

Cold War Decision Making Exercise<sup>1</sup>

**Background:** “Following WWII the global balance of economic and political power shifted after the end of World War II and rapidly evolved into the Cold War. The United States and the Soviet Union emerged as **superpowers**, which led to ideological struggles between Capitalism and Communism throughout the globe. The Cold War produced new military alliances, including **NATO** and the **Warsaw Pact**, and promoted proxy wars in Latin America, Africa, and Asia.” - AP World History Framework.

**Part I: Expert Groups.** Your group is responsible for choosing US policy towards **four** of the conflicts or developments that following WWII. Read through each and record the decision **you** would make if you were advising the US President (not necessarily what you think which action/s the US took). Try to make decisions in the context of the time period, as if you were living then, and not from historical hindsight.

Your group is assigned four of the following conflicts. Be prepared to share your information in mixed groups.

Turkey, 1946	Greece, 1947	China, 1948	Korea, 1950
French Indo-China, 1954	Middle East, 1956	Cuba, 1961	3rd World Nations, 1961
Laos & Cambodia, 1960's	Vietnam, 1963	Yom Kippur War, 1973	Afghanistan, 1980

CONFLICT	Crux of the Issue	Choice	Reason for Choice

**Part II: Mixed Groups.** After sharing information and listening to the decisions others made, respond to the following statement by identifying the best “Pro” and “Con” points:

The Cold War and Proxy Wars that resulted were inevitable.

Best “Pro” point:

Best “Con” point:

<sup>1</sup> This lesson is a re-working of a lesson designed by Andy Aiken of Boulder, CO & Aaron Marsh of Vashon, WA.

## US Policy - Regional Conflicts

### 1. Turkey, 1916

The Soviet Union has laid claim to Turkish territory. The Russians are pressuring Turkey for joint Soviet-Turkish administration of the Dardanelles. If the Soviet Union gains their objective they will have warships from their Black Sea bases to the strategically important Mediterranean Sea. This Russian access might allow the Soviets to dominate not only Turkey but also Greece and the Middle East. Which of the following Options shall we recommend to the President?

#### OPTIONS...

A. Do Nothing! Turkey has a long border with Russia and it would be impossible for the US to defend her. We should urge the U.N. action.

B. We should make a show of American military might by sending an aircraft carrier group to Turkish waters. This will discourage Soviet claims and provide visible support for our Turkish Allies.

C. We should encourage our allies in the region, Italy, Greece, and France, to deal with the problem. They are much nearer to Turkey and can respond quicker.

### 2. Greece, 1947

In early 1947 Britain informed us (the United States) that they will be pulling their soldiers out of Greece. This would mean a Communist takeover of Greece. At present Communist guerrillas control much of the country. If Greece falls to Communism, Turkey and much of the Middle East will be endangered. Which of the following options will we recommend to the President?

#### OPTIONS...

A. Greece is too near the Soviet Union for the U.S. to defend. We should concentrate our resources on protecting Western Europe. A channel of communication should be opened with the Greek Communists to prevent a complete takeover by the Soviets.

B. If Greece falls; U.S. interests will be severely impacted. We must send U.S. troops to replace the departing British.

C. We should immediately send our Greek Allies military and economic aid. This will give them the means to defend themselves. No U.S. combat troops should be sent.

### 3. China, 1948

Since the early 1930's civil war has raged in China between the Nationalist government and the Communists led by Mao Tse Tung. During the war with Japan Mao extended Communist control over large areas of China. In 1946 General Marshall went to China to arrange a peace treaty but he failed and full scale war broke out in 1947. The Communist forces are gaining ground. What should the U.S. do to prevent China from becoming a Communist nation?

#### OPTIONS...

A. We have done enough to help the Nationalists in China. If they cannot defeat the Communists by themselves they do not deserve to win. We should not send troops or increase our aid level.

B. We must do everything in our power to prevent a Communist takeover of China. We should send massive military aid to Chiang Kai-shek, the Nationalist leader. Along with this aid we should send American "military Advisors" and consider the use of U.S. Combat units.

C. We should continue sending military and economic aid but not increase the level massively. Under no circumstances should we send U.S. Military advisors or ground troops. The greatest threat to freedom is in Europe and it is there we should concentrate our resources.

### 4. Korea, 1950

On June 24, 1950 North Korean armies (trained and equipped by the U.S.S.R.) invaded the Republic of South Korea without a declaration of war. South Korea is a part of the Free World and a U.S. ally. Its loss would mean that Communism has gained another free nation by the use of force. What should we recommend the President do to aid South Korea?

#### OPTIONS...

A. The attack on South Korea is clearly a violation of the United Nations Charter. We should take the aggression to the U.N. and try to get them to act against North Korea. The Russians are boycotting the U.N. so they will not be able to exercise their veto.

B. We must immediately send U.S. combat troops to South Korea to face the North Koreans to halt their invasion. We cannot let South Korea fall to Communism.

C. South Korea is a small remote country far from the U.S. or Europe. We should not become involved in a land war there. We should send arms and supplies to the South Koreans but no U.S. combat troops.

## 5. French Indo-China, 1954

The French controlled Cochin China, Cambodia, Annam, and Tonkin (known collectively as Indo-China) since 1887. Japan conquered Indo-China in the first years of WWII and French control disappeared. A local Communist resistance movement battled the Japanese in Vietnam. The anti-Japanese guerrilla army's led by Ho Chi Minh who believed that after the war Vietnam would become an independent country. Immediately after WWII France, attempting to regain her empire, moved back to again control French Indo-China. They were met with war of liberation from the Communist forces led by Ho Chi Minh. The U.S. supplied France with war materials in their battles against the Communist Vietnamese. The French have recently decided (after surrendering an army at Dienbienphu) to pull out of Vietnam and the rest of Indo-China. What option should we recommend to the President to stop a Communist takeover?

### OPTIONS...

A. Under no circumstance should we allow a communist takeover of Vietnam and Indo-China. We should encourage the French to stay but be prepared to send in American Military forces to replace them if necessary.

B. We should participate fully in the current Geneva Peace Conference. Ngo Dinh Diem, a Vietnamese leader friendly the United States, should give control of the southern half of the country. The northern half will be under the control of Ho Chi Minh and will become a Communist nation. Elections are proposed to reunite the two halves in two years.

C. The U.S. has no business being involved in Indo-China. We made a mistake when we backed the French, and they lost. Let's not compound our mistake by becoming more deeply involved. Let's cut our losses now.

## 7. Cuba, 1961

Fidel Castro, the leader of Cuba, has moved his country into the Soviet camp. We've stopped trading with Cuba. Castro had turned to the Soviet Union for aid and they responded with both economic and military assistance. What should the U.S. do about a Communist nation being established in the Western Hemisphere?

### OPTIONS...

- A. We should immediately declare war against Cuba before the Russians become entrenched. A communist nation 90 miles from our shore cannot be tolerated.
- B. Something must be done to remove Castro and Communism from Cuba. We recommend the C.I.A organize, train, and equip a secret army of anti-Castro Cuban exiles. When their army is combat ready, we should transport it to Cuba and support it with both air and naval forces.
- C. Although Castro is Communist we should try to keep him from becoming a Russian puppet. We could offer to resume trade and grant Cuba loans and credits to build up their economy. We recommend against any military action which, if it fails, will only draw Castro closer to Russia.

## 6. Middle East, 1956

In 1955 it was becoming obvious that the U.S.S.R was planning a move in the Middle East. U.S. interests in the region go back before the war with oil and other investments. In 1948 we supported the establishment of the Jewish state of Israel. In 1955 Russia signed a commercial treaty with Egypt and began sending tanks and other military equipment in exchange for Egyptian cotton. We had promised Nasser, the ruler of Egypt, a loan to build a giant dam at Aswan on the Nile River. Nasser began making deals with Red China and we canceled the loan to show our displeasure. Nasser, feeling humiliate by the U.S., seized the Suez Canal from its British and French owners (our allies). Britain, France, and Israel, without consulting us, attacked Egypt. Israel seized the Sinai Peninsula while the British and French captured the Northern part of the Suez Canal. What option should we recommend to the President to deal with this unforeseen invasion by our allies?

### OPTIONS....

A. We've had our own problems with Egypt and should openly support our allies, Britain, France, and Israel, in their attack on Egypt.

B. We should take the issue to the United Nations and support our allies. Egypt was wrong in seizing the canal. It should be returned to its rightful owners, England and France. We must block any attempt by Russia to condemn them in the U.N.

C. Britain, France and Israel attacked Egypt without consulting us. Their attack has risked a world war. We should take the issue to the U.N. and vote to condemn them for their invasion and to return the Suez canal to Egypt. We should vote this way even if it means voting with the Soviet Union.

## 8. Third World Nations, 1961

There are many newly independent nations in the world. Many of them are joining what has been called the "Third World". These countries do not align themselves with either the U.S. or the Communist Bloc. A new strategy is needed to influence these "Third World" nations. What option should we recommend to the President to deal with these new nations?

### OPTIONS...

- A. We should attempt to win these nations to our side by giving them massive amounts of money and military aid. We should continue programs begun during the 1950's with the only change being an increase in the dollar amounts.
- B. The U.S. should make it clear that any nation that is not on our side is, by default, supporting the Communists. There can be no neutrals in the struggle between freedom and tyranny. If any nation chooses to remain neutral, we should consider it as a supporter of Communism and not provide any aid.
- C. We must continue with our aid and military assistance programs but something new should be tried. We propose setting up a corps of trained American volunteers to live and work in Third World nations. Once in these countries Americans will be able to help the people with their most pressing needs on a personal basis. This program will be a functioning symbol of our desire to provide humanitarian aid.

## 9. Laos and Cambodia, Early 1960's

North Vietnam, South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos are four new countries in South East Asia. South Vietnam is our ally. North Vietnam is Communist with Red China and the Soviet Union as allies. Cambodia and Laos are divided among three factions. The first is pro-west, the second is pro-communist, and the third is neutral. What should the U.S. do to insure that the pro-west factions prevail?

### OPTIONS...

- A. We should send substantial amounts of money and military to aid the pro-west forces. We should encourage our ally in the area, South Vietnam, to provide assistance to the pro-western factions.
- B. We should let events in the two countries follow their own course. We should not provide any additional assistance. South Vietnam is enough of a burden. We should not take on two other Southeast Asian nations that we know little about.
- C. We must do everything in our power to prevent Laos and Cambodia from falling to Communism. If military and economic aid proves to be insufficient we should offer the pro-western factions U.S. military advisors and troops. Russia and Red China are supporting their side with substantial resources. We must do the same. If one nation falls to Communism others will fall, like dominoes.

## 11. Yom Kippur War, 1973

The Middle East has long been a potential confrontation point between East and West. The United States has supported Israel with both economic and military aid. The Communist nations have been supplying several Arab states with military aid. Since the establishment of Israel in 1948 there have been three major wars and many more bloody skirmishes.

In October, a coordinated surprise attack was launched against Israel by Egyptian and Syrian armies. This attack took place while Israelis were observing Yom Kippur, a Jewish holy day. At first the Arab attacks were successful, and there was little support in the United Nations for a cease-fire. But in the second week the Israelis began winning the war. Israeli armies are closing in on Cairo and Damascus, the capital cities of Egypt and Syria.

The United Nations is now calling for a cease-fire, but Israel has refused. The Egyptians have appealed to the Soviet Union for help. The Russians are now threatening to send in their troops to stop the fighting. What should we do to stop the Russians from intervening?

### OPTIONS...

- A. We should do nothing. The Russians are bluffing. We doubt they would be willing to use their own troops. We should let Israel finish the war that the Arabs started.
- B. We must take the Russians threat of intervention seriously. We recommend the President order an immediate "precautionary alert" to all our armed forces around the world. We should prepare to intervene if the Russians follow through on their threat. At the same time we should urge the Israeli's to accept the cease-fire.
- C. We should warn the Russians that any intervention on their part will risk war with us. Our armed forces should be placed on the highest possible alert. Israel was treacherously attacked on their most holy religious day and suffered grievous losses. We should supply them with all the equipment and material they need to bring the war to a satisfactory conclusion.

## 10. Vietnam, 1963

The United States has been heavily involved in South Vietnam since the French withdrawal in 1954. We have been supporting Ngo Dinh Diem, the current President of South Vietnam. Diem's administration has become increasingly corrupt and repressive towards its own citizens. South Vietnam's military leaders have become alarmed at Diem's inability to contain the Communist Viet Cong guerrillas. U.S. Intelligence has learned of a military plot to overthrow Diem. What should we recommend our President do with this information?

### OPTIONS...

- A. We must inform Diem immediately. Although there have been serious problems with his leadership we cannot predict if his replacement will be any better. We should tell the disgruntled military that we will not support an attempt to overthrow Diem.
- B. We should do and say nothing. Diem has not been a good leader and his removal can do nothing but improve the situation. If the coup is successful the military may fight the Communists with increased vigor.
- C. Diem must be removed from the presidency of South Vietnam. We should inform him immediately that he no longer has our support. We should make provisions to remove him safely from the country.

## 12. Russian Invasion of Afghanistan, 1980

In January Soviet armies invaded Afghanistan to replace the existing Communist government with another more amenable to Soviet control.

Afghanistan lies close to the vital Persian Gulf oil lifeline. Russian forces in Afghanistan would be able to interdict the world's oil supply and threaten the Free World with economic disaster. What option should we recommend to the President?

### OPTIONS...

- A. We consider the Russian invasion to be an extremely dangerous escalation of the Cold War. For the first time Russian troops have intervened in a sovereign nation. We recommend a whole series of responses including a cut in trade, withdrawing from the Moscow Summer Olympics, and halting grain and electronic sales to the Soviet Union.
- B. We agree that the invasion is a dangerous precedent but there is a danger of overreacting. We should strongly condemn the invasion but we do not believe halting grain sales or boycotting the Olympic Games will do any good. We should postpone the current arms limitation treaty, Salt II, until the Soviets withdraw from Afghanistan.
- C. We propose the President curtail trade including grain and electronic equipment sales to the Soviet Union. We also agree that the Moscow Olympics should be boycotted by ourselves and our allies. In addition the Soviet threat to the Persian Gulf demands a direct warning. We recommend issuing a statement stating that the Persian Gulf is vital to our interests. The Soviets should understand that any move on their part toward the Persian Gulf will be met by American Military force.