

Cold War Policy and the Vietnam War Eisenhower Cabinet

Introduction

President Dwight D. Eisenhower was elected first in 1953 and served until 1961 as the 34th president of the United States. Before his time in presidential office, Eisenhower was a five star general in WWII and named supreme commander of the Allied Expeditionary Forces. Eisenhower was the commander who orchestrated Operation Overlord, the allied invasion at Normandy, most commonly known as D-Day.

Eisenhower's presidency was riddled with Cold War and communist tensions. During his campaign and presidency, Republican Eisenhower took a very anti-communist stance on foreign policy. Eisenhower's main goal in dealing with communism was to eliminate any influence that it had on non-communist countries and if possible, stop communism in the countries where it already existed. In order to explain to the general American public why communism was such a problem, Eisenhower coined the Falling Domino Theory. He explained,

“you have...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.”¹

His theory was that if one country became communist then, with its influence and the strong pull that some believe communism has, the countries surrounding the original communist country would topple under the pressure. When describing the Domino Theory, Eisenhower had the country of Vietnam in mind. They are falling under the pressure of China and the Soviet Union. The close relations between Vietnam and its neighbors, especially following the French colonization of the area, poses a threat to the free countries of East and Southeast Asia. Without the help of the United States, these countries, and possibly the rest of the world, may fall to communism.

History of the Issue

World War Two left most of the world devastated and looking for a way to solve the problems that were left behind. Even 10 years later, the world is still trying to grapple with the aftereffects of the massive war. Following the war, the colonies in Africa, Asia, and Latin America were fighting for their freedom from the colonizing powers of Europe, including Britain, France, Portugal, Spain, and the Netherlands. In order to cope with the devastation that the wars created in the newly freed countries and the ones devastated by WWII, people were looking for governments that created stability and at the forefront, communism seemed like the answer.

In Europe, the United States wanted to do whatever was possible to stop communism from spreading. Eastern Europe was already under the control of the Soviet Union through decisions made at the Yalta Conference previous to the end of the war, but the US pumped billions of dollars

¹ Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Domino Theory Principle*, April 7, 1954, Public Papers of the President Dwight D. Eisenhower, accessed August 15, 2015, <http://coursesa.matrix.msu.edu/~hst306/documents/domino.html>.

into Greece and Turkey and other Western European countries through the Marshall plan. The money and time paid off in Western Europe, seeing as none of those countries became communist. When the United States recognized their plan as successful in Europe, they tried out a similar plan in East and Southeast Asia.

The Soviet Union had just come out of a revolution with a newly formed communist government and were pushing China onto the same path. To begin the new plan in Asia, the US gave 2 billion dollars to the Chinese nationalists, set up in Taiwan, who were fighting the Chinese Communist Party. The CCP won the war against the nationalists in 1949 by appealing to greatest population in China, peasants. This victory made the American people fearful because the government had let China go “red.” They thought that if such a big country could turn communist, then what would keep the rest of the world from turning to the same communist policies, paralleling Eisenhower’s later “falling domino” theory.

In June 1950, the US created a defense perimeter in east Asia that stretched from just above Japan to the bottom of Philippines. This perimeter was a way for the US to specifically define a line where we are willing to defend against communism. Japan was of special interest to the United States because of the millions of dollars that we placed back into their economy following the war and with the US occupation ending in just 2 years, the country wanted to ensure that the Japanese government remained democratic after we had left.

In the same year that the defense perimeter was drawn, North Korea, under the direction of China and the Soviet Union, invaded South Korea as an act of aggression. Previously, the United States had created a defense perimeter that bordered Korea in order to protect Japan from communism. The US saw North Korea’s invasion as a direct threat so the country immediately sent 250,000 men to try to reunify Korea. Near the beginning of the conflict, North Korea pushed the South Koreans all the way to the southern border of Korea with the help of Soviet soldiers. In response the United States sent more soldiers and began nuclear threats. The policy of nuclear threats, called nuclear deterrence, was a way for the US to exert its power over less influential and militarily strong nations. The United States was able to push North Korea back across the original border and end the conflict with a stalemate.

When Eisenhower entered office, the Korean War was quickly becoming a stalemate and other conflicts were arising, not all directly pertaining to communism. Many people believed; however, that any interaction with communist nations, indicated an inclination towards becoming a communist nation themselves. Iran, a Muslim state with highly valuable oil reserves, became a country of tension between the west and communist countries. Both sides wanted access to the oil; however, when Mohammed Mossadegh was elected as the first democratic leader of Iran, he nationalized the oil industry which negatively affected both the USSR and the west. In the spring and summer of 1953, the CIA along with British intelligence officers staged a coup to overthrow the democratic government and install an oppressive government controlled by the Shah.

Adding to the conflict in the Middle East, just 3 years later, the Egyptian president, Gamal Abdel Nasser, nationalized the Suez Canal in Egypt. This decision heightened tensions between Britain and France, who owned the company overseeing the Suez Canal, and Egypt. When the conflict first arose, efforts were made to resolve it by peace. One of the US correspondents proposed the creation of SCUA (Suez Canal Users’ Association), which would be a coalition of equal ownership between the 18 nations that used the canal. SCUA was rejected and no other

peaceful means appeared to be successful. In October of 1956, Britain, France, and Israel invaded Egypt and tried to regain control of the canal. With this new violence, the Soviet Union threatened to invade. Eisenhower's administration at the time, believed that when the Soviet Union interfered then Egypt would become communist. In order to avoid this threat, the US urged the UN to pass a cease fire, which was granted in early November of that same year.

During the period following World War Two, as mentioned above, the United States contributed money and men to various causes. In 1946, the countries in Southeast Asia, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, were fighting for independence from France. At this time, communists in Vietnam, called Viet Minh, under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh, were slowly taking control of the country. The United States supported France primarily through monetary means because they believed that if the war continued and France won, then the communists controlling Vietnam would fall. This war lasted until 1954 when the United States, China, France, Britain, Soviet Union, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos all met at the Geneva Conference to fabricate a solution for ending the violence in Indochina.

At the Geneva Conference, many agreements were made. Firstly, Vietnam would be an independent nation, under two leaders, in communist Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh, and in South Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem. The Viet Minh agreed to the accords presented at the conference because in 1956 there would be an election and the communists were sure to win.

Additionally to relieve tensions in South East Asia, NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) created a new treaty under the title of SEATO (Southeast Asia Treaty Organization) in mid-1954. The largest goal of the treaty was to reduce and contain the influence of communism.

Recent Developments

Ngo Dinh Diem thus far, has proved to be a less than competent leader, most of the reasons that he was appointed leader originally were because he continued to show his support for a nationalist government and he was morally more conservative, having grown up Catholic. Diem has even instated himself as a dictator. The native South Vietnamese do not support the new corrupt way that the government is running their country, and some have even begun supporting the communists and forming groups of resistance. Having authority without support in South Vietnam has proved to be harmful to the anti-communist side in Vietnam.

Just recently, the communist government in Hanoi appears to be repairing and regrouping in a much more organized pattern. This has proved problematic as the peasants in South Vietnam look for a stable government to support. A new group has arisen out of these peasants, they call themselves the NLF (National Liberation Front) and are made up of communists. It appears as if the ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) is incapable of retaliating because of the corrupt leadership that Diem has provided for the Army. The decision of how to support the Republic of Vietnam is ours. Without our help, Vietnam could fall to communism and with it the rest of the world, but if we help, we could risk the loss of lives, even greater than those in Korea.

In order to monitor recent Soviet Movements in correlation with worldwide communist advertising, the United States has authorized the use of U-2 spy planes above key areas. These planes are high-altitude fliers that have the ability to reach heights of 70,000 feet. It is estimated that the possibility of the detection of these planes on Soviet radar is almost none because of the height.

The use of these spy planes arose out of concern for the recent announcement that the Soviets possess numerous intercontinental ballistic missiles that pose a direct threat to the United States and their allies.

Republican Point of View

The top priority of the Republican Party is to maintain national security. In order to maintain security, it is important to, maintain the strength of Armed Forces by not repeating the mistakes of Korea and increasing the numbers of well-trained and equipped members in the military. Additionally, it is important to begin disarmament and reduce the amount of weapons of mass destruction. John Foster Dulles, the secretary of State says, "Local defenses must be reinforced by the further deterrent of massive retaliatory power."² Also, increasing the amount of technological and weaponry research is vital to keeping the US ahead of the communist world. The government also needs to be protected by the CIA and FBI from communist activities. If national security and foreign peace is reached then this country will have protected human liberty and the independence of the United States own national independence.

In order to reach peace among foreign nations, then the United States must, maintain close ties with friendly countries to prevent the spread of communism and provide aid to poorer nations so that communism does not spread. In regards to the Middle East, if the conflict between the Palestinians and the Israelis is resolved without Soviet aid, then communism is less likely to spread in those areas. Therefore, that aid must be our responsibility. The United States also needs to take initiative in reuniting Germany and freeing the Eastern Europeans from Soviet control. International morality also needs to be upheld, so the United States will continue to support the UN in denying China a seat. It is impossible to accomplish all of the tasks that the Republican Party has set forth on our own, so if the United States begins to support free international trade and give money to poorer nations, then the world economy will become more stable. If the world economy is more stable, then people will have no need to look towards communism for economic stability and people will be able to defend themselves against the encroaching communists. The United States must also unify the nations that are manipulated under foreign powers, such as Korea and Vietnam. All of this freedom from communism cannot come at the cost of recolonization; countries should have the ability to rule themselves without having to resort to communism.

Democratic Point of View

One of the objectives important to the world at this moment is peace, not just stopping the direct violence, but collaborating to establish a stable economy, strong and friendly international relations, and most importantly powerful and lively world leaders. The United States must remain steady in its pursuits of peace, and not grow weak. Also, friendly interaction between free nations should be upheld. This continued communication will be vital in the United States' plea for peace, it will help the country to approach the problem not only with more imagination, but also with

² "Dulles, John Foster," Eigen's Political and Historical Quotations, accessed September 1, 2015, <http://politicalquotes.org/node/31986>.

determination and strength. This country must rise to the challenges that this new era poses for it, just as democratic presidents before us have done. The greatest force for helping the country meet these goals is the United Nations. With the support of the United States, the UN may have even more power to reach peace in the world.

The Democratic Party supports the disarmament of nuclear weapons, it will eventually lead the United States towards peace and the threats from either side will become fewer and less dangerous. The United States must also support the release of our American soldiers that Communist China has retained. The United States will also build up its national defense systems and research how to better defend this country and train its soldiers. The Democratic Party also fully supports the collective defense programs including NATO.

Conclusion

It is now our duty to decide how to proceed in this war on communism. There is a war brewing in Vietnam, that may, with the support of the United States be stopped, but if the US invests too much, then the war may turn into a repeat of similar efforts in Korea. In order to stem the war in Vietnam before it has even begun, the United States must take into account all aspects of this conflict. The country must consider the Soviet Union, and how this communist machine will respond to any actions that are made in Asia. And also, other Asian nations must be taken care of. The United States cannot risk the spread of communism and with other Asian nations succumbing to communism, China and North Korea, the US must take the utmost care in this situation.

Questions to Consider

- i. Should the US support the war on communism in a strictly monetary way as to prevent the loss of US lives and resources such as in Korea?
- ii. How should the US approach any future conflicts in the Middle East that do not directly pertain to the spread of communism?
- iii. What should the next steps in Vietnam be? Should actual soldiers be sent, instead of solely military advisors?
- iv. Is it possible to maintain national security in the US as a the top priority, while still engaging full force in this war against communism?
- v. How can the US adapt to the ever changing world climate, where it appears as if communism is gaining an even bigger presence, despite the efforts of the United States?
- vi. Little is known about the truth of Khrushchev's claims that the Soviet Union actually possesses ballistic missiles, his might or might not be similar to the United States' plan of nuclear deterrence. How will the country cope if one of the ballistic missiles is released against the US?
- vii. Is the use of U-2 planes beneficial, even if there are unknown risks when US citizens are flying over Soviet land?
- viii. How can the US reduce the influence that communism currently holds on the world?

- ix. What led to the conflict in Korea, that corresponds with the conflict in Vietnam? Could these similarities lead to a possible similarity in the conclusion of the brewing Vietnam War?
- x. Does the US risk foreign communist interference in the Vietnam War if the conflict escalates farther?

Additional Sources

More information on the First Indochina war

- i. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1953-1960/dien-bien-phu>
- ii. <http://www.clemson.edu/caah/history/FacultyPages/EdMoise/viet5.html>
- iii. <http://www.fsmitha.com/h2/ch24t4.htm>

Vietnam War

- i. This source provides some background into the aftermath of Eisenhower's Presidency, so it may influence your decisions on how to proceed with the conflict at hand: <http://millercenter.org/presidentialclassroom/exhibits/exceptional-alliance>
- ii. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/reviews/capsule-review/1993-09-01/trapped-success-eisenhower-administration-and-vietnam-1953-61>

U-2 spy planes

- i. http://www.coldwar.org/articles/60s/u2_incident.asp
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- i. <http://millercenter.org/president/biography/eisenhower-foreign-affairs>
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