Vietnamese Take Over	21%
Continue Present Policy; negotiate & stay as long as necessary	15%
End the War as soon as possible	15%
Other options (volunteered by respondent)	3%
No Opinion	21%

Interview Date: January 22-28, 1969

In view of the developments since we entered the fighting in Vietnam, do you think the United States made a mistake sending troops to fight in Vietnam?

Yes	52%
No	39%
No Opinion	9%

Interview Date: March 12-17, 1969

In terms of time -- months or years -- how long do you think the fighting in Vietnam will last?

Under two years	27%
Over 2 years	49%
Uncertain, no opinion	24%

Interview Date: February 20-25, 1969

Do you think the Paris peace talks are making headway, or not?

Yes	17%
No	70%
No opinion	13%

Source: *The Gallup Poll, 1935-1971* (New York: Random House, 1972), p. 2189.

The results of these questions were released to Gallup subscribers on March 23, 1969.

October 2, 1969

**Memorandum for the President**

From: Henry A. Kissinger

Subject: Contingency Military Operations Against North Vietnam

Attached are papers on contingency military operations against North Vietnam prepared under my direction by a special working group.

The papers do not address the relative merits of this option as against the present policy or other choices. My purpose at this time is to:

- Give you a general idea of such an option in terms of objectives and concept of operation.
- Provide in some detail contingency military and political plans thus far developed by the special working group on this question.
- Give you our appreciation of the issues posed by such an action.
- If this course of action is pursued, certain basic principles must, I believe, be accepted:

To attempt this course and to fail would be a catastrophe. It must therefore be based on a firm resolve to do whatever is necessary to achieve success. Since we cannot confidently predict the exact point at which Hanoi would be likely to respond positively, we must be prepared to play out whatever string necessary.

Hanoi will heavily base its decisions on its view of the seriousness of our intention to see it through. We (including the whole bureaucracy) must therefore demonstrate that domestic and foreign criticism will not deter us.

To achieve its full effect on Hanoi's thinking, the action must be brutal. This would impress Hanoi both by its actual effect and as a signal of our intent.

We should limit the number of decisions you will face, in order to limit the opportunities for domestic critics to put pressure on you. Each action must therefore be short and compact.

Once embarked on this course, we should not allow ourselves to be deterred by vague, conciliatory gestures by Hanoi. It must achieve its objectives, or we shall have demonstrated to the world our weakness rather than our strength. This requires, of course, a precise definition of our objectives.

April 1, 1969

**National Security Decision Memorandum**

TO:               The Vice President  
                     The Secretary of State  
                     The Secretary of Defense  
                     The Director of Central Intelligence  
                     The Director, Office of Emergency Preparedness

SUBJECT:        Vietnam

As a result of the National Security Council meeting on March 28, 1969, I have made the following decision on the issues listed below:

The Issue of De-escalation

- 1) There will be no de-escalation except as an outgrowth of mutual troop withdrawal.
- 2) The US side will not initiate any de-escalation proposals in the Paris negotiations.
- 3) If the DRV raise the issue of de-escalation, the US side will listen but only discuss it in the context of mutual withdrawal.

The Issue of US Forces Subject to Withdrawal

On the definition of US Forces subject to withdrawal, I have decided that we should be prepared to withdraw all combat forces from South Vietnam if Hanoi meets specific conditions of a mutual withdrawal agreement. These conditions should include provisions for:

- 1) Verification and supervision of withdrawal
- 2) The withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces from Laos and Cambodia, as well as from South Vietnam.
- 3) Guarantees to maintain the agreement.

The Issue of a Timetable for Completion of US Withdrawal

There will be no public repudiation of the former US position that we would complete our withdrawal within six months of the completion of Hanoi's withdrawal. This position will be adopted with the recognition that, in practice, the US will be in a position to control the timing of the completion of our withdrawal, since we can determine if Hanoi has fully met the conditions of mutual withdrawal agreement. The key point will not be the timetable but rather getting Hanoi to comply with the conditions for withdrawal.

The draft papers considered by the National Security Council on March 28, 1969, are approved with modifications reflecting the above decisions.

I have also directed that the following studies be undertaken for which appropriate NSSMs will be forthcoming:

- 1) Specific plan timetable for Vietnamizing the war.
- 2) Phased withdrawal under conditions of:
  - a. Mutual withdrawal, or:
  - b. Vietnamizing the war.
- 3) Verification for mutual withdrawal.
- 4) Detailed political settlement for SVN.
- 5) International guarantees for above.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Assigned President: \_\_\_\_\_

**Presidential Scenario Questions**

As you read your scenario answer the following questions to help guide your thinking

1. Summarize the situation assigned to you. What are the major facts?
2. In your own words, what decision did your President face?
3. After reading your attached documents, which one provides the most persuasive argument for a certain type of action?
4. What is your decision regarding your scenario? Why? (Be sure to cite information from your documents and scenario sheet)
5. Did you find it difficult to make your decision? Why or why not?



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## The Vietnam War

### 1. France and Vietnam (1945 - 1953)

- \_\_\_\_\_ was a French colony and after WWII they wanted to be free
- France denied the Vietnamese independence, so they fought back.
- \_\_\_\_\_
  - Vietnamese freedom fighters led by \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. The US and Vietnam

- The US did not get involved in the conflict until \_\_\_\_\_.
- The US did not support French \_\_\_\_\_, but they did not support Ho Chi Minh's \_\_\_\_\_.
- Two events caused the US to support France:
  1. \_\_\_\_\_
  2. \_\_\_\_\_

### 3. Presidents Truman and Eisenhower believed in the \_\_\_\_\_.

- the idea that if one country falls to communism, the \_\_\_\_\_.

### 4. France Falls (1954 - 1956)

- France could not defeat the resistance – the Vietminh guerilla war tactics were too difficult to defend against
- \_\_\_\_\_
  - battle where the French were badly beaten by the Vietminh. This loss convinced the French to leave Vietnam

### 5. Geneva Accords (1956)

- Agreement to end fighting between French and Vietminh
- Divided Indochina into three countries
  1. \_\_\_\_\_
  2. \_\_\_\_\_
  3. \_\_\_\_\_
- Also divided Vietnam into two sections:
  - \_\_\_\_\_ led by \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_ led by \_\_\_\_\_

### 6. Geneva Accords (1956)

- Elections were to be held in 1956 to determine the governments of North and South Vietnam
- \_\_\_\_\_ refused to hold elections because he knew he would lose.
- Now the country was headed towards \_\_\_\_\_ with the US caught in the middle

### 7. Vietcong

- The newly organized \_\_\_\_\_ that was based in S. Vietnam
- Effective at staging guerilla attacks

- Difficult to \_\_\_\_\_, so Diem began to \_\_\_\_\_ for more help in fighting the VC

**8. John F. Kennedy Becomes President**

- Kennedy needed to \_\_\_\_\_, so he increased \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ to Vietnam
- He also urged Diem to make democratic reforms to increase his popularity --> these reforms had little effect

**9. Diem's Unpopularity**

- Diem was a \_\_\_\_\_ and he persecuted the \_\_\_\_\_ as a response some Buddhist monks committed

**10. Diem's Downfall**

- With \_\_\_\_\_, he was overthrown and executed by his generals on Nov 2, 1963
- This severely \_\_\_\_\_ the S. Vietnamese gov't and forced the US to get more involved to help the S. Vietnamese
- President Kennedy was assassinated a few weeks later on November 22<sup>nd</sup>. VP \_\_\_\_\_ replaces JFK.

**11. Gulf of Tonkin Incident**

- August 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> 1964
- President Lyndon Johnson tells the nation that Vietnamese ships have \_\_\_\_\_ US destroyers
- He asks Congress to authorize the use of force to defend American forces.
- In 2005 a declassified study stated that the second incident \_\_\_\_\_

**12. Gulf of Tonkin Resolution**

- August 7, 1964
- Gulf of Tonkin Resolution authorized the president to \_\_\_\_\_  
" \_\_\_\_\_"  
\_\_\_\_\_.

**13. War**

- The US began to increase the amount of troops in 1964 - 66
- The US was supremely confident it would be an "easy" war and a majority of the US public supported the war too
- But as we quickly found out, the war wasn't easy

**14. VC tactics**

- \_\_\_\_\_
  - Who is friend?
  - Who is foe?
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**15. US Response to VC tactics**

- " \_\_\_\_\_ " missions
- Destroy landscape to get rid of VC cover
  1. \_\_\_\_\_

- Jellied gasoline that explodes and sticks to surfaces. It is very difficult to extinguish
2. \_\_\_\_\_
- a chemical that destroys the foliage so the US could see troop movement from the sky

**16. Increasing Difficulties**

- The VC did not surrender despite our tactics
- They were not going to give up their \_\_\_\_\_ easily and they were willing to accept \_\_\_\_\_.
- The US also refused to \_\_\_\_\_ N. Vietnam because we didn't want a full scale war with \_\_\_\_\_.
- This made it very difficult to win for the US

**17. Ho Chi Min Trail**

- The N. Vietnamese's series of \_\_\_\_\_
- Passed through the countries of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_
- Because Laos and Cambodia weren't involved in the war, LBJ refused the order to bomb the trail

**18. Post Gulf of Tonkin**

- Many of the President's advisors supported an expansion of the war.
- \_\_\_\_\_ the Secretary of Defense was one of the biggest supporters.
- In March 1965, Johnson expanded the war by continuously bombing North Vietnam – this became known as \_\_\_\_\_

**19. Operation Rolling Thunder**

- \_\_\_\_\_ campaign against N. Vietnam
- Goal was to \_\_\_\_\_ the N. Vietnamese and convince them to stop supplying the Viet Cong.

**20. Television War**

- At the beginning of the war, \_\_\_\_\_ kept declaring that the enemy is on the brink of defeat
- The TV news reports showed a different story. Every night Americans saw young men dying and wounded and began to \_\_\_\_\_

**21. Television War**

- A \_\_\_\_\_ developed, meaning it was hard to believe the rosy government reports.
- Vietnam was the first Television War because footage of combat was shown nightly.
- This helped lead to an \_\_\_\_\_.

**22. Anti-War Movement**

- The anti-war movement was heavily influenced by the \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ – students and teachers across US colleges abandoned their classes to discuss the Vietnam War and their opposition to it.
- \_\_\_\_\_ – many young men did not want to fight in a conflict they felt was wrong so they burned draft cards to protest.

- Dr. King Protests the War – King began to publicly criticize the war when it became apparent that many of the soldiers fighting and dying were \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

### 23. Hawks and Doves

- By 1968 polls showed that the country was almost split down the middle on support for Vietnam.
  1. \_\_\_\_\_
    - Americans who wanted to withdraw from Vietnam
  2. \_\_\_\_\_
    - Americans who wanted to stay in Vietnam

### 24. 1968 - Boom Goes the Dynamite

- **Tet Offensive**
  1. The year started with a Vietcong surprise attack on US troops
  2. The VC managed to attack almost all \_\_\_\_\_ and many Southern Vietnamese \_\_\_\_\_ – this became known as the Tet Offensive.
  3. The Tet Offensive was a huge \_\_\_\_\_ for the VC, but it still \_\_\_\_\_ the American public.
  4. How could an enemy that is so close to defeat launch an attack of that size?
- Johnson does not run for re-election
- Due to \_\_\_\_\_ and two strong Democratic candidates, Johnson decides not to run for President.

### 25. 1968

- Dr. Martin Luther King
  - Dr. King is assassinated in Memphis by \_\_\_\_\_.
- \_\_\_\_\_
  - JFK's younger brother and Democratic presidential candidate is killed by \_\_\_\_\_.
- \_\_\_\_\_
  - at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, police and protesters clashed in a highly publicized riot – it was all over TV.

### 26. Election of 1968

- Richard Nixon (Republican) vs. Hubert Humphrey (Democrat) vs. George Wallace (American Independent)
- Nixon wins and he promises to “\_\_\_\_\_,” and also end the war.

### 27. My Lai Massacre

- March 16, 1968
- US Soldiers killed 347 to 504 unarmed citizens in South Vietnam
- When the incident became public knowledge in 1969, it prompted widespread outrage around the world. The massacre also reduced U.S. support at home for the Vietnam War.

### 28. Nixon and 'Nam

- \_\_\_\_\_
  - Nixon's strategy for “\_\_\_\_\_”
  - a gradual \_\_\_\_\_ of US troops from Vietnam
  - Turn control of the war over to the S. Vietnamese
- Invasion of Cambodia
  - Nixon expanded the war into Cambodia to stop VC
  - sparked protests
- Kent State University Protests

- Response to \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_
  - January 19, 1973
  - US and N. Vietnam reach peace
  - South Vietnam falls 1975

**29. Legacy of 'Nam**

- Cost \$150 Billion
- Over \_\_\_\_\_
- Over 3 million total Vietnamese deaths (civilians/military)
- Considered by many to be the first US military defeat
- Disrespect of troops upon returning home
  - “That was the feeling in the air that we were unclean.” – Jan Scruggs, founder of Vietnam Veterans Memorial
- Americans became more distrustful of government
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - Revealed that American leaders \_\_\_\_\_ to Congress and the American people regarding Vietnam
- War Powers Act
  - \_\_\_\_\_, had to get consent from Congress before sending troops

**Additional Notes or Questions:**

## Vietnam War Political Cartoon



Bill Mauldin. *The Sun-Times* (Chicago), 1966.  
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Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

1. **What 1954 battle was a crushing defeat for France?**

- A: Dien Bien Phu
- B: Hanoi

- C: Saigon
- D: Angkor Wat

2. **The US entry into the Vietnam War was precipitated by:**

- A: The My Lai massacre
- B: The Gulf of Tonkin Incident
- C: The assassination of President Diem of South

- Vietnam
- D: The assassination of President Kennedy

3. **This Viet Cong/North Vietnamese offensive was a military catastrophe for the communists and an even worse political catastrophe for President Johnson:**

- A: The Year of the Rat Offensive.
- B: The Tet Offensive.

- C: The Battle of Khe Sanh.
- D: The Battle of Hue.

4. **Who was the US backed leader of South Vietnam until 1963?**

- A: Ho Chi Minh
- B: Le Duc Tho

- C: Ngo Dinh Diem
- D: Vo Nguen Giap

5. **What did the domino theory state?**

- A: If one country fell to Communism, other nearby would soon follow.
- B: Use of nuclear weapons in one country would lead to use in others.

- C: If the economy of one Asian country fell, other nearby would soon follow
- D: The United States should increase defense spending to cripple the Soviet economy.

6. **In 1963, a Buddhist monk protesting Diem's regime killed himself in public by:**

- A: Jumping off a cliff
- B: Setting himself on fire

- C: Refusing to move out of the way of a tank
- D: Drinking poison

7. **The policy of Vietnamization called for**

- A: Bombing North Vietnam around the clock to convince it to surrender
- B: Escalating the war and putting as many troops in Vietnam as possible

- C: Reducing the number of American troops in South Vietnam and turning control of the war over to the South Vietnamese
- D: Bombing Laos and Cambodia in order to destroy NVA supply line

8. **What did the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin Resolution do?**

- A: Gave the president more freedom to conduct military operations in Vietnam
- B: Gave the president almost unlimited funding to wage war

- C: Effectively declared war against N. Vietnam
- D: All of the above

9. **The Viet Cong proved a formidable enemy for all of the following reasons except:**

- A: Its members believed passionately in the Vietnamese nationalist cause
- B: Its members could disappear easily into the Vietnamese peasant population

- C: Its firepower was far superior to US firepower
- D: It had constructed a vast network of underground tunnels and hideouts

10. **The My Lai Massacre of 1968 helped turn American public opinion against**

- A: The South Vietnamese

- B: The North Vietnamese

C: President Richard Nixon

D: The US military

11. **Which Constitutional amendment lowered the US voting age from twenty-one to eighteen?**

A: The Twenty-Fourth Amendment

C: The Nineteenth Amendment

B: The Twenty-Fifth Amendment

D: The Twenty-Sixth Amendment

12. **South Vietnam finally fell to the North Vietnamese in**

A: 1971

C: 1975

B: 1973

D: 1980

13. **What is napalm?**

A: A type of airplane

C: A flammable gasoline-based gel

B: Poison that is applied to the tips of bullets

D: A chemical herbicide and defoliant

14. **The US bombing campaign of North Vietnam was called:**

A: Operation Rolling Thunder

C: Operation Overlord

B: The Tet Offensive

D: Vietnamization

15. **The disparity between nightly TV reports and government reports about progress concerning the war helped lead to a:**

A: Silent Majority

C: Credibility Gap

B: My Lai Massacre

D: Domino Theory



### **Vietnam Quiz Answer Key**

1. What 1954 battle was a crushing defeat for France **A: Dien Bien Phu**
2. The US entry into the Vietnam War was precipitated by **B: The Gulf of Tonkin Incident**
3. This Viet Cong/North Vietnamese offensive was a military catastrophe for the communists and an even worse political catastrophe for President Johnson: **B: The Tet Offensive.**
4. Who was the US backed leader of South Vietnam until 1963? **C: Ngo Dinh Diem**
5. What did the domino theory state? **A: If one country fell to Communism, other nearby would soon follow.**
6. In 1963, a Buddhist monk protesting Diem's regime killed himself in public by: **B: Setting himself on fire**
7. The policy of Vietnamization called for **C: Reducing the number of American troops in South Vietnam and turning control of the war over to the South Vietnamese**
8. What did the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin Resolution do? **D: All of the above**
9. The Viet Cong proved a formidable enemy for all of the following reasons except **C: Its firepower was far superior to US firepower**
10. The My Lai Massacre of 1968 helped turn American public opinion against: **D: The US Military**
11. Which Constitutional amendment lowered the US voting age from twenty-one to eighteen? **D: The Twenty-Sixth Amendment**
12. South Vietnam finally fell to the North Vietnamese in **C: 1975**
13. What is napalm? **C: A flammable gasoline-based gel**
14. The US bombing campaign of North Vietnam was called: **A: Operation Rolling Thunder**
15. The disparity between nightly TV reports and government reports about progress concerning the war helped lead to a **C: Credibility Gap**

LBJ Political Cartoon



V-90 David Levine, 1966.