

President Eisenhower's News Conference, April 7, 1954, *Public Papers of the Presidents, 1954*, p. 382

* * *

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. *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."

Source: *The Pentagon Papers*, Gravel Edition, Vol. 1 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), p. 597-8