

Big question for this mini-unit on the Cold War:

During the Cold War, were American policy makers right to fight the spread of communism?

If No, why not?

If Yes, then was the fight worth the costs?

Debate Preparation: To the Brink of War in Support of...France?

The scenario: Imagine it is spring 1954 and you are an adviser to the President of the United States, Dwight D. Eisenhower. He was a general during World War Two and a national hero who was elected President in 1952. Before he was elected, the Korean War had begun. His first year in office, the Koreans agreed to an armistice and the USSR tested their first hydrogen bomb.

Background: In Indochina (what we now call Vietnam), the French military effort to crush the Vietnamese resistance and re-establish control over their colony in Indochina is failing. Eight years of fighting have brought the two sides to one final battle: the siege of Dien Bien Phu. To the surprise of the French, the Vietnamese are able to overcome the difficult terrain and use artillery to inflict heavy casualties on French soldiers in the valley below. So, even with much assistance from the US, in the form of airplanes and pilots and millions of dollars, the French appear on the verge of losing. If they withdraw, then Ho Chi Minh, a nationalist and a communist, will surely become the first president of an independent Vietnam.

Question: What should Eisenhower do about Vietnam? You are his adviser. He depends on you for advice.

STEP ONE: In the table, list some benefits (+) and risks (-) of each of these three options. Remember: it is 1954—the height of McCarthyism in the USA and the Cold War.

		Benefits (+)	Risks (-)
Option 1	Accept the French defeat, allow Ho Chi Minh to become Vietnam's first president, and focus on resisting communism in other regions.	**Us doesn't lose resource: life and treasure.	**Could activate the "domino theory" or communism spreading
Do nothing		**Can allocate resources elsewhere perhaps more important	**Look weak and unwilling to support "fledgling democracies"
.		**America doesn't act hypocritical re: self	

		determination etc.	
Option 2 Attack!	Rescue the French soldiers at Dien Bien Phu, using any means necessary, including atomic bombs. If need be, send US troops to relieve the siege and defeat the Vietnamese guerillas.	**destroy the communist regime in vietnam **Same french soldiers **strengthen ties with the French by supporting them	**Economically dangerous as it could drag us into a war **Risk of 3rd World War **Bad precedent re: nuclear weapons **could be bad optics...getting involved in such a conflict maybe shows US overreach.
Option 3 Try to “divide and contain.”	Give up on the French, and give up on the northern part of Vietnam, where the communists are very popular. Create/support a non-communist government in southern Vietnam.	**while still costing money, much less expensive than big war **could slow or resist the spread of communism, could “isolate it” **Allows a democratic stronghold in the region (maybe) **allows for possibility that Vietnam could ONE DAY be fully Democratic **It’s a nice “split the difference’ option...we’re not overreaching but we’re not doing nothing.	**Putting the citizens of n.vietnam at risk...you’re letting them go **maybe this halfway measure isn’t enough to keep S vietnam independent and democratic. **risk losing **Hard to occupy **americans may (will) still die **Risk ESCALATION

STEP TWO: Presidential advisers like you do not get paid simply to fill in boxes in a table. You get paid to advise!

Think: which of these 3 options is the best? Or is there an even better fourth option you thought of?

Your task: Write a rough draft of a short speech you will make in a meeting with Eisenhower and some other advisers. Your goal is to persuade. (We will simulate this meeting in class.) Draft length should be 300-400 words.

Argue for one option and against the others. To prove that your advice is worth listening to, make some references to events/issues in the early Cold War. Sound smart! Here is a list to choose from:

- USSR creates Comintern and Cominform
- Iron Curtain in Eastern Europe
- Truman Doctrine
- Marshall Plan

- Berlin blockade and airlift
- Communist takeover in China
- USSR tests their first atomic bomb/hydrogen bomb
- Armistice in Korea
- French Communist Party wins most votes in November 1946 election
- French “Fourth Republic” government is weak and unstable (15 different Prime Ministers during 1947-54)
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You must refer to **at least 2** of these events in your draft. For each reference, name the event and explain how it is relevant to the option you are proposing.

If there is additional information that would help you support one option, do some research. You know how.

Resources:

Ho Chi Minh’s speech, declaring independence just days after the atomic bombings ended World War Two: http://coombs.anu.edu.au/~vern/van_kien/declar.html

A good summary of the French war to re-colonize Vietnam:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Indochina_War