

## The Decision to Escalate in Vietnam



*"From This Nettle, Danger, We Pluck This Flower Safely," by Bill Mauldin, used with permission of the Bill Mauldin Family (Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division)*

# The Decision to Escalate in Vietnam

BY RON NASH

## UNIT OVERVIEW

This unit is one of the Gilder Lehrman Institute's Teaching Literacy through History resources, designed to align to the Common Core State Standards. The lessons can also be modified to conform to the C3 Framework. These units were developed to enable students to understand, summarize, and evaluate original documents of historical significance. Students will practice the skills that will help them analyze, assess, and develop knowledgeable and well-reasoned viewpoints on these source materials.

In these lessons students will analyze different sets of documents related to US escalation in Vietnam in 1965. Students will analyze political cartoons from 1965 and examine representative documents that highlight the complexity of the decision to “Americanize” the war. Finally, the students will demonstrate what they have learned through their analysis of the various statements on war escalation by writing and then staging a mock news conference. The writing of the news conference script as well as the actual presentation to the class will serve to reinforce the major issues raised in the cartoons, memoranda, press conference, and book excerpts that the students have studied over the past two lessons.

## OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to

- Analyze primary source documents using close-reading strategies
- Interpret, analyze, and demonstrate understanding of political cartoons
- Draw logical inferences and summarize the essential message of a written document
- Compose summaries of the major points in a document
- Compare and contrast the proposals made by different writers

## ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

Students will consider both the overarching Essential Questions here and lesson-specific Essential Questions. Integrate these questions into the unit as appropriate for your students and the time available.

- What calculations led US leaders to intervene in Vietnam and defend their positions there despite private doubts and public dissent?
- Was escalation chosen as a matter of policy in order to contain communism abroad?
- Was escalation used as a way to test American capacity in nation-building, of expanding democracy overseas?
- Did escalation flow from concerns about prestige and credibility, both national and political?
- Were there genuine alternatives to the interventionist path that was chosen for Vietnam?
- Why did President Johnson decide to go to war in 1965?

**NUMBER OF CLASS PERIODS:** 3–4

**GRADE LEVEL:** 8–12

### **COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS**

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.6: Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on [grade-level] topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-W.11-12.1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

## LESSON 1

### OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students will examine political cartoons, write a statement about each one, and develop an opinion based on them. In addition, they will read both a secondary source and several primary sources related to the American decision to escalate in Vietnam in 1965. They will close read each document and answer critical thinking questions.

### OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to

- Demonstrate understanding of both literal and inferential aspects of text-based evidence
- Summarize the essential message of a written piece
- Draw conclusions based on direct evidence found in the text

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In November 1961 the number of US servicemen in Vietnam stood at 948 and in January 1962 the number had increased to 2,646. By June 30, 5,579 Americans were deployed to Saigon. At the end of 1962 the number rose to 11,300. By the time of President John F. Kennedy's assassination in 1963, 16,000 US military personnel were in Vietnam. The mission continued to be described as "advisory" in nature.

The period between Kennedy's assassination in November 1963 and Lyndon B. Johnson's election in November 1964 was one of political chaos in Saigon and doubt in Washington. Several policies were initiated by the US government, including limited bombing of North Vietnam, a reiteration of the Truman-Eisenhower-Kennedy pledge to seek an independent and non-communist South Vietnam, and covert operations along the North Vietnam coast.

The latter program resulted in an incident in August 1964 that provided Johnson with an awesome grant of power through the Southeast Asia Resolution (also referred to as the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution).

From the summer of 1964 and into early 1965, the level of US activity in Vietnam did not increase significantly. This did not prevent Johnson and his advisors from wrestling with several options that were proposed but not acted upon.

### MATERIALS

- **Cartoons**

Cartoons by Herblock, with permission from the Herb Block Foundation

Cartoon 1: "Another Government Goes Down," *Washington Post*, January 28, 1965, courtesy the Herb Block Foundation

Cartoon 2: "The Falling Domino Example," February 23, 1965, courtesy the Herb Block Foundation

Cartoon 3: "Onward," June 15, 1965, courtesy the Herb Block Foundation

Cartoon 4: "Any Place to Land Down There?" April 4, 1965, courtesy the Herb Block Foundation

### Cartoons by Tom Engelhardt, with permission from the Artist

Cartoon 5: “You realize, of course, that this is strictly your war” by Tom Engelhardt, printed in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, March 21, 1965, St. Louis Post-Dispatch Editorial Cartoon Collection (71), State Historical Society of Missouri, [digital.shsmo.org](http://digital.shsmo.org)

Cartoon 6: “Falling is Easy – Hitting the bottom is something else again,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, June 13, 1965, St. Louis Post-Dispatch Editorial Cartoon Collection (71), State Historical Society of Missouri, [digital.shsmo.org](http://digital.shsmo.org)

Cartoon 7: “Deeper and Deeper,” June 30, 1965, St. Louis Post-Dispatch Editorial Cartoon Collection (71), State Historical Society of Missouri Digital Collections, [digital.shsmo.org](http://digital.shsmo.org)

Cartoon 8: “Whoa, Boy, Whoa! What’s Got into Ya, Critter?” July 8, 1965, St. Louis Post-Dispatch Editorial Cartoon Collection (71), State Historical Society of Missouri Digital Collections, [digital.shsmo.org](http://digital.shsmo.org)

### Cartoons by Bill Mauldin, used with the permission of the Bill Mauldin Family

Cartoon 9: “From This Nettle, Danger, We Pluck This Flower Safely,” Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures>

Cartoon 10: “Up Escalators,” Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures>

### Other Artists

Cartoon 11: “Whittling Him Down” by Gib Crockett, *Washington Star*, April 27, 1965, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures>

Cartoon 12: “Stick Em Up,” by Ed Valtman, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, <https://www.loc.gov>

- **Documents**

“Introduction to the Decision to Escalate in Vietnam” excerpted from David Coleman and Marc Selverstone, “Lyndon B. Johnson and the Vietnam War,” *Presidential Recordings Digital Edition*, The Miller Center, University of Virginia, with permission from the University of Virginia Press, <http://prde.upress.virginia.edu/content/Vietnam>

Excerpts from “The Fork in the Road” Memo from Robert McNamara and McGeorge Bundy to President Lyndon B. Johnson, January 27, 1965, LBJ Presidential Library, National Security File, Memos to the President, McGeorge Bundy, Volume 8, Box 2, <http://lbjlibrary.tumblr.com>

Excerpts from *In the Jaws of History* by Bui Diem (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), pp. 131–134, with permission from the author and Indiana University Press

- **Activity Sheet**

Critical Thinking Questions

- **Audio**

“Send the Marines” by Tom Lehrer with permission from Tom Lehrer, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1LhKL2wbhF4>

## PROCEDURE

1. As a homework assignment or in-class activity before the lesson, have the students analyze the twelve political cartoons (or a selection of them) related to the political and military situation in Southeast Asia in 1964–1965. You may choose to have the students work in groups. Students should write a one- or two-sentence statement for each cartoon and then develop a preliminary thesis on how US citizens perceived the situation in South Vietnam. The thesis should specifically refer to details from the cartoons. Have individual students share their analysis as you introduce the lesson. The cartoons can be referenced later in the news conference portion of the unit.
2. Introduce the following Essential Questions:
  - a. Why did the United States opt for a large-scale war in Vietnam?
  - b. Could the war have been averted?
  - c. If so, how?
3. Hand out “Introduction to the Decision to Escalate in Vietnam.” “Share read” the text with the class by having the students follow along silently while you read aloud, modeling prosody, inflection, and punctuation. Ask the class to join in with the reading after a few sentences while you continue to read aloud. This technique will support struggling readers and English language learners (ELL).
4. Hand out the McNamara and Bundy “Fork in the Road” memo, January 27, 1965, and share read this text with the class.
5. Hand out the “Critical Thinking Questions” activity sheet. Answer Critical-Thinking Question #1 as a whole-group activity. Make sure that the students use and cite evidence from the text to answer the question.
6. Students will now answer the rest of the questions. Divide the students into critical-thinking groups to answer the questions if they are not ready to work independently.
7. Discuss different interpretations developed by the students or student groups.
8. For homework, have the students read and complete the Critical Thinking Questions for the reading from *In the Jaws of History* by Bui Diem.
9. As the students prepare to leave class, play Tom Lehrer’s “Send in the Marines” without comment.

## ASSESSMENT

The strategy for this lesson will involve a formative assessment ensuring at this juncture that students have been able to determine key arguments regarding escalation and are able to gather additional facts that demonstrate the complexity of the decision making process.

## LESSON 2

## OVERVIEW

In this lesson the students will continue to read and assess primary sources regarding the decision to escalate in Vietnam in 1965.

## OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to

- Identify an author’s major claims
- Support claims using textual evidence
- Identify the textual structure of a written piece
- Summarize the essential message of a written piece
- Write insightful questions focused on a specific topic
- Draw conclusions based on direct evidence found in the text

## MATERIALS

- **Audio**

Audio clip of “Send the Marines” by Tom Lehrer, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1LhKL2wbhF4>

- **Activity Sheet**

Critical Thinking Questions activity sheet

- **Documents**

Excerpts from “William Bundy Discusses Vietnam Situation, February 7, 1965,” Office of the Department of State, *Department of State Bulletin*, March 1, 1965 (Washington DC: Office of Media Services, Bureau of Public Affairs, 1965), 292.

Memo from George Ball to Dean Rusk, Robert McNamara, McGeorge Bundy, William Bundy, John McNaughton, and Leonard Unger, Part II, June 29, 1965, *The Pentagon Papers*, vol. 4, Gravel Edition (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), pp. 609–610.

Excerpt from “Recommendations of Additional Deployments to Vietnam,” Memorandum from Robert McNamara to President Johnson, July 20, 1965, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968*, vol. 3: Vietnam, June–December 1965, Historical Documents, Office of the Historian, Department of State, <https://history.state.gov>.

Excerpts from Lyndon B. Johnson, “Why We Are in Vietnam” Press Conference, July 28, 1965, The Miller Center, <http://millercenter.org>.

## PROCEDURE

1. Briefly review the results from the previous day. Replay the Lehrer song, but this time be prepared to discuss the satirical message of the song. Students will return to their critical-thinking groups.
2. Hand out “William Bundy Discusses Vietnam Situation” and share read with the class as described in Lesson 1.
3. The student groups will complete the Critical Thinking Questions activity sheet. Make sure they use and cite evidence from the text to answer the questions.
4. Discuss different interpretations developed by the students or student groups.
5. Repeat the process with the “Memo from George Ball to Dean Rusk, Robert McNamara, McGeorge Bundy, William Bundy, John McNaughton, and Leonard Unger.”
6. After the class has had a chance to discuss different interpretations developed by the students or student groups, have the students analyze “Recommendations of Additional Deployments to Vietnam.”
7. For homework or in class, have the students independently analyze President Johnson’s “Why We Are in Vietnam.”



## LESSON 3

### OVERVIEW

In this lesson the students will divide into groups to develop a news conference simulation based on the primary sources they read and assessed in the previous two lessons and their understanding of American involvement in Vietnam. The class will close with a discussion of the Essential Questions and how their response to it has changed based on their engagement with the primary sources. Finally, they may write a brief essay examining the reasons for and reasons against American escalation using evidence from the primary sources.

### OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to

- Write insightful questions focused on a specific topic
- Draw conclusions based on direct evidence found in texts
- Synthesize multiple sources of information in order to arrive at a logical conclusion that is supported by textual evidence
- Demonstrate an effective oral presentation

### MATERIALS

- “The Fork in the Road” Memo from Robert McNamara and McGeorge Bundy to President Lyndon B. Johnson, January 27, 1965
- “William Bundy Discusses Vietnam Situation,” February 7, 1965
- Bui Diem, *In the Jaws of History*
- Memo from George Ball to Dean Rusk, Robert McNamara, McGeorge Bundy, William Bundy, John McNaughton, and Leonard Unger, June 29, 1965 (Excerpts)
- “Recommendations of Additional Deployments to Vietnam,” Memorandum from Robert McNamara to President Johnson, July 20, 1965 (Excerpts)
- Lyndon B. Johnson, “Why We Are in Vietnam” Press Conference, July 28, 1965 (Excerpts)
- The News Conference organizer (print enough for one question per reporter)

### PROCEDURE

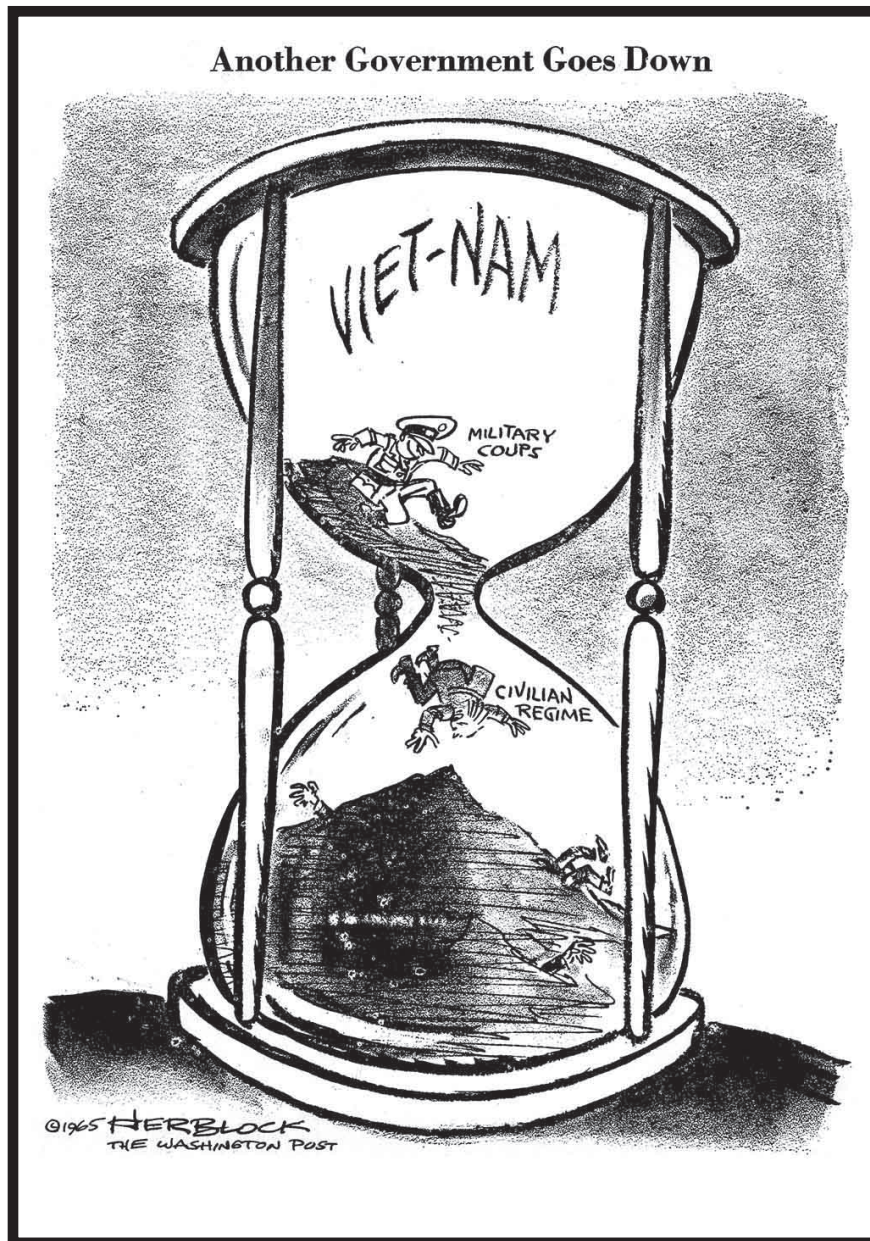
1. Divide the class into groups of 3 to 5 students; each group is assigned or chooses one of the six Vietnam decision-making statements. It is best if all texts are used before doubling up on any of them.
2. Students select who will portray the speaker and the rest of the group members will play reporters at the news conference.
3. Distribute the News Conference organizer. The students will build both the questions and the answers to those questions using this activity sheet. The students should be careful to cite evidence from the text for the answers given by the speaker. The questions should highlight the major issues brought forth in the document. Each student will write their own complete copy of the questions and answers, not just their own question.

4. Presentation:
  - o The speaker delivers the speech or reads the memo.
  - o The “reporters” raise their hands, and the speaker selects them to ask their questions. If possible, have the students watch a video of an actual press conference, such as a presidential news conference, prior to this activity.
  - o This continues until all of the questions have been asked, one per reporter; if time permits, the students could script follow-up questions.
5. Repeat the process with all of the groups. This may mean going into another class period to allow time for all of the presentations, as well as time to debrief the experience.
6. Have the class debrief the presentations. Which were the most effective? What made them effective? How could the presentations have been improved? Focus on good oral presentation skills as well as which questions elicited the most meaningful answers.
7. Students should now address the Essential Questions asked as a prelude to Lesson 1. Has their opinion changed due to their analysis of these documents?

## ASSESSMENT

Essay Extension: The students can compare and contrast the different texts and develop an overview of the complexity surrounding the decision to escalate the Vietnam War. This can then be used to develop an essay about arguments to increase US presence in 1965. The students must use evidence from the lesson plan texts and cite that evidence.

Cartoon 1



A 1965 Herblock Cartoon © The Herb Block Foundation

Cartoon 2



A 1965 Herblock Cartoon © The Herb Block Foundation

Cartoon 3



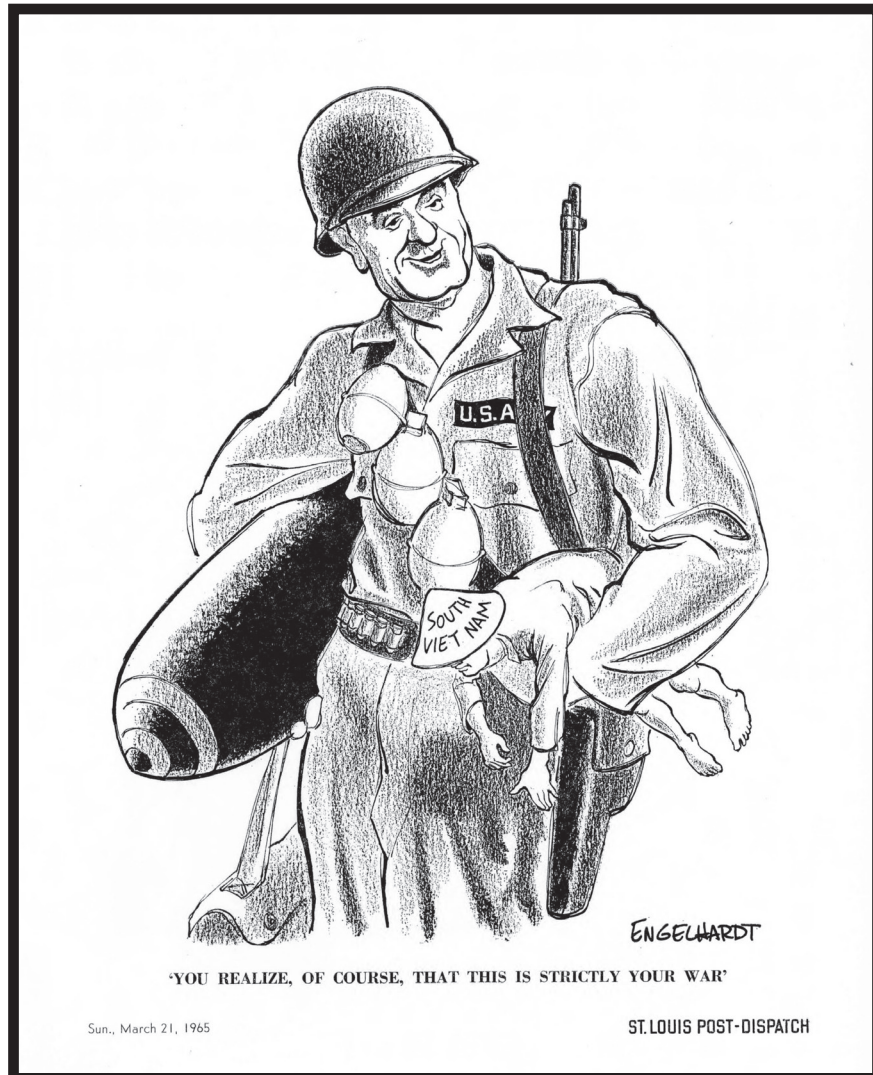
A 1965 Herblock Cartoon © The Herb Block Foundation

Cartoon 4



A 1965 Herblock Cartoon © The Herb Block Foundation

## Cartoon 5



© 1965 Engelhardt in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, March 21, 1965, reprinted with permission from the Artist, St. Louis Post-Dispatch Editorial Cartoon Collection (71), State Historical Society of Missouri

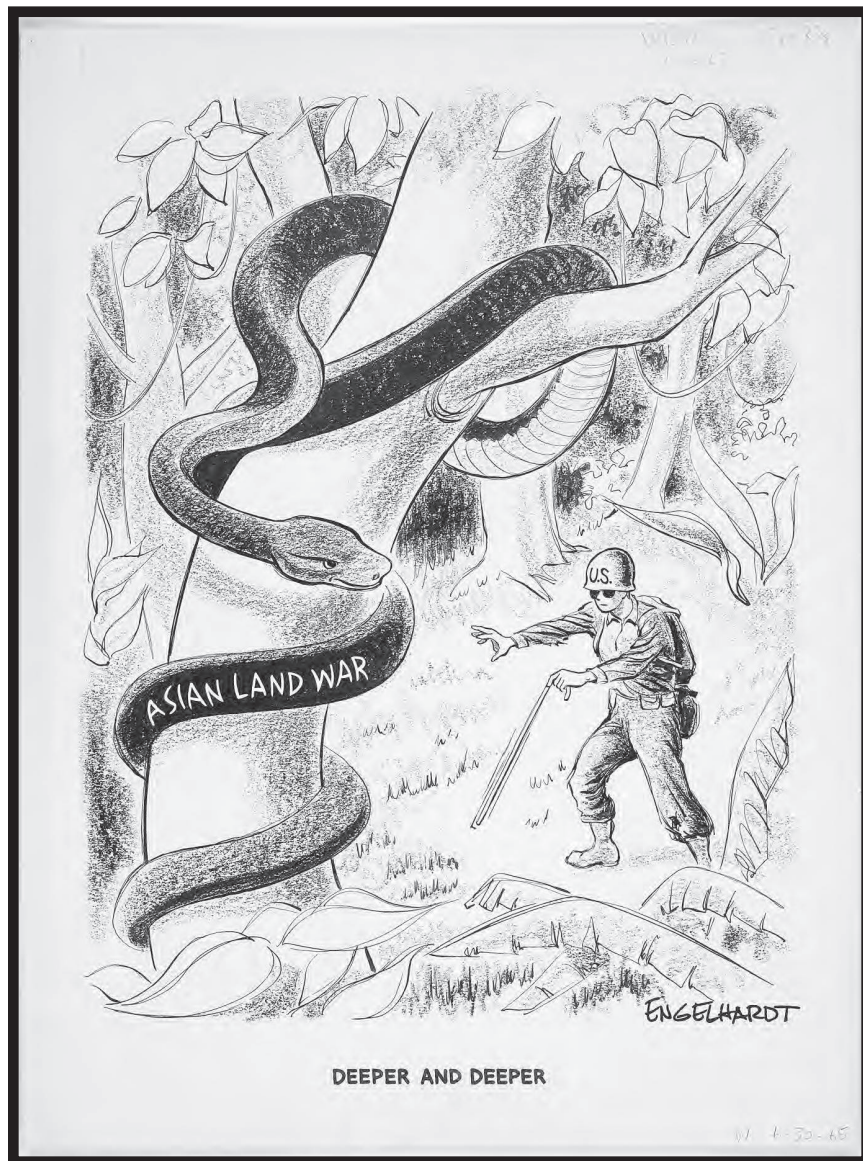
## Cartoon 6



© 1965 Engelhardt in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, June 13, 1965, reprinted with permission from the Artist, St. Louis Post-Dispatch Editorial Cartoon Collection (71), State Historical Society of Missouri

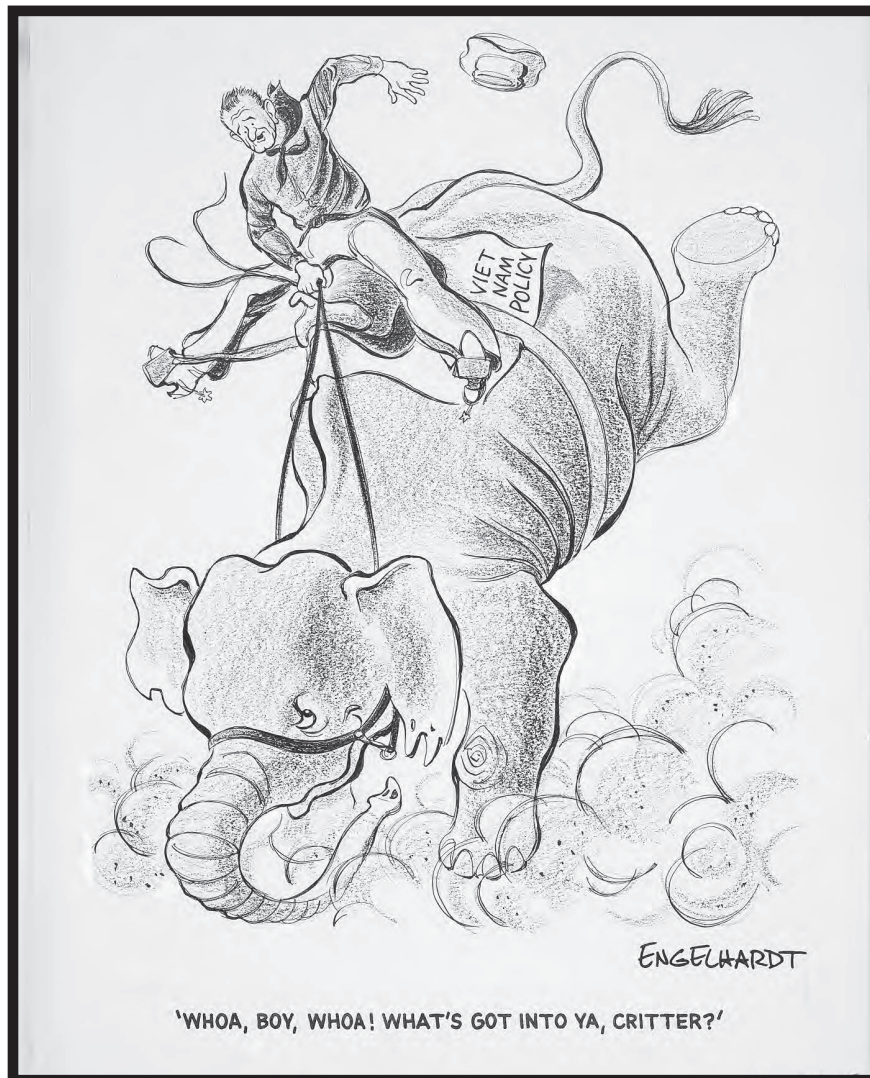


## Cartoon 7



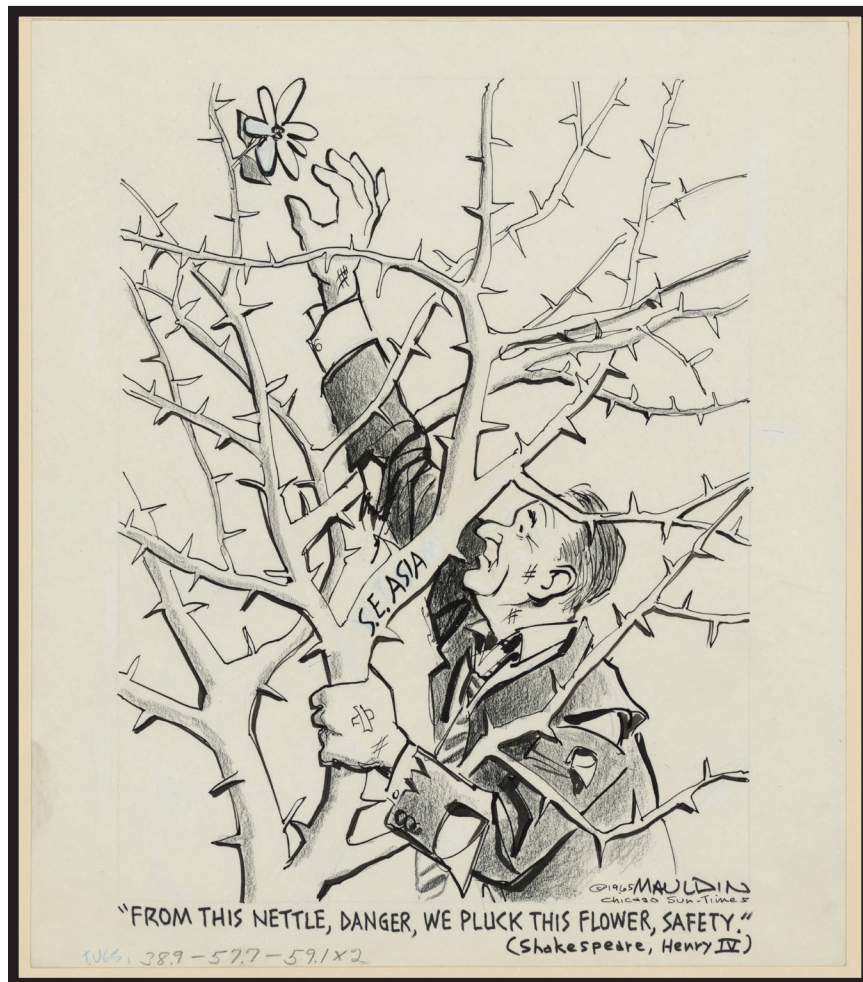
© 1965 Engelhardt, reprinted with permission from the Artist, St. Louis Post-Dispatch Editorial Cartoon Collection (71), State Historical Society of Missouri

## Cartoon 8



© 1965 Engelhardt, reprinted with permission from the Artist, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* Editorial Cartoon Collection (71), State Historical Society of Missouri

## Cartoon 9



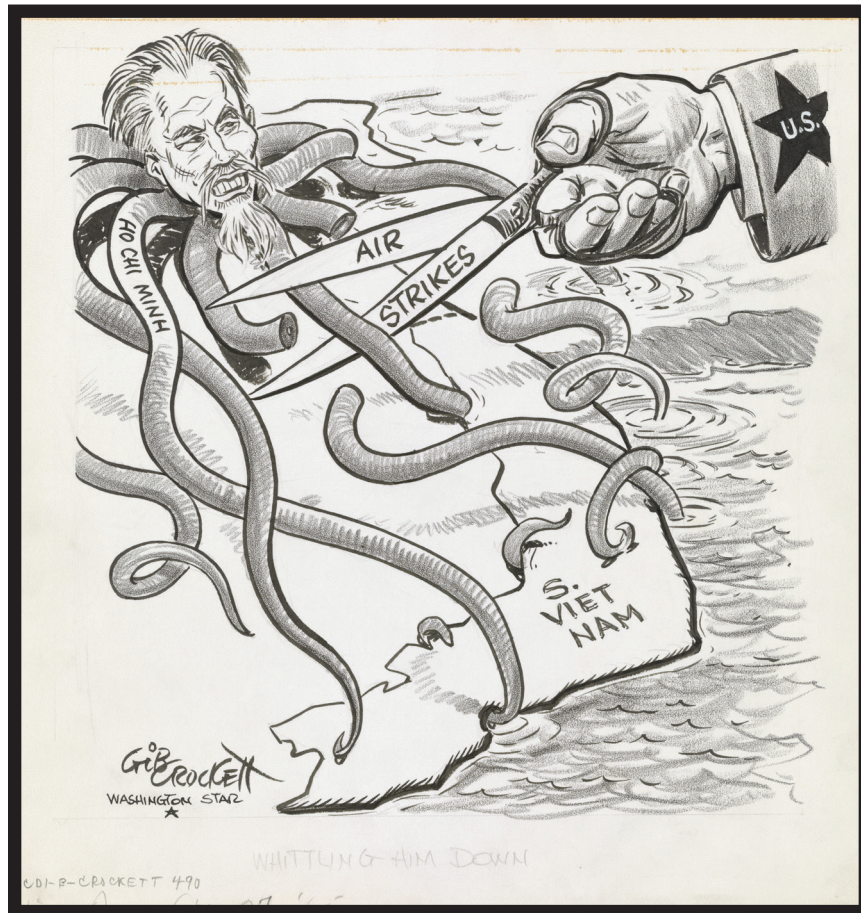
© By Bill Mauldin (1965). Used with permission of the Bill Mauldin Family. (Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division)

## Cartoon 10



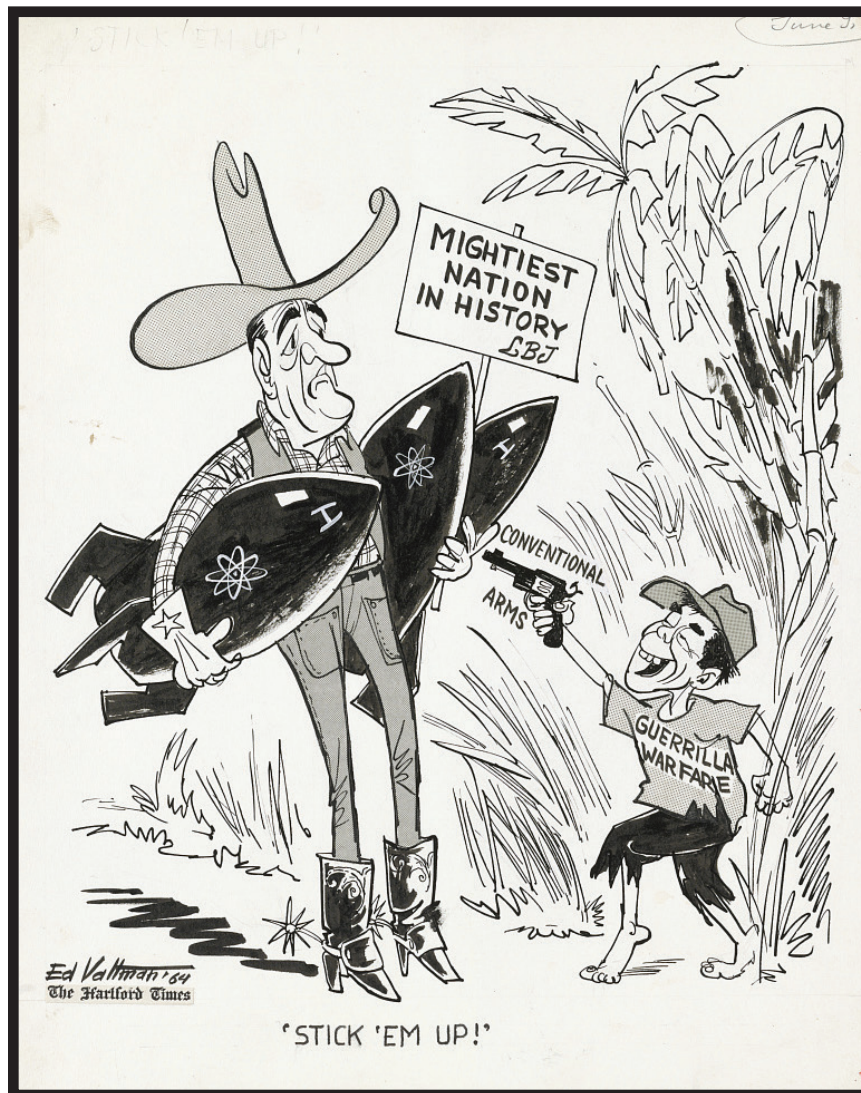
© By Bill Mauldin (1965). Used with permission of the Bill Mauldin Family.  
(Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division)

Cartoon 11



Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

Cartoon 12



Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

## Introduction to the Decision to Escalate in Vietnam

From David Coleman and Marc Selverstone, “Lyndon B. Johnson and the Vietnam War,” *Presidential Recordings Digital Edition*, The Miller Center, University of Virginia, <http://prde.upress.virginia.edu/content/Vietnam>.

[Lyndon B.] Johnson’s election as president in his own right allowed the administration to move forward in crafting a more vigorous policy toward the Communist challenge in South Vietnam. Just days before the vote, the U.S. air base at Bien Hoa was attacked by Communist guerrillas, killing four Americans, wounding scores of others, and destroying more than twenty-five aircraft. Johnson opted not to respond militarily just hours before Americans would go to the polls. But on 3 November—Election Day—he created an interagency task force, chaired by William P. Bundy, brother of McGeorge Bundy and chief of the State Department’s Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, to review Vietnam policy. The working group settled on three potential policy strands: persisting with the current approach, escalating the war and striking at North Vietnam, or pursuing a strategy of graduated response. Following weeks of intensive discussion, Johnson endorsed the third option—Option C in the administration’s parlance—allowing the task force to flesh out its implementation. The plan envisioned a series of measures, of gradually increasing military intensity that American forces would apply to bolster morale in Saigon, attack the Vietcong in South Vietnam, and pressure Hanoi into ending its aid of the Communist insurgency. The first phase began on 14 December with Operation Barrel Roll—the bombing of supply lines in Laos.

The emergence of the William Bundy task force highlights a key dimension of the administration’s policymaking process during this period. Broad planning for the war often took place on an interagency basis and frequently at levels removed from those of the administration’s most senior officials. The presence of several policy options, however, did not translate into freewheeling discussions with the President over the relative merits of numerous strategies. Johnson abhorred the Kennedy practice of debating such questions in open session, preferring a consensus engineered prior to his meetings with top aides. Two of those senior officials, Secretary of Defense McNamara and Secretary of State Rusk, would prove increasingly important to Johnson over the course of the war, with McNamara playing the lead role in the escalatory phase of the conflict. Nevertheless, the State Department’s influence in Vietnam planning was on the rise, as it had been since early 1963. William Bundy’s role atop the Vietnam interagency machinery is indicative of that development—a pattern that continued for the remainder of the Johnson presidency as Rusk’s star rose and McNamara’s faded within Johnson’s universe of favored advisers.

In fact, it was those advisers who would play an increasingly important role in planning for Vietnam, relegating the interagency approach—which never went away—to a level of secondary importance within the policymaking process. In time, LBJ would make his key decisions in the presence and on the advice of very few advisers; a practice that Johnson hoped would protect him from the leaks he so greatly feared would undermine his carefully crafted strategy. By spring of 1965, Johnson was holding impromptu lunch meetings with only a handful of senior officials on Tuesdays where they hashed out strategy. Those “Tuesday Lunches” would involve a changing array of attendees over the course of the next two years and, by 1967, would become an integral though unofficial part of the policymaking machinery.

But the procedural issues of these months, as important as they were and would become, were constantly being overwhelmed by the more pressing concerns of progress in the counterinsurgency. No amount of administrative tinkering could mask the continuing and worsening problems of political instability in Saigon and Communist success in the field. The deterioration of the South Vietnamese position, therefore, led Johnson to consider even more decisive action.

## Excerpts from “The Fork, in the Road” Memo by Robert McNamara and McGeorge Bundy to President Lyndon B. Johnson, January 27, 1965

. . . Both of us are now pretty well convinced that our current policy can lead only to disastrous defeat. What we are doing now, essentially, is to wait and hope for a stable government. Our December directives make it very plain that wider action against the Communists will not take place unless we can get such a government. In the last six weeks that effort has been unsuccessful, and Bob and I are persuaded that there is no real hope of success in this area unless and until our own policy and priorities change.

3. The underlying difficulties in Saigon arise from the spreading conviction there that the future is without hope for anti-Communists. More and more the good men are covering their flanks and avoiding executive responsibility for firm anti-Communist policy. Our best friends have been somewhat discouraged by our own inactivity in the face of major attacks on our own installations. The Vietnamese know just as well as we do that the Viet Cong are gaining in the countryside. Meanwhile, they see the enormous power of the United States withheld, and they get little sense of firm and active U. S. policy. They feel that we are unwilling to take serious risks. In one sense, all of this is outrageous, in the light of all that we have done and all that we are ready to do if they will only pull up their socks. But it is a fact –or at least so McNamara and I now think. . . .

5. Bob and I believe that the worst course of action is to continue in this essentially passive role which can only lead to eventual defeat and an invitation to get out in humiliating circumstances.

6. We see two alternatives. The first is to use our military power in the Far East and to force a change of Communist policy. The second is to deploy all our resources along a track of negotiation, aimed at salvaging what little can be preserved with no major addition to our present military risks. Bob and I tend to favor the first course, but we believe that both should be carefully studied and that alternative programs should be argued out before you.

7. Both of us understand the very grave questions presented by any decision of this sort. We both recognize that the ultimate responsibility is not ours. Both of us have fully supported your unwillingness, in earlier months, to move out of the middle course. We both agree that every effort should still be made to improve our operations on the ground and to prop up the authorities in South Vietnam as best we can. But we are both convinced that none of this is enough, and that the time has come for harder choices.

8. You should know that Dean Rusk does not agree with us. He does not quarrel with our assertion that things are going very badly and that the situation is unraveling. He does not assert that this deterioration can be stopped. What he does say is that the consequences of both escalation and withdrawal are so bad that we must simply find a way of making our present policy work. This would be good if it was possible. Bob and I do not think it is....

Source: LBJ Presidential Library, National Security File, Memos to the President, McGeorge Bundy, Volume 8, Box 2, <http://lbjlibrary.tumblr.com/post/29827407306/january-27-1965-faced-with-a-deteriorating>.



## Excerpts from *In the Jaws of History* by Bui Diem

It was against this background that, in early March of 1965, I expected some sort of request from the Americans to bring combat troops into Vietnam. Such a request would come as a logical outgrowth of the air war that had started up. The primary U.S. air base was at Danang . . . and it seemed probable that General William Westmoreland would want the base's security to be handled by American units. . . . I merely thought that at some point we would be fielding this idea during one of the weekly meetings. . . .

Events happened otherwise. Early on the morning of March 8 I received a phone call from Dr. Quat [the prime minister], asking me in a strained voice to come to his house immediately, something urgent had come up. When I arrived, I found Melvin Manfull already there. The American diplomat looked all business, but Quat was obviously nervous. Without asking me to sit down, Quat said that marines were at that moment coming ashore at Danang to take up defensive positions around the base. Manfull and I were to write a joint communiqué announcing the landing. "Be as brief as possible," Quat told me. "Just describe the facts and affirm our concurrence." . . . The abruptness of the thing and the lack of preparation for it were upsetting, to say the least. . . . As soon as we were away from Manfull, I said, "Is there something going on on the military front we don't know about? Something that's making them do this so suddenly?" . . .

Within half an hour, Manfull and I had prepared a text announcing the arrival of two battalions of U.S. marines, "with the concurrence of the Vietnamese government." But as soon as the American diplomat left, I got back to the point with Quat. He told me that several days earlier he and Ambassador Taylor had had an "exchange of ideas" about the need to reinforce South Vietnam's defenses. As part of this exchange, which Quat had considered no more than an initial, general discussion, Taylor had broached the subject of bringing in the marines. Quat had then told Taylor he was reluctant to see an "Americanization" of the war. Although he had not requested American troops, Quat told me, neither had he explicitly opposed the idea. For his part, Taylor, as Quat put it, "had shared many of my views on the matter."

When I asked Dr. Quat why we faced this sudden development, he answered, "I think Taylor himself was taken by surprise by a quick decision from Washington. This morning he tried to present it to me as a strictly limited military move that had to be taken because conditions were bad around the base."

The same misleading impression of joint consultation given in the communiqué was conveyed more vividly the following day in Saigon's newspapers, where front-page pictures showed battle-ready marines being greeted on Danang's beaches by lovely Vietnamese girls dressed in native *ao dai* dresses and carrying leis. It seemed like a well-prepared official welcome. Few who saw the pictures knew the facts behind the open arms and smiling faces. . . .

The record shows that Maxwell Taylor voiced his deep reservations about the introduction of American troops at every step in the process. But he was overruled in Washington and in the end had no choice but to go along. Taylor then turned around and asked Dr. Quat to concur in a decision that was already being implemented. It was a hasty and furtive procedure, the destructive consequences of which would become evident in due course.

Source: Bui Diem, *In the Jaws of History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), pp. 131–134.

**CRITICAL THINKING**
**ANALYZING THE TEXT**

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

PERIOD \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

**Critical Thinking Question 1**

What is the major claim being made by the author of this piece?

What textual evidence supports the author's claim?

Does the claim that is being presented appear to be fact based or opinion based?

**Critical Thinking Question 2**

Is this text based on fact or opinion?

Identify phrases that demonstrate the fact- or opinion-based nature of the text:

How does the use of fact or opinion make the text more or less effective?

**Critical Thinking Question 3**

What are the best (most convincing or most thought-provoking) parts of the piece?

Cite textual evidence to support your opinion.

**Critical-Thinking Question 4**

Summarize, in your own words, the overall message of this piece:

What evidence in the text supports your summary?

Excerpt from “William Bundy Discusses Vietnam Situation, February 7, 1965,”  
*Department of State Bulletin*, March 1, 1965

Why are we there? What is our national interest? I think it was pretty well stated by Congress last August when it passed a resolution, following the Gulf of Tonkin affair, in which it stated that the United States “regards as vital to its national interest and to world peace the maintenance of international peace and security in southeast Asia.” And that’s the basic reason right there—peace in the area, letting the nations of the area develop as they see fit and free from Communist external infiltration, subversion, and control.

Secondly, it’s obvious on the map that if South Viet-Nam were to fall under Communist control it would become very much more difficult—I’m not using what’s sometimes called “the domino theory,” that anything happens automatically or quickly—but it would become very much more difficult to maintain the independence and freedom of Thailand, Cambodia, of Malaysia, and so on. And the confidence of other nations in the whole perimeter of Southeast Asia would necessarily be affected, and the Communists would think they had a winning game going for them. So that’s a very important, strategic reason in addition to the fact that we’re helping a nation under aggression.

And thirdly, this technique they’re using—they call it “wars of national liberation”—is a technique that will be used elsewhere in the world if they get away with this one, and they’ll be encouraged to do that.

So those are the three basic reasons why our national interest—and basically our national interest in peace in this whole wide Pacific area with which we have historically had great concern and for which we fought in World War II and in Korea—are deeply at stake in this conflict.

Source: Office of the Department of State, “Department Officers Discuss Viet-Nam Situation,” *Department of State Bulletin*, March 1, 1965 (Washington DC: Office of Media Services, Bureau of Public Affairs, 1965), 292.

## Memo from George Ball to Dean Rusk, Robert McNamara, McGeorge Bundy, William Bundy, John McNaughton, and Leonard Unger, Part II, June 29, 1965

### PART II

#### 1. Plan for Cutting Our Losses

In essence, what we should seek to achieve is a posture *vis-a-vis* the various leaders in Saigon that will appear to the world as reasonable and lacking any suggestion of arbitrariness. What I have proposed is that we make it a condition of continued assistance that the various elements in Saigon put aside their petty differences and organize themselves to fight the war. The only argument against the reasonableness of this proposition is that we have not insisted on such performance in the past. This is not persuasive. From the point of view of legitimacy, effective representation of the major elements of opinion, and social and economic progressiveness, the present government seems even worse than its predecessors.

#### 2. The Task of Re-education

It should by now be apparent that we have to a large extent created our own predicament. In our determination to rally support, we have tended to give the South Vietnamese struggle an exaggerated and symbolic significance (*Mea culpa*, since I personally participated in this effort).

The problem for us now—if we determine not to broaden and deepen our commitments—is to re-educate the American people and our friends and allies that:

- (a) The phasing out of American power in South Vietnam should not be regarded as a major defeat—either military or political—but a tactical redeployment to more favorable terrain in the overall cold war struggle;
- (b) The loss of South Vietnam does not mean the loss of all of Southeast Asia to the Communist power. Admittedly, Thailand is a special problem that will be dealt with later in this memo;
- (c) We have more than met our commitments to the South Vietnamese people. We have poured men and equipment into the area, and run risks and taken casualties, and have been prepared to continue the struggle provided the South Vietnamese leaders met even the most rudimentary standards of political performance;
- (d) The Viet Cong—while supported and guided from the North—is largely an indigenous movement. Although we have emphasized its cold war aspects, the conflict in South Vietnam is essentially a civil war within that country;
- (e) Our commitment to the South Vietnamese people is of a wholly different order from our major commitments elsewhere—to Berlin, to NATO, to South Korea, etc. We ourselves have insisted the curtailment of our activities in South Vietnam would cast doubt on our fidelity to the other commitments. Now we must begin a process of differentiation being founded on fact and law. We have *never* had a treaty commitment obligating us to the South Vietnamese people or to a South Vietnamese government. Our only treaty commitment in that area is to our SEATO partners, and they have—without exception—viewed the situation in South Vietnam as not calling a treaty into play. To be sure, we *did* make a promise to the South Vietnamese people. But that promise is conditioned on their own performance, and they have not performed.

Source: Memo from George Ball to Dean Rusk, Robert McNamara, McGeorge Bundy, William Bundy, John McNaughton, and Leonard Unger, June 29, 1965 (Excerpts). Source: *The Pentagon Papers*, vol. 4, Gravel Edition (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), pp. 609–610.

## Excerpts from “Recommendations of Additional Deployments to Vietnam,” Memorandum from Robert McNamara to President Johnson, July 20, 1965

. . . The situation in South Vietnam is worse than a year ago (when it was worse than a year before that). After a few months of stalemate, the tempo of the war has quickened. . . . The central highlands could well be lost to the National Liberation Front during this monsoon season. . . . The government is able to provide security to fewer and fewer people in less and less territory as terrorism increases.

. . . Nor have our air attacks in North Vietnam produced tangible evidence of willingness on the part of Hanoi to come to the conference table in a reasonable mood. The DRV/VC seem to believe that South Vietnam is on the run and near collapse; they show no signs of settling for less than complete take-over. . . .

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

a. I recommend that the deployment of US ground troops in Vietnam be increased by October to 34 maneuver 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. . . . 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.

b. I recommend that Congress be requested to authorize the call-up of approximately 235,000 men in the Reserve and National Guard. . . .

c. I recommend that the regular armed forces be increased by approximately 375,000 men. . . .

. . . The DRV, on the other hand, may well send up to several divisions of regular forces in South Vietnam to assist the VC if they see the tide turning and victory, once so near, being snatched away. This possible DRV action is the most ominous one, since it would lead to increased pressures on us to “counter-invade” North Vietnam and to extend air strikes to population targets in the North; acceding to these pressures could bring the Soviets and the Chinese in. The Viet Cong, especially if they continue to take high losses, can be expected to depend increasingly upon the PAVN forces as the war moves into a more conventional phase; but they may find ways to continue almost indefinitely their present intensive military, guerrilla, and terror activities, particularly if reinforced by some regular PAVN units. . . .

Source: *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968*, vol. 3: *Vietnam, June–December 1965*, Historical Documents, Office of the Historian, Department of State, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments>.

## Excerpts from Lyndon B. Johnson, “Why We Are in Vietnam,” Press Conference, July 28, 1965

My fellow Americans:

. . . We did not choose to be the guardians at the gate, but there is no one else.

Nor would surrender in Viet-Nam bring peace, because we learned from Hitler at Munich that success only feeds the appetite of aggression. The battle would be renewed in one country and then another country, bringing with it perhaps even larger and crueler conflict, as we have learned from the lessons of history.

Moreover, we are in Viet-Nam to fulfill one of the most solemn pledges of the American Nation. Three Presidents—President Eisenhower, President Kennedy, and your present President—over 11 years have committed themselves and have promised to help defend this small and valiant nation.

Strengthened by that promise, the people of South Viet-Nam have fought for many long years. Thousands of them have died. Thousands more have been crippled and scarred by war. We just cannot now dishonor our word, or abandon our commitment, or leave those who believed us and who trusted us to the terror and repression and murder that would follow.

This, then, my fellow Americans, is why we are in Viet-Nam. . . .

In meeting the present challenge, it is essential that our people seek understanding, and that our leaders speak with candor. I have therefore directed that [a] report to the American people be compiled and widely distributed. In its pages you will find statements on Vietnam by three leaders of your Government—by your President, your Secretary of State, and your Secretary of Defense.

These statements were prepared for different audiences, and they reflect the differing responsibilities of each speaker. The congressional testimony has been edited to avoid undue repetition and to incorporate the sense of the discussions that ensued.

Together, they construct a clear definition of America’s role in the Vietnam conflict:

- the dangers and hopes that Vietnam holds for all free men
- the fullness and limits of our national objectives in a war we did not seek
- the constant effort on our part to bring this war we do not desire to a quick and honorable end.

What are our goals in that war-strained land?

First, we intend to convince the Communists that we cannot be defeated by force of arms or by superior power. They are not easily convinced. In recent months they have greatly increased their fighting forces and their attacks and the number of incidents.

I have asked the Commanding General, General Westmoreland, what more he needs to meet this mounting aggression. He has told me. We will meet his needs.

I have today ordered to Viet-Nam the Air Mobile Division and certain other forces which will raise our fighting strength from 75,000 to 125,000 men almost immediately. Additional forces will be needed later, and they will be sent as requested.

This will make it necessary to increase our active fighting forces by raising the monthly draft call from 17,000 over a period of time to 35,000 per month, and for us to step up our campaign for voluntary enlistments.

After this past week of deliberations, I have concluded that it is not essential to order Reserve units into service now. If that necessity should later be indicated, I will give the matter most careful consideration and I will give the country—you—an adequate notice before taking such action, but only after full preparations. . . .

Second, once the Communists know, as we know, that a violent solution is impossible, then a peaceful solution is inevitable. . . .

Let me also add now a personal note. I do not find it easy to send the flower of our youth, our finest young men, into battle. I have spoken to you today of the divisions and the forces and the battalions and the units, but I know them all, every one. I have seen them in a thousand streets, of a hundred towns, in every State in this Union—working and laughing and building, and filled with hope and life. I think I know, too, how their mothers weep and how their families sorrow.

This is the most agonizing and the most painful duty of your President.

Source: Lyndon B. Johnson, “Why We Are in Vietnam,” Press Conference, July 28, 1965, The Miller Center, <http://millercenter.org/president>



NAME \_\_\_\_\_

PERIOD \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

## The News Conference

Speaker/Author: \_\_\_\_\_

Title of Text: \_\_\_\_\_

Write your question here:	Answer:   Evidence from Text:
Write your question here:	Answer:   Evidence from Text:
Write your question here:	Answer:   Evidence from Text: