Indochina - Views of the United States on the Eve of the Geneva Conference: Address by the Secretary of State, March 29, 1954 (1)

This provides a timely occasion for outlining the Administration's thinking about two related matters—Indochina and the Chinese Communist regime.

I

Indochina

Indochina is important for many reasons. First—and always first are the human values. About 30 million people are seeking for themselves the dignity of self-government. Until a few years ago, they formed merely a French dependency. Now, their three political units—Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia—are exercising a considerable measure of independent political authority within the French Union. Each of the three is now recognized by the United States(2) and by more than 30 other nations. They signed the Japanese Peace Treaty (3) with us. Their independence is not yet complete. But the French Government last July (4) declared its intention to complete that ins independence, and negotiations to consummate that pledge are actively under way.

The United States is watching this development with close attention and great sympathy. We do not forget that we were a colony that won its freedom. We have sponsored in the Philippines a conspicuously successful development of political independence. We feel a sense of kinship with those everywhere who yearn for freedom.

Communist Imperialism

The Communists are attempting to prevent the orderly development of independence and to confuse the issue before the world. The Communists have, in these matters, a regular line which Stalin laid down in 1924.

The scheme is to whip up the spirit of nationalism so that it becomes violent. That is done by professional agitators. Then the violence is enlarged by Communist military and technical leadership and the provision of military supplies. In these ways, international Communism gets a stranglehold on the people and it uses that power to "amalgamate" the peoples into the Soviet orbit.

"Amalgamation" is Lenin's and Stalin's word to describe their process.

"Amalgamation" is now being attempted in Indochina under the ostensible leadership of Ho Chi Minh. He was indoctrinated in Moscow. He became an associate of the Russian, Borodin(5) when the latter was organizing the Chinese Communist Party which was to bring China into the Soviet orbit. Then Ho transferred his activities to Indochina

Those fighting under the banner of Ho Chi Minh have largely been trained and equipped in Communist China. They are supplied with artillery and ammunition through the Soviet-Chinese Communist bloc. Captured material shows that much of it was fabricated by the Skoda Munition Works in Czechoslovakia and transported across Russia and Siberia and then sent through China into Vietnam. Military supplies for the Communist armies have been pouring into Vietnam at a steadily increasing rate.

Military and technical guidance is supplied by an estimated 2,000 Communist Chinese. They function with the forces of Ho Chi Minh in key positions—in staff sections of the High Command, at the division level and in specialized units such as signal, engineer, artillery and transportation.

In the present stage, the Communists in Indochina use nationalistic anti-French slogans to win local support. But if they achieved military or political success, it is certain that they would subject the People to a cruel Communist dictatorship taking its orders from Peiping and Moscow.

The Scope of the Danger

The tragedy would not stop there. 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.

Southeast Asia is the so-called "rice bowl" which helps to feed the densely populated region that extends from India to Japan. It is rich in many raw materials, such as tin, oil, rubber and iron ore. It offers industrial Japan potentially important markets and sources of raw materials.

The area has great strategic value. Southeast Asia is astride the most direct and best developed sea and air routes between the Pacific and South Asia. It has major naval and air bases. Communist control of Southeast Asia would carry a grave threat to the Philippines, Australia and New Zealand, with whom we have treaties of mutual assistance. (6) The entire Western Pacific area, including the so-called "offshore island chain", would be strategically endangered.

President Eisenhower appraised the situation last Wednesday when he said that the area is of "transcendent importance". (7)

The United States Position
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, 1953,[8] 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.[9]

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.[10]

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, 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 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.7

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

II

**Communist China**

Let me now discuss our political relations with Red China, taking first the matter of recognition.

The United States does not recognize the Chinese Communist regime. That is well known. But the reasons seem not so well known. Some think that there are no reasons and that we are actuated purely by emotion. Your Government believes that its position is soberly rational.

**Non-Recognition**

Let me first recall that diplomatic recognition is a voluntary act. One country has no right to demand recognition by another. Generally, it is useful that there should be diplomatic intercourse between those who exercise de facto governmental authority and it is well established that recognition does not imply moral approval.

**President Monroe, in his famous message to Congress,** denounced the expansionist and despotic system of Czarist Russia and its allies. But he said that it would nevertheless be our policy "to consider the government de facto as the legitimate government for us".[11] That has indeed been the general United States policy, and I believe that it is a sound general policy. However, where it does not serve our interests, we are free to vary from it.

In relation to Communist China, we are forced to take account of the fact that the Chinese Communist regime has been consistently and viciously hostile to the United States.

A typical Chinese Communist pamphlet reads: "We Must Hate America, because She is the Chinese People'sImplacable Enemy"; "We Must Despise America because it is a Corrupt Imperialist Nation, the World Center of Reaction and Decadency"; "We Must Look down upon America because She is a Paper Tiger and Entirely Vulnerable to Defeat".

By print, by radio, by drama, by pictures, with all the propaganda skills which Communism has devised, such themes are propagated by the Red rulers. They vent their hatred by barbarous acts, such as seizures and imprisonments of Americans.

Those responsible for United States policy must ask and answer: "Will it help our country if, by recognition, we give increased prestige and influence to a regime that actively attacks our vital interests?" I can find only the answer "No".

**Admission to the United Nations**

Let us turn now to the matter of seating Red China in the United Nations. By the **Charter**, membership is supposed to be limited to "peace-loving" states. Therefore, it is relevant to recall that the Chinese Communist regime became an aggressor in the latter part of 1950. Its armies invaded Korea and waged war against the United Nations Command. They contributed largely to the killing, wounding or losing in action of about 500,000 soldiers of the United Nations Command, including over 100,000 Americans.

The United Nations General Assembly on February 1, 1951 voted, 44 to 7, that the Chinese People's Republic was guilty of aggression in Korea. [12] It called upon it to withdraw its forces from Korea. But they still remain.

It is true that the Chinese Communist Command concluded a Korean Armistice.[13] But that was not a Chinese Communist good-will offering. It was something that the United Nations Command won. The Communists signed only after desperate and bloody final efforts had failed to break the allied line, and only after the United Nations Command had made it apparent that the conflict, if continued, would bring into jeopardy valuable Communist military and industrial assets in nearby Manchuria.

The Chinese Communists' continuing lack of genuine will for peace is being demonstrated in Indochina.

As one of the United Nations members who must pass on representation, we must ask "Will it serve the interests of world order to bring into the United Nations a regime which is a convicted aggressor, which has not purged itself from that aggression, and which continues to promote the use of force in violation of the principles of the United Nations?" I can find only the answer "No".

Free China on Formosa

There is still another aspect of this China matter. We must not forget that the National Government of China continues to function in Formosa and millions of free Chinese are gathered there under its jurisdiction. It has the allegiance of many more. They have been our loyal friends and allies when, during World War II, we needed each other.

Should the free nations facilitate and encourage the bloody liquidation by the Chinese Communists of these free Chinese on Formosa? To me again, the only answer is "No".

Experience with Communist Promises

Some say that the United States should recognize the Chinese Communist regime and welcome it to the United Nations, in reliance of promises in relation to Korea and Indochina.

The United States must judge that proposal on the basis of past experience.

The United States agreed to recognize the Soviet regime in 1933 relying on its promise, in the so-called Litvinov agreement, to avoid and prevent political action from Russia against our political or social order. We performed and granted recognition. But the promises we received were vain.

At Yalta, in February 1945, Britain and the United States gave sanction to the fact of dominant Soviet influence in Central Europe. They did so on the basis of a Soviet agreement that the peoples of liberated Europe would have the right "to choose the form of Government under which they will live", and that in Poland there would be "free and unfettered elections as soon as possible". But those promises we received were vain.

There was also a Yalta Agreement with reference to the Far East. The United States agreed to obtain for the Soviet Union control of Port Arthur, Dairen and the Manchurian Railroad. In exchange, the Soviet Union promised to support the National Government of China. This arrangement was consummated at Moscow in August 1945. Then the Soviet Government acquired from China the Manchurian assets that had been promised it. In return it gave a 30-year engagement to render to China moral support and aid in military supplies and other material resources, such support and aid to be entirely given to the National Government as the central government of China.

Having gained what it wanted the Soviet Government then moved promptly to assist the Chinese Communist regime in its efforts to overthrow the National Government. It gave to the Chinese Communist forces vast stocks of military supplies and other material resources which it had promised to give entirely to the National Government.

In this matter again we gave performance. But the corresponding Communist promises proved vain.

Our experience with Chinese Communist promises is limited because we have with them only one agreement. That is the Korean Armistice. The United Nations Command has reported that the Communists have violated it 40 times. That only tells part of the story, for the basic violation is that the Swedish and Swiss members of the Supervisory Commission are denied an adequate opportunity to supervise the North and to detect Communist violations.

The United States recognizes that few nations have a record which is not marred by some violations of agreements. Also, we recognize that nothing human is immutable. Surely, there is nothing vindictive or implacable about the American people. Indeed, few people are as ready as we to forgive and forget. But it would be reckless for us to ignore the events of recent years which have filled our archives with vain promises. We are not in the market for more.

It is now the policy of the United States not to exchange United States performance for Communist promises.

That United States position was made clear at the recent Berlin Conference. There, by standing firm, I finally obtained the reluctant agreement by Mr. Molotov that the Geneva Conference would not be a "Big Five Conference" and that the invitation to Geneva would itself specify that neither the invitation to, nor the holding of, that conference should be deemed to imply diplomatic recognition where it had not already been accorded.

The Chinese Communist regime has been invited only to discuss Korea and Indochina, where it is in fact a force of aggression which we cannot ignore. It gets no diplomatic recognition from us by the fact of its presence at Geneva. I said at Berlin: "It . . . is one thing to recognize evil as a fact. It is another thing to take evil to one’s breast and call it good." That we shall not do.

The Dangers Ahead

The United States Delegation will go to Geneva in an effort to bring about a united and independent Korea, from which Communist China will have withdrawn its army of invasion. Also, we hope that any Indochina discussion will serve to bring the Chinese Communists to see the danger of their apparent design for the conquest of Southeast Asia, so that they will cease and desist. We shall not, however, be disposed to give Communist China what it wants from us, merely to buy its promises of future good behavior.

Some, perhaps, would have it otherwise. But we dare not forget that during the period when we accepted Communist promises at their face value, and took for granted their peaceful intentions, the danger steadily grew.

We can, I think, take a lesson from Dien Bien Phu. For some days there has seemed to be a lull. But in fact the danger has steadily mounted. The enemy sappers have never ceased their work. They have burrowed and tunneled to gain forward positions so that the inner citadels can be subjected to mass assault from close positions.

Today the free world also feels a sense of lull. The danger of general war seems to have receded. I hope that that is so. If it is so, it is because the free nations saw the danger and moved unitedly, with courage and decision, to meet it.

There is, however, no reason for assuming that the danger has permanently passed. There is nothing to prove that the Soviet Communist rulers accepted peace as permanent, if permanent peace would block their ambitions. They continue unceasingly to burrow and tunnel to advance their positions against the citadels of freedom.

In Europe, Soviet Russia holds its grip on Eastern Germany and Austria and maneuvers recklessly to prevent reconciliation between France and Germany. In Asia, the whole area from Japan and Korea to Southeast Asia is troubled by Communist efforts at penetration.

As against such efforts, there is only one defense-eternal vigilance, sound policies and high courage.
The United States is a member of a goodly company who in the past have stood together in the face of great peril and have overcome it. If we are true to that past, we can face the future with hope and confidence.


(2) See statement of Feb. 7, 1950, by the Department of State. Back


(5) Mikhail Markovich Borodin, political adviser to the Kuomintang (1923-1927) and head of Communist government at Hankow (1924-1927). Back

(6) See the treaties of Aug. 30, 1951, and Sept. 1, 1951; supra, pp. 873-875 and 878-880. Back


(8) Supra, pp. 65-71. Back

(9) Address of Sept. 2, 1953. Back

(10) e. g., Secretary Dulles' address of Jan. 12, 1954; "The way to deter aggression is for the free community to be willing and able to respond vigorously at places and means of its own choosing" (supra, p. 80). Back

(11) Message to Congress, Dec. 2, 1823: "Our policy in regard to Europe which was adopted at an early stage of the wars which have so long agitated that quarter of the globe, nevertheless remains the same, which is, not to interfere in the internal concerns of any of its powers; to consider the government de facto as the legitimate government for us; to cultivate friendly relations with it, and to preserve those relations by a frank, firm, and manly policy, meeting, in all instances, the just claims of every power, submitting to injuries from none." (Memorandum on the Monroe Doctrine [Department of State publication 37; 1930], p. 103.) Back

(12) General Assembly Res. 498 (V); infra., pp. 2608-2609. Back

(13) Armistice agreement of July 27 1953; supra, pp. 724-750. Back


(16) See the agreement regarding Japan, signed at the Crimea Conference, Feb. 11, 1945, ibid., pp. 33-34. Back

(17) Treaty of Aug. 14, 1945, and related agreements; United States Relations with China, with Special Reference to the Period 1944-1949 (Department of State publication 3573; 1949), pp. 585-596. Back


(19) See infra, pp. 2715-2728. Back

(20) i. e., the Geneva conference on the problems of Korea and Indochina. Back

(21) See the quadripartite communiqué of Feb. 18, 1954. Back


(23) The French-held bastion in Indochina under siege by the forces of the Viet Minh. Back

Source:
American Foreign Policy 1950-1955
Basic Documents Volumes I and II
Department of State Publication 6446
General Foreign Policy Series 117