

Primary Sources on Vietnam Involvement

Follow these steps to analyze the quotations that follow:

- Create a T-chart in your notebook with the headings “Hawks” and “Doves.”
- With your group, carefully read each excerpt to determine whether the speaker supports (“Hawk”) or does not support (“Dove”) increased U.S. military involvement in Vietnam.
- On the appropriate side of your T-chart, write the number of the excerpt and a short summary in your own words of the argument(s) the speaker uses to support his position.

Your group will use this information to help form a recommendation on this question: *Should the president significantly increase U.S. military involvement in Vietnam?*

Excerpt 1

While the military and political costs of a big US investment in helping [South Vietnam] may be high, I cannot think of a better place for our forces to be employed to give so much future national security benefits to the United States. Thus my conclusion is that we . . . must go all out on all three tracks: counterinsurgency, covert countermeasures, and military pressures by US forces.

—CIA Deputy Director Ray Cline, September 8, 1964

Excerpt 2

The critical moves are, I believe, these: the introduction of . . . ground forces in South Viet Nam and . . . the introduction into the Pacific Theater of massive forces to deal with any escalatory response . . . They [North Vietnamese and supporters] will not actually accept a setback until they are absolutely sure that we really mean it. They will be as searching in this manner as [Soviet leader] Khrushchev was before he abandoned the effort to break our hold on Berlin . . . The odds are pretty good, in my view, that, if we do these things in this way, the war will either promptly stop or we will see the . . . fragmentation of the Communist movement in South Viet Nam . . . At this stage of history we are the greatest power in the world—if we behave like it.

—State Department Official Walter Rostow, November 23, 1964

Excerpt 3

I would like to share with you my views on the political consequences [to the United States] of certain courses of action that have been proposed in regard to U.S. policy in Southeast Asia . . . If we were to get involved in a large-scale land war—and a consequent increase in defense expenditures; it would tend to shift the Administration’s emphasis from its Great Society oriented programs to further military outlays . . . From a political viewpoint, the American people find it hard to understand why we risk World War III by enlarging [this] war . . . If . . . we find ourselves . . . embroiled deeper in fighting with Vietnam over the next few months, political opposition will steadily mount . . . with direct spill-over effects politically for all the Democratic . . . programs to which we are committed.

—Vice President Humphrey to President Johnson, February 17, 1965

Excerpt 4

The President questioned me concerning consequences of our [possible] withdrawal from Vietnam and I said that it would pave the way toward Communist takeover of all of Southeast Asia.

—CIA Director John McCone, February 3, 1965

Excerpt 5

Why we have not withdrawn from Vietnam is, by all odds, one reason: (1) To preserve our reputation as a guarantor [strong ally], and thus to preserve our effectiveness in the rest of the world . . . At each decision point we have gambled; at each point, to avoid the damage to our effectiveness of defaulting on our commitment, we have upped the ante . . . It is important that we behave so as to protect our reputation.

—Assistant Secretary of Defense John McNaughton, March 24, 1965

Excerpt 6

I think what we are doing in starting on a track which involves ground force operations . . . [will mean] an ever-increasing commitment of U.S. personnel without materially improving the chances of victory . . . In effect, we will find ourselves mired down in combat in the jungle in a military effort that we cannot win, and from which we will have extreme difficulty in extracting ourselves.

—CIA Director John McCone, April 2, 1965

Excerpt 7

Should we limit our liabilities in South Viet-Nam and try to find a way out with minimal long-term costs? The alternative . . . 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 [with China or the Soviet Union] at the end of the road.

—Undersecretary of State George Ball, June 30, 1965

Excerpt 8

We must not create an impression that we have decided to replace the South Vietnamese and win a ground war in Vietnam . . . A failure to engage in an all-out war will not lower our international prestige. This is not the last inning in the struggle against communism. We must pick those spots where the stakes are highest for us and we have the greatest ability to prevail . . . [I] don't believe we can win in South Vietnam. If we send in one hundred thousand more [troops], the North Vietnamese will meet us. If the North Vietnamese run out of men, the Chinese will send in volunteers . . . If we lose fifty thousand men it will ruin us. Five years, billions of dollars, fifty thousand men, it is not for us.

—Unofficial presidential adviser Clark Clifford, July 25, 1965