

Domino Theory Principle, Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1954

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The President's News Conference of April 7, 1954

The President.

We will go right to questions this morning, ladies and gentlemen.

Q. Merriman Smith, United Press:

Mr. President, concerning the hydrogen bomb, are we going to continue to make bigger and bigger H-bombs and, as the H-bomb program continues or progresses, are we learning anything that is directly applicable to the peacetime uses of atomic energy?

The President.

No, we have no intention of going into a program of seeing how big these can be made. I don't know whether the scientists would place any limit; and, therefore, you hear these remarks about "blow-out," which, I think, is even blowing a hole through the entire atmosphere.

Q. (Questioner unidentified):

What was that, sir?

The President.

I say you hear statements, comments like "blow-out" and all of that sort of thing.

We know of no military requirement that could lead us into the production of a bigger bomb than has already been produced.

Now, with respect to the potentiality of this development for peace-time use, our people study, I think in almost every aspect of human affairs, how this whole atomic science, this nuclear science, can be applied to peacetime uses.

It would be rash to say that the hydrogen bomb doesn't add to the possibilities; yet, at the moment, I know of no direct connection or direct application of the hydrogen bomb principle to peacetime power.

I asked that very question of the scientists, and they gave an answer as nearly as I have just stated it as I can recall.

Q. Walter Ridder, St. Paul Pioneer Press and Dispatch:

Sir, on that subject, a certain Senator said last night there had been a delay of 18 months in the production of the hydrogen bomb, and suggested it was due to subversion in Government. Do you know anything about that?

The President.

No, I know nothing about it. I never heard of any delay on my part, never heard of it.

Q. Mrs. May Craig, New England Papers:

Mr. President, aren't you afraid that Russia will make bigger hydrogen bombs before we do?

The President:

No, I am not afraid of it. I don't know of any reason for building a bigger bomb than you find to represent as great an efficiency as is needed or desirable, so I don't know what bigger ones would do.

Q. Joseph Harsch, Christian Science Monitor and NBC:

Mr. President, would you care to say anything to us about the loyalty and patriotism of Edward R. Murrow?

The President.

I am going to say nothing at all about that.

First of all, I don't comment about people, I don't comment about things of which I know nothing.

I will say this: I have known this man for many years; he has been one of the men I consider my friend among your profession. That is what I do know about him.

So far as indulging is philosophical discussion, I can't remember any instance; but I do say that he has been one of those that over the years, in the war, when he was working in London, and so on, I always thought of him as a friend.

Q. Robert Richards, Copley Press:

Mr. President, would you mind commenting on the strategic importance of Indochina to the free world? I think there has been, across the country, some lack of understanding on just what it means to us.

The President.

You have, of course, both the specific and the general when you talk about such things.

First of all, you have the specific value of a locality in its production of materials that the world needs.

Then you have the possibility that many human beings pass under a dictatorship that is inimical to the free world.

Finally, you have broader considerations that might follow what you would call the "falling domino" principle. You have a row of dominoes set up, you knock over the first one, and what will happen to the last one is the certainty that it will go over very quickly. So you could have a beginning of a disintegration that would have the most profound influences.

Now, with respect to the first one, two of the items from this particular area that the world uses are tin and tungsten. They are very important. There are others, of course, the rubber plantations and so on.

Then with respect to more people passing under this domination, Asia, after all, has already lost some 450

million of its peoples to the Communist dictatorship, and we simply can't afford greater losses.

But when we come to the possible sequence of events, the loss of Indochina, of Burma, of Thailand, of the Peninsula, and Indonesia following, now you begin to talk about areas that not only multiply the disadvantages that you would suffer through loss of materials, sources of materials, but now you are talking really about millions and millions and millions of people.

Finally, the geographical position achieved thereby does many things. It turns the so-called island defensive chain of Japan, Formosa, of the Philippines and to the southward; it moves in to threaten Australia and New Zealand.

It takes away, in its economic aspects, that region that Japan must have as a trading area or Japan, in turn, will have only one place in the world to go -- that is, toward the Communist areas in order to live.

So, the possible consequences of the loss are just incalculable to the free world.

Q. Diosdado M. Yap, Manila Chronicle:

Mr. President, next Friday marks the 12th anniversary of the fall of Bataan. Would you care to make any comment on it?

The President.

Well, I have been asked by General Romulo to send a message to a meeting, which I have done. If I haven't already signed it, I have been working on it, I know that.

Q. Raymond Brandt, St. Louis Post-Dispatch:

Mr. President, what response has Secretary Dulles and the administration got to the request for united action in Indochina?

The President.

So far as I know, there are no positive reactions as yet, because the time element would almost forbid.

The suggestions we have, have been communicated; and we will have communications on them in due course, I should say.

Q. Robert G. Spivack, New York Post:

Mr. President, do you agree with Senator Kennedy that independence must be guaranteed the people of Indochina in order to justify an all-out effort there?

The President.

Well, I don't know, of course, exactly in what way a Senator was talking about this thing.

I will say this: for many years, in talking to different countries, different governments, I have tried to insist on this principle: no outside country can come in and be really helpful unless it is doing something that the local people want.

Now, let me call your attention to this independence theory. Senator Lodge, on my instructions, stood up in the United Nations and offered one country independence if they would just simply pass a resolution saying

they wanted it, or at least said, "I would work for it." They didn't accept it. So I can't say that the associated states want independence in the sense that the United States is independent. I do not know what they want.

I do say this: the aspirations of those people must be met, otherwise there is in the long run no final answer to the problem.

Q. Joseph Dear, Capital Times:

Do you favor bringing this Indochina situation before the United Nations?

The President.

I really can't say. I wouldn't want to comment at too great a length at this moment, but I do believe this: this is the kind of thing that must not be handled by one nation trying to act alone. We must have a concert of opinion, and a concert of readiness to react in whatever way is necessary.

Of course, the hope is always that it is peaceful conciliation and accommodation of these problems.

Q. Charles von Fremd, CBS Television:

I would like to go back to the A- and H-bomb matter for just a moment, sir. Due to the concern and the arguments in the British House of Commons in the past week, do you think it possible or wise to have a renewal of the passage of atomic energy information or hydrogen information between the two countries?

The President.

Well, exactly how much information you have to pass back and forth, I am not sure.

This whole development has a curious history, and, I believe, the Prime Minister tried to trace some of the several steps the other day in the House of Commons.

Originally, I think it was clearly evident that there was supposed to be a complete exchange of information. Then there was a new agreement made in '48 -- intervening was the Atomic Energy Act. And now, the Atomic Energy Commission is -- I don't know whether it has as yet presented the bill, but it has been working on a bill, at least, you might say to modernize the law under which we operate.

The original bill, let me call your attention, was drawn under the theory we could keep the secret of the manufacture of the atomic bomb. Well, the second that went out and was disproven, then you have a new condition, and there should be now some revision of law.

As to exactly how much information we should exchange, I am not certain; but I do know this: when it comes down to the exchanging of the information that is necessary in order for allies to work together intelligently, both for the prevention of war or in the tragic occurrence of war for operating efficiently, that much, of course, we must do now.

Q. Alice Johnson, Seattle Times:

Mr. President, last week the Senate passed a measure enabling both Hawaii and Alaska to achieve statehood. If the House should pass that measure, would you veto the bill?

The President.

I believe I have made a rule here never to predict what I will do. I am sometimes like the man, you know,

who in a speech was introduced a little bit overgenerously; and he said, " I am even going to be interested in what I am going to say, because there certainly have been great predictions made about it." [Laughter]

Here we have a situation for which I have stood for a long time, Hawaiian statehood.

I thought there were certain considerations of national security, and so on, that made the other case a separate one.

If these bills are put together, I will have to take a look at them at the time and study and decide what I believe to be right at that moment. I just can't predict.

Q. Mrs. Johnson:

May I ask one more allied question? Governor Heintzleman of Alaska recently suggested that statehood should be given only to the populated area of Alaska. Would you favor such a move as that?

The President.

I don't know whether I would favor it. It certainly is a different problem; and I would look at it with an entirely different viewpoint than I would if we had all those outer reaches, barren outer reaches, that are lying on the Bering Sea and the Arctic Ocean, included. It would be a different problem in my mind.

Q. Ethel Payne, Defender Publications:

Mr. President, in your housing message to Congress on January 25th you said the administrative policies governing the operations of the several housing agencies must be, and will be, materially strengthened and augmented in order to assure equal opportunity for all of our citizens to acquire, within their means, good and well-located homes. Then there was a further reference to the misuse of slum clearance laws to dislocate persons. I would like to know what administrative regulations have been issued by the housing agencies to implement this part of the message.

The President.

You have asked a question that I will have to ask Mr. Hagerty to look up for next week. I know this: I know that every administrative part of Government knows my policy and is trying to do it. Now, they may be slow getting around to it, sometimes.

Q. Robert Clark, International News Service:

Secretary Dulles has said that the Chinese Communists are awfully close to open aggression in Indochina. Can you tell us what action we are prepared to take if their intervention reaches the point of open aggression?

The President.

No, Mr. Clark, I couldn't answer that one for the simple reason that we have got this whole troublesome question now under study by a group of people.

The only thing I can say is that here is a problem that is of the utmost moment to all of us, not only the United States, to the free world. It is the kind of thing to which there is more attention given, I guess, at the given moment of real acute occurrence than almost any other thing.

It is getting study day by day, and I can't tell you what would be the exact reaction.

Q. Sarah McClendon, El Paso Times:

Sir, I found many Senators and House members this week who said that while you were allaying their fears, that Secretary Dulles was making them fear more, and I wonder if he is going to clear his statements on Indochina with you?

The President.

So far as I know, Secretary Dulles has never made an important pronouncement without not only conferring and clearing with me, but sitting down and studying practically word by word what he is to say.

Now, I am not aware of any antagonism between the statements he has made and I have made.

I have plead with America to look facts in the face; I have plead with them not to minimize what the possibilities of the situation are, but to realize that we are 160 million of the most productive and the most intelligent people on earth; therefore, why are we going around being too scared?

Now, on the other hand, we would be completely foolish not to see what these facts are and what their potentialities are.

I see those two statements a completely compatible, not as incompatible.

Q. Marvin Arrowsmith, Associated Press:

Mr. President, you have touched on this, but I wonder if you could tell us whether there is any truth to these reports in the last couple of days that the United States is asking some of the other free nations to join in a joint declaration warning Communist China against any aggression in Southeast Asia?

The President.

No; in approach, Mr. Arrowsmith, you call attention to the problem and say that this looks like a place where the interests of all of us are involved, and now let us talk this over. You don't propose the answer before you study it, put it that way.

Q. Kenneth Scheibel, Gannett Newspapers:

Sir, could you tell us how soon you expect to name a successor to Mr. Warren, the Comptroller General?

The President.

No, I can't tell you.

Q. Henri Pierre, Le Monde (Paris):

Mr. President, would you say that the last statement of the Secretary of State of last week about Indochina has improved the chance of reaching a negotiated solution at Geneva of the Indochinese controversy?

The President.

Your question is really, do I think there is a good chance of reaching a negotiated solution?

Q. Mr. Pierre:

That is right.

The President.

Well, I wouldn't class the chances as good, no, not one that the free world would consider adequate to the situation.

I must say, let me make clear again, I am certain the United States, as a whole, its Congress and the executive portions of its Government, are ready to move just as far as prudence will allow in seeking any kind of conciliation or negotiated agreement that will ease any of the problems of this troubled world. But one thing: we are not going to overstep the line of prudence in keeping ourselves secure, knowing that the agreements we made have some means of being enforced. We are not simply going to take words. There must be some way of making these things fact and deed.

Q. Robert Riggs, Louisville Courier-Journal:

Does the executive branch want any action by Congress now about Indochina?

The President.

Not at this moment. I should point out, with all the sincerity I have, there is nothing partisan about this problem. There is nothing, so far as I know, in which the executive branch and the Congress are apart. We not only must confer upon the broadest scale with the leaders of Congress as we proceed toward a decision, we go just as far as they would think it would be necessary in such a conference. If some specific authority or anything else were necessary, it would be asked for after the leaders had already agreed on a bipartisan basis this is what we should do.

I know of nobody that is trying to escape his responsibility in this whole business, because we realize that it is America and the free world we are talking about, and nothing else.

Q. Martin Agronsky, American Broadcasting Company:

Mr. President, in response to the question about whether you knew anything of Senator McCarthy's charge that the building of the H-bomb had been delayed for 18 months as a result of Communist influence in our Government, you replied you didn't know anything about that. That might leave the implication, sir, that there is some possibility of truth in that charge. It is a very serious charge, of actually high treason in Government.

The President.

I don't know. As a matter of fact, I don't know of any speech, first of all; I get from here the first knowledge that there was a speech. But, secondly, I have been very close to the Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission. He tries to keep me informed not only of present developments but of history. He has never mentioned such a thing as you speak of, and I gave a perfectly honest answer: I never heard of it.

Q. James Patterson, New York News:

Mr. President, as the last resort in Indochina, are we prepared to go it alone?

The President.

Again you are bringing up questions that I have explained in a very definite sense several times this

morning.

I am not saying what we are prepared to do because there is a Congress, and there are a number of our friends all over this world that are vitally engaged.

I know what my own convictions on this matter are; but until the thing has been settled and properly worked out with the people who also bear responsibilities, I cannot afford to be airing them everywhere, because it sort of stultifies negotiation which is often necessary.

Q. John W. Vandercook, American Broadcasting Company:

Going to a change of subject, sir, the most recent figures of the Bureau of Census have indicated that possibly unemployment is leveling out; that statement has been made. Would you care to say, sir, whether you have reckoned a specific figure or proportion of unemployment which might be regarded as acceptable or permissible as an average in the American life?

The President.

Well, in the economic conferences, we talk about that possibility a very great deal. But let us remember, the economy of America is not a static thing; you cannot say 6 percent equals so-and-so, and that is disaster, and something else is prosperity. It is a fluid thing, and you must keep touch with it.

Now, the last figures I saw, apparently the total of employment rose about 50,000 in March and apparently unemployment rose about 50,000, sort of canceling each other out, but showing a very definite flattening out of the curve of the rise of unemployment.

There are other rather encouraging signs in the economy. The thing is now, I think, to keep in touch with it day by day to be ready to move with everything you have, to give it a boost in the right direction. But again, as in all other things, let's don't be panicky about it, let's be straightforward. This is one field where I have no intention of trying to conceal anything from the American public that we find out. It is just what do we do at any given moment, and it is not always easy, but we are doing our best.

Q. Mr. Vandercook:

May I ask a related question, sir?

The President.

Yes.

Q. Mr. Vandercook:

Do you have in mind so far any intention of proposing legislation to assist the States to continue unemployment benefits beyond the 6 months' period, as that 6 months, in many instances, is running out?

The President.

I have forgotten for sure whether that was in the bill that went to the Congress or not. I remember the subject was discussed by Mrs. Hobby in front of me, and I would have to ask Mr. Hagerty to give you the exact thing as to whether it was actually in the bill.

Merriman Smith, United Press: Thank you, Mr. President.