

## Background Briefing—The United States

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The survival of the free nations of Southeast Asia is endangered today. The United States will not allow another nation to fall under the control of international communism. Should part of Indochina be placed permanently under communist control, such a regime, taking its directions from the Soviets and China, will seek to subvert its neighbors. Just as a row of dominos will topple if one is knocked down, so the young and vulnerable free nations of Southeast Asia will fall to the communists. The security of the United States and its vital interests in this area require that this be prevented. Should we fail, the free world would suffer a major blow and the forces of communist aggression would be strengthened.

The United States is deeply sympathetic to the attempts by people who have been ruled by European colonial powers to achieve their national independence. Because of our own heritage, we can identify with their aspirations. However, in Southeast Asia the forces of nationalism have been subverted by international communism. The Vietminh are not fighting for Vietnamese freedom and independence; they are merely pawns of Soviet and Chinese communists. No matter how hard they may attempt to conceal it, they are aided and directed by Moscow and Beijing. North Korea's unprovoked invasion of South Korea revealed the ugly face of communist aggression in Asia. At that time, the United States took a firm stand to halt the spread of communism in Asia, and we strongly urge that the Western powers take a firm stand in Indochina today to halt communist aggression there. Since 1950, we have been supplying the French with economic and military aid to fight the communists. We have spent nearly \$3 billion of our taxpayers' money to finance this war. Unfortunately, France's reluctance to pledge full independence for the people of Indochina has been an obstacle in its struggle to defeat the Vietminh. More than 150,000 Vietnamese were drafted to fight with the French forces, and all but nine thousand successfully avoided the

call to service, an indicator of the weakness of native loyalties for the French.

While the recent French loss of the garrison at Dienbienphu is a serious blow to the anti-communist struggle, its impact should not be overestimated. To defeat the communists, the United States is willing to send American planes, ships, and ground troops to Indochina, provided the British and French agree to a joint effort. The Republican Party's platform in 1952 pledged that the United States would not sanction any further territorial gains through communist aggression. This administration intends to stand by that commitment. We hope that our allies in London and Paris share these sentiments.

The real evil force behind communist aggression in Southeast Asia is Red China. This bandit regime, imposed by force of arms on the Chinese people, is a puppet government, responding to its master in Moscow. We refuse to recognize the legitimacy of this illegal regime and we will not deal with it in any manner that would imply approval or acceptance. Its treachery and aggressive designs were revealed to the world in Korea. We will continue to support the legitimate government of China, currently in temporary exile in Taiwan, and we will block any attempt by the Soviets to give Red China a seat in the United Nations. After all, only three years ago the United Nations branded Red China as the aggressor in Korea.

If we cannot persuade our allies to join us in a united defense against the present communist aggression in Indochina, we will seek to minimize the territorial gains that the Vietminh will achieve at this conference. The principles that we insist upon are: that the Vietminh withdraw their forces from Cambodia and Laos and the independence of these countries be preserved; that at least the southern half of Vietnam remain free; that there be no provisions which would restrict the right of southern Vietnam to defend itself by obtaining military material and advisers

from foreign countries; that there be no political provisions which would risk the loss of southern Vietnam to communist control; and finally, that the eventual unification of a free Vietnam by peaceful means not be precluded. If the negotiated settlement does not conform to these basic principles, we shall disassociate ourselves from this conference and return

to Washington. In addition, we intend to take immediate steps to construct a mutual security defense organization (South East Asia Treaty Organization) which will halt further communist aggression in Asia just as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization has halted further communist aggression in Europe.

## From the Historical Record

*Testimony of Assistant Secretary of State Dean Rusk before Congress, June 1950*

“This [the Indochina war] is a civil war that has been in effect captured by the [Soviet] Politburo and, besides, has been turned into a tool of the Politburo. So it isn't a civil war in the usual sense. It is part of an international war.”

*Speech by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, March 29, 1954*

“Under the conditions of today, the imposition on Southeast Asia of the political system of Communist Russia and its Chinese Communist ally, by whatever means, would be a grave threat to the whole free community. The United States feels that that possibility should not be passively accepted, but should be met by united action. This might involve serious risks. But these risks are far less than those that will face us a few years from now, if we dare not to be resolute today.”

*Letter by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles to President Dwight Eisenhower, April 22, 1954*

“The situation here [Paris] is tragic.... There is, of course, no military or logical reason why loss of Dien Bien Phu [Dienbienphu] should lead to collapse of French will.... It seems to me that Dien Bien Phu has become a symbol out of all proportion to its military importance.”

*Remarks by Vice President Richard Nixon to reporters, April 17, 1954*

“More men are needed and the question is where to get them. They will not come from France, for France is tired of the war.... The

French, however, while slow in training the native soldiers, resent the idea that the United States or others should send men to do the job. More difficult is the job of spirit. Encouragement must be given to fight and resist. Some say if the French get out, the Vietnamese will fight with more spirit, because they would be fighting for their independence. But the Vietnamese lack the ability to conduct a war by themselves or govern themselves. If the French withdrew, Indochina would become Communist-dominated within a month. The United States as a leader of the free world cannot afford further retreat in Asia. It is hoped that the United States will not have to send troops there, but if this government cannot avoid it, the Administration must face up to the situation and dispatch troops. Therefore, the United States must go to Geneva and take a positive stand for united action by the free world.... This country is the only nation politically strong enough at home to take a position that will save Asia. Negotiations with the Communists to divide the territory would result in Communist domination of a vital new area.... It should be emphasized that if Indochina went Communist, Red pressure would increase on Malaya [Malaysia], Thailand, and Indonesia and other Asian nations. The main target of the Communists in Indochina, as it was in Korea, is Japan. Conquest of areas so vital to Japan's economy would reduce Japan to an economic satellite of the Soviet Union.”

*Memorandum summarizing discussion between President Dwight Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles regarding situation in Indochina, May 7, 1954*

“The U.S. should (as a last act to save Indochina) propose to France that if the following five conditions are met, the U.S. will go to Congress for authority to intervene with combat forces: a) grant of genuine freedom for Associated States; b) U.S. take major responsibility for training indigenous forces; c) U.S. share responsibility for military planning; d) French forces to stay in the fight and no requirement of replacement of U.S. forces; e) action under UN auspices.”

*Instructions sent by President Dwight Eisenhower to the U.S. delegation at the Geneva Conference*

“You will not deal with the delegates of the Chinese Communist regime, or any other regime not now diplomatically recognized by the United States, on any terms which imply political recognition or which concede to that regime any status other than that of a regime with which it is necessary to deal on a de facto basis in order to end aggression or the threat of aggression.... The position of the United States...is that of an interested nation which, however, is neither a belligerent nor a principal in the negotiations. The United States is not prepared to give its express or implied approval to any cease-fire, armistice, or other settlement which would have the effect of subverting the existing lawful governments... or which otherwise contravened the principles stated in (4) above [these people should not be amalgamated into the Communist bloc of imperialistic dictatorship].”

*Joint letter sent by President Eisenhower and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill to French government, June 29, 1954*

“The United States Government/His Majesty’s Government would be willing to respect an agreement which 1) Preserves the integrity and independence of Laos and Cambodia and assures the withdrawal of Vietminh forces therefrom. 2) Preserves at least the southern half of Vietnam.... 3) Does not impose on Laos, Cambodia, or retained Vietnam [South Vietnam] any restrictions materially impairing their capacity to maintain stable non-Communist regimes; and especially restrictions impairing their right to maintain adequate forces for internal security, to import arms and to employ foreign advisers. 4) Does not contain political provisions which would risk loss of the retained area to Communist control. 5) Does not exclude the possibility of the ultimate reunification of Vietnam by peaceful means... 6) Provides effective machinery for international supervision of the agreement.”

*Statement issued by a U.S. State Department spokesman, July 11, 1954*

“The United States will not become a party to any agreement which smacks of appeasement. Nor will we acknowledge the legitimacy of Communist control of any segment of Southeast Asia.”

*Statement by the spokesman of the U.S. delegation at the Geneva Conference, July 18, 1954*

“If the agreements arrived at here are of a character which my government is able to respect, the United States is prepared to declare unilaterally that...it will refrain from the threat or use of force to disturb them, and would view any renewal of the aggression in violation of the agreements with grave concern.”