

Options in Brief

Option 1: Americanize the War, and Fight to Win!

The survival of free, independent, non-communist South Vietnam is necessary to protect U.S. strategic interests in the Western Pacific and East Asia. The United States must take whatever steps are necessary to defend South Vietnam against communist aggression and to demonstrate that the communists cannot succeed in using these so-called “wars of national liberation” to enslave more people. We have no choice: we must stop the advancing wave of communist aggression in Southeast Asia now! The United States must take over the war. We must not repeat the mistake of Korea, where the U.S. military was denied the political backing to achieve victory. U.S. forces in Vietnam should not be asked to fight a war with one hand tied behind their backs. There is no substitute for military victory. We must fight to win.

Option 3: Limit Our Involvement and Negotiate a Withdrawal

The risks of increasing U.S. military involvement in Vietnam now outweigh any benefits of our presence. The military situation has deteriorated to the point that even massive American troop reinforcements cannot guarantee victory. The present government in Saigon is an unstable military dictatorship that has little popular support. 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 withdraw. U.S. prestige and credibility would be seriously damaged by such an outcome. No American forces beyond those promised should be sent to Vietnam. The bombing campaign against North Vietnam should be reduced, as should the scope of U.S. operations in the South. We should seek a negotiated settlement that would enable the U.S. to gradually reduce our presence in South Vietnam. We must cut our losses, but not at the cost of seriously damaging American honor and credibility.

Option 2: Escalate Slowly and Control the Risks

The honor, determination, and credibility of the United States are at stake in South Vietnam. What ally could rely on American assurances in the future if we allow South Vietnam to fall under communist control? What potential enemy would be deterred by our pledge to oppose aggression if we fail to stand up to North Vietnam? We must take effective measures to convince the North Vietnamese and the insurgents in the south that they will not be permitted to achieve control of South Vietnam. Slowly and steadily squeezing harder on North Vietnam by increasing our bombing in a calculated manner would be the most effective approach. At the same time, we would avoid provoking increased involvement by the Soviet Union and China, and alarming the American people with a hasty, and perhaps unnecessary, crash buildup. We must control the pace of U.S. involvement.

Option 4: Unilateral Withdrawal—Pull Out Now!

The involvement of the U.S. in the Vietnamese civil war is contrary to American values and interests. We have no right to impose upon the people of Vietnam a government of our choosing. We have no strategic interests in Vietnam which require any U.S. military involvement. To assume that we know what is best for a people halfway across the world with different traditions and values, and to employ our overwhelming military might to impose our solution on them, is unjustified, arrogant, and immoral. The United States cannot preserve its democratic values at home while it is betraying them abroad. The U.S. government should begin to withdraw its forces. Americans will understand that the principles that 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.