

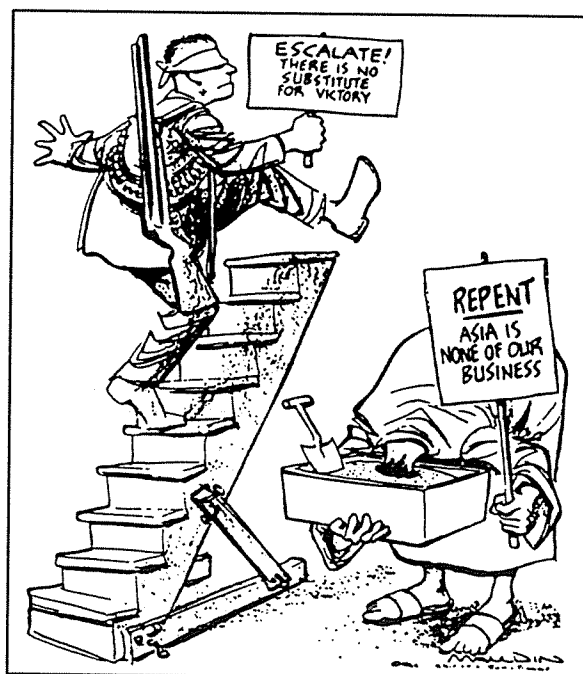
## ESCALATE SLOWLY AND CONTROL THE RISKS

The honor, determination, and credibility of the United States are at stake in South Vietnam. Since 1950, successive U.S. governments under Presidents Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson have pledged to protect South Vietnam from communist aggression. When South Vietnam was created in 1954 at the Geneva Conference, the United States declared its opposition to any attempts to alter the settlement by force. Shortly afterward, the United States and its South East Asian Treaty Organization allies pledged to protect South Vietnam and its neighbors, Laos and Cambodia. U.S. economic, political, and military aid helped this young nation in its infancy. Our country is internationally recognized as the "godfather" and patron of South Vietnam. The increasingly visible U.S. commitment over the past four years has linked our country's prestige and credibility with the fate of 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? Could the Western Europeans be expected to trust us with their fate in the face of Soviet nuclear threats when we cannot defend the South Vietnamese from insurgents armed only with conventional weapons?

History shows us that when nations lose their credibility, their power to influence others and protect their national interests suffer. When the Western European democracies reneged on their commitments to Czechoslovakia at Munich in 1938 and allowed Adolf Hitler to pressure that country into submission, they also cast in doubt their promise to defend Poland from German attack. World War II was the result. Similarly, the failure of the United States to back up its warnings to Japan in the 1930s emboldened Japanese militarists to extend their aggression to Pearl Harbor. In contrast, U.S. successes in the late 1940s and 1950s in thwarting Soviet expansion into Western Europe were due to the credibility of our pledge to counter Soviet aggression with massive, overwhelming retaliation. Likewise, our success in 1962 in forcing the Soviets to remove their missiles from Cuba demonstrated that a measured, credible response to aggression will convince even the most powerful of enemies to back down.

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. Whatever actions are necessary to convince the North Vietnamese of this must be taken. Slowly and steadily squeezing harder on North Vietnam by increasing our bombing of military targets in a graduated, calculated manner would be the most effective approach. Such a strategy will convince the communists of our determination and overwhelming military superiority. 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. In addition to stepped-up bombing, additional American troops should be dispatched into South Vietnam to check the tide of government defeats and buy enough time for our campaign against North Vietnam to achieve its objectives. Communist supply lines from Laos and the north should be cut by bombing, while long-range programs to strengthen the ARVN and build public support for the Saigon government should be initiated.

Although the American people must understand the need for increased U.S. military involvement in Vietnam, we should not put the economy on a war footing, nor should the reserves be called up. These actions could endanger our domestic programs and provoke demands for more drastic military action. We must control the pace of U.S. involvement.



Bill Mauldin in the Chicago Sun-Times. Copyright © 1966 North America Syndicate.

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## FROM THE RECORD

*Letter by President Dwight Eisenhower to South Vietnamese President Diem, October 26, 1960:*

"For so long as our strength can be useful, the United States will continue to assist Vietnam in the difficult yet

hopeful struggle ahead."

*Speech by Senator John Kennedy, June 1956:*

"[Vietnam is] a proving ground for democracy in Asia...a test of American responsibility and determination in Asia....[I]f we are not the parents of little

Vietnam, then surely we are the godparents. We presided at its birth, we gave assistance to its life, we helped to shape its future."

*Inaugural address by President John Kennedy, January 1961:*

"Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty....To those

peoples in the huts and villages of half the globe struggling to break the binds of mass misery, we pledge our best efforts to help them help themselves, for whatever period is required."

*Letter by President John Kennedy to South Vietnamese President Diem, December 14, 1961:*

"They [the communists] have violated the provisions of the Geneva Accords designed to ensure peace in Vietnam and to which they bound themselves in 1954....Although not a party to the Accords, [the United States] declared that it 'would view any renewal of the aggression in violation of the Agreements

with grave concern and as seriously threatening international peace and security....In accordance with that declaration, and in response to your request, we are prepared to help the Republic of Vietnam to protect its people and to preserve its independence."

*Speech by President Lyndon Johnson, April 25, 1965:*

"Why are we in South Vietnam? We are there because we have a promise to keep. Since 1954 every American President has offered support to the people of South Vietnam. We have helped to build, and we have helped to defend. Thus, over many years, we have made a national pledge to help South Vietnam defend its

independence. And I intend to keep our promise. To dishonor that pledge, to abandon this small and brave nation to its enemy, and to the terror that must follow, would be an unforgivable wrong....We will not be defeated! We will not grow tired! We will not withdraw, either openly or under the cloak of a meaningless agreement."

*Memoranda by Assistant Secretary of Defense John McNaughton, March 24, 1965 and January 19, 1966:*

"U.S. aims: 70 percent to avoid a humiliating U.S. defeat (to our reputation as a guarantor); 20 percent to keep SVN (and the adjacent) territory from Chinese hands; 10 percent to permit the people of SVN to enjoy a better, freer way of life. ALSO to emerge from

crisis without unacceptable taint from methods used. NOT to 'help a friend,' although it would be hard to stay in if asked out....The present U.S. objective in Vietnam is to avoid humiliation. The reasons why we went into Vietnam to the present depth are varied; but they

are largely academic. Why we have not withdrawn from Vietnam is, by all odds, one reason: (1) to preserve our reputation as a guarantor, 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

*National Security Action Memorandum, April 6, 1965:*

"5. The President approved an 18-20,000 man increase in U.S. military support forces to fill out existing units and supply needed logistic personnel. 6. The President approved the deployment of two additional Marine Battalions and one Marine Air Squadron and associated headquarters and support elements. 7. The President approved a change of mission for all Marine Battalions deployed to Vietnam to permit their more active use under conditions to be established and approved by the Secretary of Defense in consultation with the Secretary of State....We should continue the present slowly ascending tempo of ROLLING THUNDER [the air campaign against North Vietnam]. The target systems should continue to avoid the effective GGI range of MIGs. We should continue to vary the types of targets, stepping up attacks on lines of communication in the near future and possible moving in

reputation....The 'softest' credible formulation of the U.S. commitment is the following: DRV [North Vietnam] does not take over South Vietnam by force....This does not necessarily rule out: a coalition government including Communists, [or] a free decision by the South to succumb to the VC or to the North, [or] a neutral (or even anti-U.S.) government in SVN...if the Communist take-over was fuzzy and very slow."

a few weeks to attacks on the rail lines north and northeast of Hanoi....Blockade or aerial mining of North Vietnamese ports need further study and should be considered for future operations. It would have major political complications, especially in relation to the Soviets and other third countries, but also offers many advantages. Air operation in Laos, particularly route blocking operations...should be stepped up....The President desires that with respect to the actions in paragraphs 5 through 7, premature publicity be avoided by all possible precautions. The actions themselves should be taken as rapidly as practicable, but in ways that should minimize any appearance of sudden changes of policy....The President's desire is that these movements and changes should be understood as being gradual and wholly consistent with existing policy."

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## **THE UNITED STATES SHOULD TAKE THE FOLLOWING STEPS:**

1. Send additional American ground troops to South Vietnam to check the tide of communist advances.
2. Undertake a stepped-up bombing campaign against military targets in North Vietnam to convince North Vietnamese leaders to halt their involvement in the war.
3. Initiate long-term programs to strengthen the ARVN, and increase support for the Saigon government by involving U.S. forces in building schools, hospitals, and other civilian projects.
4. Assure our allies and the Soviet Union that, while not seeking to widen the war, we will not accept the defeat of the South Vietnamese government through communist aggression.
5. Remind the American people of our commitment to South Vietnam and ask them to continue to support all measures necessary, while avoiding the dangers raised by mobilizing the reserves and shifting to a war economy.

## **LESSONS FROM HISTORY**

- The failure of the British and French to honor their commitment to Czechoslovakia in 1938 led Hitler in 1939 to believe that Britain and France would not defend Poland from a German invasion.
- Japanese aggression in the Pacific before Pearl Harbor was not deterred by U.S. warnings because we failed to back up our words with action.
- Credible commitments to Western Europe backed up by our willingness to employ all military measures necessary contained Soviet expansion after 1947.
- Carefully controlled military escalation and credible threats convinced the Soviet Union in 1962 to reverse its aggressive policies in Cuba and to withdraw its missiles.

## **ARGUMENTS FOR OPTION 2**

- By carefully controlling the escalation of our military involvement in Vietnam, we will minimize the risk of greater Soviet or Chinese participation in the conflict.
- Without more American troops in South Vietnam, the Saigon government will soon be overthrown by the communists.
- By reaffirming our commitment to South Vietnam and taking additional steps to back up our commitment, we are bolstering American honor, prestige, and credibility.
- U.S. determination and overwhelming military superiority will force the North Vietnamese to abandon their campaign to take over South Vietnam by armed aggression, thus cutting off the insurgent movement in the south from its main source of support.