



The White House
Washington



Agenda Item:

Should the President significantly increase U.S. military involvement in Vietnam?



Hawks and Doves: Increasing American Presence in Vietnam

Scenario: With Congress' adoption of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, a decision must be made by President Johnson on whether or not to increase the United States' military involvement in Vietnam. You have been invited to participate in a national security meeting with the intent of advising President Johnson on this very issue.

What are the potential outcomes of increasing military presence in Vietnam?

What are the potential outcomes of not increasing military presence in Vietnam?

Key Vocabulary

Viet Cong: a member of the communist guerrilla movement in Vietnam that fought South Vietnamese government forces.

Gulf of Tonkin Resolution: after a mild skirmish between North Vietnamese and American forces in the Gulf of Tonkin, Congress gave Lyndon B. Johnson authorization, without a formal declaration of war, the full force and power of the United States military.

Domino Theory: a political event in one country will cause similar events in neighboring countries, ex: one country falls to communism and neighboring countries begin to fall as well.

Insurgency: an armed rebellion against a constituted authority.

Hawk: believed strongly in the policy of containment of communism and domino theory; supported rising troop levels and escalating costs of the war

Dove: questioned the Vietnam war on both moral and strategic grounds; viewed the war as a localized civil war, not a vital Cold War battleground.



Necessary Reading Prior to the National Security Meeting

Directions: Read and analyze each primary source excerpt with the goal of determining whether or not the speaker in the excerpt is a *hawk* or a *dove*. Once you have made that determination, provide evidence that supports your conclusion. A short summary of the speaker's argument will suffice.

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

HAWK

DOVE

Summary of the argument and evidence that supports your choice:

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 them . . . 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

HAWK

DOVE

Summary of the argument and evidence that supports your choice:

Excerpt 3

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

HAWK

DOVE

Summary of the argument and evidence that supports your choice:

Excerpt 4

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

HAWK

DOVE

Summary of the argument and evidence that supports your choice:

Excerpt 5

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

HAWK

DOVE

Summary of the argument and evidence that supports your choice:

Excerpt 6

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.

—Undersecretary of State George Ball, June 30, 1965

HAWK

DOVE

Summary of the argument and evidence that supports your choice:

KEY POINTS OF EACH ARGUMENT

Use the below T-Chart to outline the key elements of both the hawks and doves arguments. Use textual evidence from the primary sources you analyzed in order to substantiate the element you are describing.

HAWKS

DOVES

Based on the evidence and sources you analyzed, what recommendation do you make to President Johnson on the issue of increasing the United States' military presence in Vietnam: