

Focusing your thoughts

On the heels of the passage of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, you have been asked by President Johnson to recommend a policy for the U.S. to adopt in Vietnam. Given what you now know about the reasons for U.S. involvement in Vietnam to date, what involvement should the U.S. have moving forward?

Please keep in mind the issues raised in our “Where Do You Stand?” discussion. These issues can and should be considered in the context of the Vietnam War.

Issues to consider:

Is U.S. national security diminished whenever a country falls under communist control?

Whose job is it to stop communism from spreading?

What is/should be the role of the U.S. in the world?

Does the U.S. have an obligation to honor its commitments?

Does the U.S. have a moral obligation to assist nations who are seeking independence?

Will the U.S.’ ability to influence other nations be greatly reduced if we don’t live up to all of our commitments?

Is it possible for U.S. military power, determination and wealth to solve conflicts?

Should the U.S. use its power to see that all nations enjoy the same freedoms and political rights that Americans do?

Given these issues, please decide which course of action the U.S. should pursue moving forward. You may borrow from one of the four options below, combine ideas from two or three of the options, or suggest a new approach altogether. There is no right or wrong answer. Try to be logical and persuasive.

Rank the options below from 1-4.

_____ 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!

Option 1: Americanize the War and Fight to Win!

It is vital to U.S. national security that South Vietnam be free, independent and non-communist. The U.S. must take whatever steps are necessary to defend South Vietnam against communist aggression and to demonstrate that the communists cannot succeed in using war to enslave more people. We have no choice: we must stop the wave of communist aggression in Southeast Asia now! The U.S. must take over the war and spend whatever amount is necessary financially and militarily to win the war. U.S. forces should not be asked to fight a war with one hand tied behind their backs. We should accept nothing short of military victory. We must fight to win.

Option 2: Escalate Slowly and Control the Risks

The honor, determination, and credibility of the U.S. are at stake in South Vietnam. What ally could rely on American promises in the future if we allow South Vietnam to fall to communist control? How would it look to our potential enemies if we fail to follow through with our promise to stand up to North Vietnam? We must do something to convince the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong that will not be allowed to take control of South Vietnam. The most effective approach is to slowly and steadily apply pressure to North Vietnam by gradually increasing our bombing. This would help us to avoid provoking more involvement by the Soviet Union and China, and would not alarm the American people about a hasty, and hopefully unnecessary military buildup. We must be thoughtful and control the pace of U.S. involvement.

Option 3: Limit Our Involvement and Negotiate a Withdrawal

The potential risks of increasing U.S. military involvement in Vietnam clearly outweigh any possible benefits of our presence. By this point, the military situation has deteriorated to the point that even massive American troop reinforcements cannot guarantee a victory. The current govt. in South Vietnam is an unstable military dictatorship that has little support on the ground. 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 eventually withdraw. U.S. prestige and credibility would be seriously hurt if we lose. Therefore, no additional American forces beyond those that we have already promised or who are on the ground in Vietnam currently should be sent to Vietnam. Also, the bombing campaign against North Vietnam should be reduced, as should the scale of U.S. military operations in the south. We should work towards negotiating a settlement that would allow the U.S. to gradually reduce our presence in South Vietnam. We must cut our losses, but not at the expense of damaging American honor and credibility.

Option 4: Unilateral Withdrawal – Pull Out Now!

The United States' involvement in the Vietnamese civil war is not in keeping with American values and interests. We have no right to impose our values or government on the people of Vietnam. We have no strategic or military 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 who have completely different traditions and values, and to use our overwhelming military strength to impose our solution on them, is unjustified, arrogant, and immoral. The U.S. cannot preserve its democratic values at home when it is betraying them abroad. The U.S. govt should immediately halt the deployment of additional American troops to Vietnam, and should begin the withdrawal of the forces currently there. 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.