

Vietnam DBQ with a Twist: Developing a Historical Question and Analysis

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Carefully read the following documents. As you read, note the date and source for each document. Try to place these documents into the context of your study of Vietnam so far.
2. Based on these documents, what important question is raised about U.S. involvement in Vietnam? Formulate a historical question. A good historical question is often focused on cause and effect. It is not too broad or too narrow. **Hint:** begin by closely studying the chart (Doc 1). What question about U.S. involvement does it raise? Write that question down and carefully read the rest of the documents to develop and support your answer to this question. You may need to revise your question somewhat after reading the other documents.
3. Write an essay that addresses your question. It should follow the standard format of an introduction, body and conclusion.
 - a. Your question and its answer (which will be your **thesis** statement) should appear in the opening paragraph of your essay, along with brief background information to “set the scene.”
 - b. In the remainder of your essay, support your answer by referring to specific documents presented here, as well as background information from class and reading.
 - c. Your essay should end with a summary of your position.

DOCUMENTS:

A. Figures supplied by the U.S. Army Center of Military History

DATE	US PERSONNEL IN SOUTH VIETNAM
by November 1963	16,300 military advisors
by late 1964/early 1965	23,300 military advisors
by July 1965	81,400 combat troops
by December 1965	184,300 combat troops
by December 1967	485,600 combat troops
by April 1969	543,400 combat troops

B. National Security Action Memorandum 288, a document from the National Security Council to advise President Johnson and which established U.S. objectives in South Vietnam, March 17, 1964

We seek an independent, non-communist South Vietnam. . . . Unless we can achieve this objective in South Vietnam, almost all of Southeast Asia will probably fall under communist dominance. . . . Even the Philippines would become shaky, and the threat to India on the West, Australia and New Zealand to the South, and Taiwan, Korea, and Japan to the North and East would be greatly increased. . . .

South Vietnam is regarded as a test case of U.S. capacity to help a nation meet the communist “war of liberation.” Thus purely in terms of foreign policy the stakes are high.

C. Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, passed by Congress on August 7, 1964

Whereas naval units of the communist regime in Vietnam, in violation of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and of international law, have deliberately and repeatedly attacked the United States naval vessels lawfully present in international waters, and have thereby created a serious threat to international peace; . . .

Now therefore be it, *Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled*, That the Congress approves and supports the President as Commander-in-Chief, to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression. . . . The United States regards as vital to its national interest and to world peace the maintenance of international peace and security in Southeast Asia.

D. Vote on the above Resolution

House of Representatives: 416 in support, 0 opposed.

Senate: 88 in support, 2 opposed

E. Poll results

Following the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, a Harris poll found that the American public overwhelmingly (85%) supported the government’s actions in Vietnam.

F. President Johnson remembers his decision to commit troops in 1965, quoted in *Vantage Point*, 1971.

. . . [Secretary of Defense Robert] McNamara noted that the Viet Cong had increased in size through local recruitments and replacements from the North. Regular Vietnamese army units had increased in number and strength. . . . Without additional armed strength, South Vietnam would inevitable fall to Hanoi [North Vietnam]. I told the National Security Council there were five possible choices available to us. (continues on next page)

We can bring the enemy to his knees by using out Strategic Air Command, I said, describing our first option. Another group thinks we ought to pack up and go home.

Third, we could stay there as we are—and suffer the consequences, continue to lose territory and take casualties. You wouldn’t want your own boy to be out there crying for help and not get it.

Then, we could go to Congress and ask for great sums of money; we could call up the reserves and increase the draft; go on a war footing; declare a state of emergency. There is a good deal of feeling

that ought to be done. We have considered this. But if we go into that kind of land war, then North Vietnam would go to its friends, China and Russia and ask them to give help. They would be forced into increasing aid. For that reason I don't want to be overly dramatic and cause tensions. I think we can get our people to support us without being too provocative and warlike.

Finally, we can give our commanders in the field the men and the supplies they say they need.

I had concluded that the last course was the right one. I believed that we should do what was necessary to resist aggression but that we should not be provoked into a major war.

Hint: how would you describe the problem that Johnson is trying to solve? How does he come to the final choice as the best choice?