12. Taking Up the White Man's Burden: Two American Views (1954)*

By John Foster Dulles and Richard M. Nixon

In the spring of 1954, as French defeat in Indochina became more certain, leading government officials such as Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and Vice-President Richard Nixon campaigned for the United States to take France's place. To save the "free world" from communism, they argued, US intervention might be necessary, especially because, in the words of the Vice-President, "the Vietnamese lack the ability to conduct a war by themselves or govern themselves."

As France capitulated in Geneva in mid-1954, the Eisenhower Administration decided to maintain an anti-communist government in southern Vietnam and to harass secretly the victorious Communist government, which had been ceded authority over northern Vietnam. To provide a legal framework for these policies, in August 1954 the National Security Council recommended the negotiation of a collective security treaty for Southeast Asia. Such a treaty would, the NSC memorandum pointed out, "provide . . . a legal basis to the President to order an attack on Communist China in the event it commits armed aggression which endangers the peace, safety, and vital interests of the United States," allow for American assistance to be offered to a "legitimate local government which requires assistance to defeat local Communist subversion or rebellion not constituting armed attack," and allow the United States "freedom to use nuclear weapons" if necessary.1 One month later, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) was established, pledging the governments of Australia, France, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand, Great Britain, and the United States to come to one another's aid and, of more immediate importance, to the aid of Cambodia, Laos, "and the free territory under the jurisdiction of the State of Vietnam," none of which was a signatory.2 The legal framework and the public rationale for full American intervention in Vietnam were now in place.

* A. Opposition to d Secretary of State

. . . If the Communists take a substantial part thereof against other free peoples, The propagandists of communism is to dominate all of Southeast Asia. The United States has stepped up their support of the Chinese Communist Red Army and in open aggression against their aggression. President Eisenhower's pre-war armistice would not apply to that aggression by the United States. Congress has approved the war effort and under all the circumstances the United States position.

Under the condition that the free peoples of the world must, and will, be united in their united action. This will not be difficult to face. The free nations want peace in the current round of events. Peace has to be worked for. . . .


3. The reference is to the stru
A. Opposition to the Spread of Communism by Whatever Means: Secretary of State John Foster Dulles

...If the Communist forces won uncontested control over Indochina or any substantial part thereof, they would surely resume the same pattern of aggression against other free peoples in the area.

The propagandists of Red China and Russia make it apparent that the purpose is to dominate all of Southeast Asia. . . .

The United States has shown in many ways its sympathy for the gallant struggle being waged in Indochina by French forces and those of the Associated States. Congress has enabled us to provide material aid to the established governments and their peoples. Also, our diplomacy has sought to deter Communist China from open aggression in that area.

President Eisenhower, in his address of April 16, 1958, explained that a Korean armistice would be a fraud if it merely released aggressive armies for attack elsewhere. I said last September that if Red China sent its own army into Indochina, that would result in grave consequences which might not be confined to Indochina.

Recent statements have been designed to impress upon potential aggressors that aggression might lead to action at places and by means of free-world choosing, so that aggression would cost more than it could gain.

The Chinese Communists have, in fact, avoided the direct use of their own Red Armies in open aggression against Indochina. They have, however, largely stepped up their support of the aggression in that area. Indeed, they promote that aggression by all means short of open invasion.

Under all the circumstances it seems desirable to clarify further the United States position.

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, must 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 be resolute today.

The free nations want peace. However, peace is not had merely by wanting it. Peace has to be worked for and planned for. Sometimes it is necessary to take risks to win peace just as it is necessary in war to take risks to win victory. The chances for peace are usually bettered by letting a potential aggressor know in advance where his aggression could lead him.

I hope that these statements which I make here tonight will serve the cause of peace. . . .

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3. The reference is to the struggle against the Viet Minh.—eds.
B. Fear of Impending French Defeat: Vice-President Richard M. Nixon

... What is to be done [about the war in Indochina]? For one, the problem is not one of materials and wasn't four months ago. 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, as we were tired of Korea. Therefore, additional man power must come from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, particularly Vietnam. 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 got 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 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 forces.

Therefore, the United States must go to Geneva and take a positive stand for united action by the free world. Otherwise it will have to take on the problem alone and try to sell it to the others.

French pressure will be exerted at the conference (beginning April 26) for negotiation and the end of the fighting. The British will take a similar position, because of mounting Labor Party pressure and defections in the Conservative ranks. The British do not want to antagonize Red China, which they have recognized.

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. Communist intransigence in Korea perhaps will teach the French and the British the futility of negotiation and bring them over to the plan of “united action” proposed by Secretary of State Dulles [i.e., the SEATO treaty—eds.].

It should be emphasized that if Indochina went Communist, Red pressures would increase on Malaya, 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.

13. Vietnam 1954*

By General Vo Ngï

In the wake of the French de France, during which time the Dien Bien Phu, near the Lao nie de l’Indochine (Paris, for his Vietnamese counterpart recent US military men, who weren’t allowed to win, Navu front that hampered French j
Quite a contrary analysi. defeated the French. Vo Ngï
Democratic Republic of Vietn

The Resistance War.

Following the success of aggression from the French de France [Reading 6—eds.] heightening of vigilance, Fatherland.

The French colonial power had not yet been c of us. Never had our co Japaneae had capitulation Kí shek army which land power. In the South, Briti and tried to help the Fre The signing of the Pe ed.s.] between the French strategy. Due to the conce

*Excerpts from Vo Nguyen Giaq House, 1961), passim.

1. Henri Navarre, Le Temps des ve