92 - DeConde

Calling the Shots

Eisenhower, Dulles, and Decisionmaking in Asian Policy

1952-1955

B. Dominic Clark
University of California, Santa Barbara
History 195H
Professor Lindemann
Advisor: Professor DeConde
1991-1992

Table of Contents

Introduction

Within recent years, the presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower has been the subject of revision by historians and political scientists. This reevaluation is the result of the recent release of relevant documents, particularly the Whitman file at the Eisenhower library in Abilene, Kansas, and new volumes of *Foreign Relations of the United States*. These collections include formerly classified transcripts of Eisenhower's telephone conversations, written communications between members of the administration, and entries from the president's diaries. Their release has shed new light on the quality of Eisenhower's leadership.

One of the first scholars to explore these new sources was Richard Immerman. In his article "Eisenhower and Dulles: Who Made the Decisions," published in 1979, he presents evidence of a complex relationship between president Eisenhower and secretary of state John Foster Dulles.[1] Previously, the relationship was often described in simplistic terms: Dulles, being of strong personality and brimming with self-confidence, eclipsed the personable but pliant Eisenhower. Immerman makes a convincing case for the need to reevaluate the Eisenhower-Dulles relationship but

---

[1]Richard Immerman, "Eisenhower and Dulles: Who Made the Decisions?" *Political Psychology* (Autumn, 1979), 21-38.

refrains from making definitive judgements as to which of the two men was dominant in the formation of United States foreign policy. Instead, he opens the door for further and more specific evaluations of the subject.

This study enters that door by taking a look at three specific situations during Eisenhower's presidency that involved complex decision-making in foreign policy. These are: the move to end the Korean War; the contemplation of direct American intervention to rescue the French garrison at Dien Bien Phu in Vietnam; and the involvement of the United States in the conflict between the Chinese communist government and the Nationalist government in Taiwan over several islands off the shore of the mainland. Examining the steps which the administration took in determining a course of action in these specific occurrences should add to the greater understanding of who controlled foreign policy during the Eisenhower presidency.

Prior to the release of the new documents, most observers of the administration believed that foreign policy was dominated by Dulles. While Eisenhower was admired as a military leader, his lack of experience allegedly made him less adept in foreign policy; his real experiences were believed to be limited to military affairs. He had gained fame as the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, who broke the back of the German army and led the Allies to victory. His post-war experience came as the military commander of the

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Prior to 1953, when he became president, the only non-military post that Eisenhower ever held was that of president of Columbia University, an office he occupied for four years.

These observers compare Eisenhower's alleged lack of experience with the obvious depth of Dulles's background. Whereas Eisenhower had come from a poor family with no noteworthy political associations, it seemed that Dulles had long been preparing to play an important role in United States foreign policy. His maternal grandfather, John W. Foster, and his uncle, Robert Lansing had both served as secretary of state, under Benjamin Harrison and Woodrow Wilson, respectively. In 1904, Dulles entered Princeton University; he was only sixteen years old. Three years later, Dulles attended the World Peace Conference at the Hague with his grandfather. At age 30, he served as an advisor President Wilson at the 1919 Paris peace conference. In 1926, he became a senior partner in the Wall Street law firm of Sullivan and Cromwell, for which he had worked since his graduation from law school in 1911. Through his position there he met several of the world's leaders. When Thomas Dewey ran for president in 1944 and 1948, Dulles served as his chief advisor for foreign affairs, and most believed that if Dewey had been elected, Dulles would have been his secretary of state. Dewey did not become president, but his foreign policy advisor was more successful. After a short term as a senator, and an unsuccessful bid for reelection,

Dulles became an important Republican advisor to Harry S. Truman's State Department.

His prominence in the foreign policy of the Democratic administration was more than a symbol of bipartisanship; it was also an indication of the respect Dulles garnered in the American foreign policy community. His activities during the Truman years, especially his help in organizing the United Nations and his primary role in the drafting of the peace treaty with Japan, earned him even more recognition. John Foster Dulles was obviously one of the most qualified, if not *the* most qualified, Republicans to occupy the office of Secretary of State, and no one was surprised when Eisenhower chose him for that position.

Another reason most believed Dulles was the primary mover in foreign policy ~~during~~ from 1953 to 1959 (the year Dulles died), was that he seemed more intellectually agile than Eisenhower. These observers saw the president as amiable but unimaginative, and unable match Dulles's expertise and intelligence. Thus, they believed Eisenhower could hardly help but defer to the secretary. Furthermore, it was Dulles who almost always made the public pronouncements of national policy, and he did so with direct and forceful language. Eisenhower, however, seemed to have difficulty expressing himself at press conferences, and was often described as "bumbling."

Critics labeled the president a "sluggish" leader who acted like a "constitutional monarch" rather than a

president.[2] At a time when the nation needed a strong national leader, Eisenhower allegedly used an elaborate system of staff and committee to protect him from having to make decisions concerning the divisive issues of the time.

These early observers described Eisenhower as a weak president who would have been better off ending his public life with his military career. As a military hero, the United States Army general had already secured for himself a high place in history. But, critics claimed, Eisenhower proved unequal to the enormous tasks that the presidency thrust upon him in the complicated world of the 1950s.[3]

They complained that Eisenhower had let the nation down. He had been elected as the war hero who the American people felt could guarantee the security of the United States in an age that threatened nuclear annihilation and the scourge of

---

[2]Walt Rostow, *The United States in the World Arena: An Essay in Recent History* (New York, 1960), 395. See also: Hans J. Morganthau, "John Foster Dulles," in Norman A. Graebner, ed., *An Uncertain Tradition: American Secretaries of State in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1961), 289-308; Richard Goold-Adams, *John Foster Dulles: A Reappraisal* (New York, 1962); Michael A. Guhin, *John Foster Dulles: A Statesman and His Times* (New York, 1972); Norman A. Graebner, *Cold War Diplomacy: American Foreign Policy, 1945-1960* (Princeton, New Jersey); Townsend Hoopes, *The Devil and John Foster Dulles* (Boston, 1973); Marquis Childs, *Eisenhower: Captive Hero: A Critical Study of the General and President* (New York, 1958).

[3]Childs, *Captive Hero*, 287.

international communism. General Eisenhower had brought victory in the greatest war in history; President Eisenhower could save the nation from the hostile world of the mid-twentieth century. However, the president, instead of taking a firm grasp of the reigns of presidential power, allegedly handed them over to his subordinates. No other president in history delegated as much authority as Eisenhower.[4]

Dulles's assumption of dominance in the administration's foreign policy was also attributed in part to the president's tremendous admiration for his secretary of state. An example of this respect came in 1957, when Dulles was under intense international public criticism. He suggested to Eisenhower that it might be a good time for the secretary of state to resign. But the president adamantly refused to allow it. He told Dulles that he had in his cabinet the greatest secretary of state the nation had ever known, and that there was no one else capable of carrying the office to the end of the second term. Dulles's spirits were lifted even higher when Eisenhower expressed his sentiments to the press, "The last person I want to see resign is Mr. Dulles. I don't mind saying this: I think he is the wisest, most dedicated man that I know."[5]

---

[4]Childs, *Captive Hero*, 188.

[5]Childs, *Captive Hero*, 189.

Eisenhower's delegation of authority to Dulles and other subordinates also had some origins in the president's experience with the chain-of-command system of the Army. Critics asserted that Eisenhower therefore created an elaborate system of staff and committee to allow him more time for his golf game. This unwillingness to assert the power of the presidential office, however, allegedly resulted in a great diminution of that power during Eisenhower's tenure of office, practically reducing the American presidency to a ceremonial office in which the office holder was content to let the tides of the world flow as they willed, or rather as his subordinates willed them to. According to this view, it is ironic that Eisenhower was the man whose rise to popularity entailed the image of the strong leader who, "sweeping all before him," led the allies to victory in Europe.[6]

In 1962, those who claimed Dulles was the main architect of American foreign policy in the Eisenhower years were supported in their assertions by the assistant to the president, Sherman Adams. In *First Hand Report: The Inside Story of the Eisenhower Administration*, Adams wrote of the relationship:

> ...Eisenhower delegated to Dulles the responsibility of developing the specific policy including the decision where the administration

---

[6]Childs, *Captive Hero*, 291.

> would stand and what course of action would be followed in each international crisis. Although, as Eisenhower often points out, the Secretary of State never made a major move without the President's knowledge and approval, the hard and uncompromising line that the United States government took toward Soviet Russia and Red China between 1953 and the early months of 1959 was more a Dulles line than an Eisenhower one.[7]

While Adams states that Eisenhower approved Dulles's policies and actions, his bottom line is clear: it was *Dulles's* policy *not Eisenhower's* that dominated the period.

Not all early observers agreed with the above assessment, however. There were some analysts who were less willing to believe that such a great leader in international military affairs would not play a vital leadership role in his own presidency, especially in foreign policy.

In Andrew H. Berding's *Dulles on Diplomacy*, published in 1965, the relationship between Eisenhower and his secretary of state is described as being largely cooperative. The two were "of one mind" when it came to foreign policy; "the example they set of singleness of purpose, and of effort and

---

[7]Sherman Adams, *First Hand Report: The Inside Story of the Eisenhower Administration* (New York, 1962), 80.

harmony of action, is almost without precedent in the history of any country."[8]

Berding agrees that Eisenhower had a great respect for Dulles, and had no doubt about his ability to handle any and all foreign policy problems. Dulles too, held Eisenhower in high regard concerning foreign policy. The two were in frequent contact either personally or by telephone, discussing whatever problems that arose. Although Dulles states, "I've never found myself in any disagreement whatsoever with the president,"[9] there was never any question who had the final decision should a disagreement occur. Berding was in Dulles's office several times while the secretary spoke to Eisenhower on the phone. Dulles was always respectful, never referring to Eisenhower in any terms but "Mr. President" or "Sir."[10]

Although Berding's analyses were those of a journalist and not a scholarly writer, he did have frequent personal contact with several important characters in successive presidential administrations, as did his fellow journalists, Arthur Krock of the *New York Times*, and Murray Kempton of the

---

[8]Andrew H. Berding, *Dulles on Diplomacy* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1965), 14.

[9]Berding, *Dulles*, 15.

[10]Berding, *Dulles*, 15.

New York Post. Significantly, Krock and Kempton also wrote articles which challenged the traditional view that Eisenhower was inept as a leader.[11]

One of the few early scholarly analysts who expressed doubt that Dulles alone was in control of foreign policy was Alexander DeConde.[12] He points out that whether or not Eisenhower delegated authority to Dulles, he could not delegate ultimate responsibility. In the United States, the constitution practically gives the president a free hand to conduct foreign policy. Cabinet approval is not required for the executive to act, as it is in Britain, nor is the president significantly responsible to congress in the area of foreign affairs. With this tremendous amount of power, however, comes an immense measure of responsibility. According to DeConde, Eisenhower recognized this, and although he utilized an intricate and sizable staff system, he made sure that his staff followed his general policy

---

[11]Arthur Krock, "Impressions of the President and the Man," *New York Times Magazine* (June 23, 1957), 5; and Murray Kempton, "The Underestimation of Dwight D. Eisenhower," *Esquire* (September, 1967), 108. See also, Gary Wills, *Nixon Agonistes* (Boston, 1970).

[12]Alexander DeConde, "Reluctant Use of Power," in Edgar E. Robinson, *Powers of the President in Foreign Affairs, 1945-1965* (San Francisco, 1966), 77-132. See also: Louis Gerson, *John Foster Dulles* (New York, 1967); David B. Capitanchik, *The Eisenhower Presidency and American Foreign Policy* (London, 1969).

guidelines, for he knew that ultimately only the president can be held responsible for the actions of his administration.[13]

DeConde also argues that while Eisenhower did delegate much authority to Dulles, he did not "abdicate" the final decision to the secretary.[14] Although he does characterize Dulles as the foremost originator of policy, DeConde, unlike most observers of the time, reduces the secretary to an advisory rather than decisive position in relation to Eisenhower.

David Capitanchik takes the idea of Eisenhower as the decision-maker a little farther. In *The Eisenhower Presidency and American Foreign Policy*, he expresses some reluctance in naming Dulles the sole designer of foreign policy during the Eisenhower years. Dulles did not want to suffer the fate of his uncle, Robert Lansing, who as secretary of state under Woodrow Wilson, lost the latter's confidence by taking too independent a course. Therefore, although he sometimes had differences with Eisenhower, "Dulles was determined always to conform to Eisenhower's wishes."[15]

---

[13]DeConde, "Reluctant Use of Power," 125.

[14]DeConde, "Reluctant Use of Power," 94.

[15]Capitanchik, *Eisenhower Presidency*, 45-46.

Capitanchik disagrees with the conventional wisdom that Eisenhower's military career did not prepare him to act decisively as president, especially in foreign policy. While he does not challenge the assertion that Dulles was well prepared for State Department service, Capitanchik also claims that Eisenhower was at least as well prepared as his secretary of state.

Most of Eisenhower's military career was uneventful. While he desperately wanted the experience and glory of leading men into battle, his requests for duty abroad during the first World War were repeatedly denied. In fact, although he served as an Army officer during two world wars, not once in his career did he command troops directly into combat. Had he done so, Capitanchik points out, the experience would have prepared him only marginally for the presidency, and the conventional view would be correct in its assumption that Eisenhower was not equipped to handle foreign affairs as president.[16]

But Eisenhower's military career was far from conventional. From 1915, the year of his graduation from West Point, to 1929, the young officer's career was rather mundane, even boring, but in the latter year he was given an assignment that would begin his exposure to the world of executive decision-making. Eisenhower was made the personal

---

[16]Capitanchik, *Eisenhower Presidency*, 6.

assistant to the Assistant Secretary of War, in which capacity he dealt with military budgets, public relations, and the relations between the executive and legislative branches.[17] In 1933, he was made personal assistant to the Army Chief of Staff, Douglas MacArthur.

In 1935, when MacArthur became military advisor to the Philippines, Eisenhower went along as his senior assistant. Here, he gained even more exposure to executive leadership, as his duties required him to deal frequently with the President of the Commonwealth.[18] Eisenhower's projects included the drafting of the Philippine Defense Act, the establishment of the Philippine Military Academy and the Philippine Air Force.

According to Capitanchik, once back in the United States, Eisenhower proved that he had learned much from his exposure to executive leadership, serving in various positions as chief of staff of a division and then a corps, and finally as chief of staff of the United States Third Army. By the time the nation entered the Second World War, Eisenhower had risen to the rank of colonel.

Drawing on his past experience in World War I, Eisenhower was resigned to spending the duration of World War II behind a desk. He had proven particularly skillful at

---

[17]Capitanchik, *Eisenhower Presidency*, 5.

[18]Capitanchik, *Eisenhower Presidency*, 6.

planning and coordinating complex strategies, and therefore was appointed Assistant to Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall. He was responsible, among other things, for the planning of an invasion of continental Europe across the English Channel, and it was basically his plan that was executed on D-Day in 1944. This was a complex task politically as well as militarily, for it required the acceptance not only of the American government but also of the British. He visited London in May 1942, in order to coordinate with the British chiefs, and to begin the difficult task of bringing British and American objectives closer in line with each other. This duty required Eisenhower to utilize a good measure of diplomatic skill. Since his plan was eventually accepted by both governments, it is safe to assume that he possessed such ability.

Soon after he returned from Britain, he was informed that he was to be appointed to the position of Commander of the European Theater of Operations and promoted to the rank of lieutenant general. This command would have normally gone to the Chief of Staff, General Marshall, who was the first choice of both Roosevelt and Churchill, but it was felt that Marshall was needed in Washington. Thus Eisenhower was promoted to a position that put him in command over 366

officers who were his senior, even though he had never seen combat and had little experience commanding troops.[19]

Capitanchik contends that Eisenhower's success as Supreme Allied Commander was not based solely on his ability as a strategist. The main reasons for his accomplishment had more to do with diplomacy than military tactics. These diplomatic achievements have relevance to his presidency. In order to achieve victory, it was necessary to overcome the friction between the British and American commanders. Eisenhower considered political factors of equal importance with strategic ones, and was particularly adept at finding compromises and convincing others to accept them.[20]

In Capitanchik's view, Eisenhower's postwar experience as NATO commander further prepared him for the presidency. In the United States and Europe, there was still a lingering doubt about the merits of collective security. Eisenhower had to overcome these doubts in the European leaders, and in the American people and congress. This task required Eisenhower to employ considerable talent in diplomacy and in public affairs. That he did so refutes the claims that he was less adept than Dulles in this area. In fact, it is arguable that he was more capable than his secretary of state.

---

[19]Capitanchik, *Eisenhower Presidency*, 7.

[20]Capitanchik, *Eisenhower Presidency*, 9.

Thus, without the benefit of any new information, Capitanchik concluded that contrary to the conventional view, Eisenhower's background prepared him well to take on the responsibilities of presidential leadership in foreign affairs. Recent analysts, after reference to new information, have added hard evidence to the speculation of Capitanchik and others concerning the importance of Eisenhower's background to his leadership.

Recent scholars have used the newly released information to attack the negative view of Eisenhower's leadership. Fred I. Greenstein in his book, *The Hidden Hand Presidency: Eisenhower as Leader*, portrays the president as a behind-the-scenes director of policy, who used his subordinates as an effective front through which he could seek his objectives without the political risks involved in openly direct personal leadership. Greenstein sees this style of leadership as uniquely astute, given the dual nature of the American presidency, especially in a nation filled with a paranoia of internal communist subversion.[21]

In the United States, the president is both the chief of state and the political head of the executive branch. In most democracies, these two offices are held by separate individuals. As chief of state, the president is equivalent

---

[21]Fred I. Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency: Eisenhower as Leader* (New York, 1982).

to a constitutional monarch, and is meant to be a symbol of national unity. As the political head of the executive branch, however, he is expected to promote economic prosperity and good social conditions in the domestic setting, while simultaneously preventing or executing wars on the international scene.

It is extremely difficult for one person to effectively execute these two roles. If the president stands as a symbol of national unity, and acts as a true constitutional monarch, who remains detached from politics, the nation will probably suffer for want of central guidance. However, if the president makes conspicuous efforts to build political decisionmaking coalitions, he loses his broad recognition as the nation's unifying leader. Greenstein says of Eisenhower's leadership methods:

> The unique characteristic of Eisenhower's approach to presidential leadership was his self-conscious use of political strategies that enabled him to carry out both presidential roles without allowing one to undermine the other....On the assumption that a president who is predominantly viewed in terms of his political prowess will lose public support by not appearing to be a proper chief of state, Eisenhower went to great lengths to conceal the political side of his leadership.[22]

According to Greenstein, the complex system of staff and the apparent delegation of authority worked so well that many

---

[22]Greenstein, *Hidden Hand*, 5.

analysts assumed that Eisenhower was either unable or unwilling to take charge of the presidency. Yet Eisenhower remained enormously popular throughout his two terms. The majority of people in the nation identified with the image of the poor farmer who, despite his disdain for politics, became president because he felt his country needed him. Even his critics described his demeanor as amiable, and his smile infectious. In eight years of monthly opinion polls, he averaged an impressive sixty-four percent approval.[23]

Greenstein contends that one of the ways Eisenhower was able to retain such popularity was by using his subordinates as "lightning rods."[24] Eisenhower used his key advisors to present his policies to the public. This way, any criticism would be directed toward the subordinates and not the president. Since observers believed that Eisenhower had given these men the authority to make their own policy, the president was shielded from this criticism.

This required Eisenhower's subordinates to have deep personal loyalty for the president. James Hagerty, Eisenhower's press secretary, remembered accepting criticism for policy statements that were thought to be his own, but were in fact the president's:

---

[23]Greenstein, *Hidden Hand*, 4.

[24]Greenstein, *Hidden Hand*, 91.

> President Eisenhower would say, "Do it this way." I would say, "If I go to that press conference and say what you want me to say, I would get hell." With that he would smile, get up and walk around the desk, pat me on the back and say, "My boy, better you than me."[25]

In the field of foreign policy, the traditional view was that Dulles was the staunch cold warrior, and Eisenhower the warm conciliator. In Eisenhower's various letters, telephone conversations and diary entries, he shows that he was at least as anti-communist as his secretary of state. In a memorandum to Dulles, Eisenhower explains his feelings about the growing international tendency toward a conciliatory attitude toward the Soviet Union:

> I personally believe that one of the main objectives of our own efforts should be to encourage our entire people to see, with clear eyes, the changing character of our difficulties and to convince them that we must be vigilant, energetic, imaginative and *incapable of surrender through fatigue or lack of courage.*[26] [emphasis added]

Greenstein believes that Eisenhower hid this hard-line attitude from the public for a couple of reasons. For one, the president realized that his image of the warm peace-seeker was particularly valuable internationally as well as domestically. Secondly, he knew that Dulles had a lawyer's

---

[25]Quoted in Greenstein, *Hidden Hand*, 91-92

[26]Quoted in Greenstein, *Hidden Hand*, 90.

habit of stating things in an adversarial manner, which would defuse any criticism that the administration was "soft" on communism, while at the same time presenting a tough international image. Dulles's "get tough" speeches also allegedly made Eisenhower's positive statements more effective.[27]

Greenstein does cite one instance where it was Eisenhower who took the blame for one of Dulles's diplomatic mistakes. He did this because he felt that Dulles's public image could not withstand the blow, but that his own would be unaffected. The situation involved the planned retirement of the ambassador to England, Walter Gifford. Somehow Eisenhower's plan to put Winthrop Aldrich in Gifford's place leaked out. Dulles, wanting to avoid a further embarrassing situation, made a public announcement of the plans, but in his haste, forgot to inform the British government beforehand. The British were quite upset. They feared that the American action might set a precedent for small nations to follow. To rectify the problem, Eisenhower would take the blame himself:

> ...I am going to advise Anthony [Eden, the British foreign secretary], when I see him next month, to lay the blame for this whole unfortunate occurrence squarely on me. He will have the

---

[27]Greenstein, *Hidden Hand*, 90.

> logical explanation that my lack of formal experience in the political world was the reason the blunder. Actually, I was the one who cautioned against anything like this happening, but manifestly I can take the blame without hurting anything or anybody, whereas if the Secretary of State would have to shoulder it, his position would be badly damaged.[28]

Eisenhower's statements are particularly illustrative of his political adroitness, and his deliberate use of the opposite image of himself to smooth out the rough world of diplomacy.

The view of Eisenhower as an active presidential leader is now accepted by most scholars, and Eisenhower's ranking among presidents has soared. In a 1960s poll on presidential greatness, historians ranked him twenty-first, tied with Chester Arthur, but a 1984 poll ranked Eisenhower among the top ten United States presidents.[29]

Greenstein's coverage of Eisenhower's leadership is done in a rather general manner, especially in foreign policy. Yet it is the relationship between Eisenhower and Dulles which is of interest here. As noted above, with the emergence of this new perception of Eisenhower as a leader in foreign policy comes a need to look at specific occurrences more closely.

---

[28]Quoted in Greenstein, *Hidden Hand*, 89.

[29]Richard A. Melanson and David A. Mayers, eds., *Reevaluating Eisenhower: American Foreign Policy in the 1950s* (Urbana, 1987), 3.

If we accept the assertion that Eisenhower's pre-presidential experiences prepared him for the presidential office, it is clear that these experiences would have given him a distinct edge over John Foster Dulles in dealing with Europe. But what about Asia? While Eisenhower admittedly did have some experience in the former American colony of the Philippines, it is apparent that Dulles had more expertise in the Far East than he. At 19, Dulles served as the secretary to the Chinese delegation at the Hague, and while working for the Truman administration, went to Korea to speak to South Korean president Syngman Rhee, (some even accused Dulles of starting the Korean War), and played an important role in the writing of the Japanese peace treaty.

How important were the respective roles of Dulles and Eisenhower in the decision-making processes in Asian policy? Obviously, Eisenhower had the final say in any decision, but the question here is: Who was responsible for the formulation of the policy that was eventually carried out? In other words, in these specific situations in Asia, did Eisenhower defer to Dulles's greater experience in the area, or did the president follow his own course? Or, was it a collective effort?

"I Shall Go to Korea"

One of Eisenhower's proudest achievements was the ending of the Korean war. Barely six months into his first term, he was able to bring an end to the two-and-a-half-year-old conflict that most agree was a key factor in the defeat of the Democrats in the November presidential election. For most revisionists, the solving of the Korea problem is a clear example of Eisenhower's dominance in the formulation of foreign policy,[30] but there is evidence that strongly disputes this assertion.

The war in Korea began when North Korean troops crossed the 38th parallel into South Korea. They were driven back by American and other United Nations troops as far as the Yalu River, threatening China. At that point, Chinese troops, officially designated as "volunteers," joined in on the North Korean side, and drove the U.N. forces well into South Korea. By December 1952, the fighting had come to a stalemate, back at the 38th parallel. President Truman had as early as March 1951 tried to negotiate an end to the fighting but was unsuccessful.

---

[30]See Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower, Vol. II: The President* (New York, 1984), 97-99; and Robert A. Divine, *Eisenhower and the Cold War* (New York, 1981).

In a campaign speech on October 24, 1952, Eisenhower made a pledge that if elected he would "go to Korea," clearly implying that he would seek an end to the conflict as soon as possible. When reporters read the speech shortly before it was delivered, many of them said, "That does it -- Ike is in."[31]

Three weeks after the election, Eisenhower made good on his pledge. While in Korea, he acted more like General Eisenhower than the president-elect. He visited troops on the lines, took a reconnaissance plane over the battle area, and visited with old friends, including his son John, an officer in the 15th infantry, and General Mark Clark, the commander of the U.N. troops in Korea. On his return trip, Eisenhower boarded the *U.S.S. Helena*, and was later joined by members of his future cabinet, including John Foster Dulles. The discussion aboard the *Helena* was broad in topic, and mainly served the purpose of allowing the men to get acquainted with each other. The only major decision that was made involved the appointment of Admiral Arthur W. Radford, then the commander in chief, Pacific, to the chairmanship of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Although the trip fulfilled Eisenhower's promise to "go to Korea," (he never explicitly committed himself to ending the war), it was politically imperative for him to find a

---

[31]Adams, *First Hand Report*, 51.

solution to the conflict, and do it quickly. He and his fellow Republicans had made the Truman administration's inability to resolve the situation a major campaign issue, and unless Eisenhower took immediate action, his and the party's credibility would be lost.

For the administration's first few months, therefore, much attention was given to ending the stalemate in Korea. Negotiations for an armistice were halted over the repatriation of prisoners of war. Many of the Chinese and North Korean prisoners of war had refused to return to their homeland. The negotiators for the north insisted on the prisoner's forced repatriation. The United States, however, refused to do so.

The Eisenhower administration faced three choices in the situation. One was to agree to the communist demands, but this was judged unacceptable because of the negative effect it would have on future would-be-defectors. Another was to force the communists north to the Yalu River, and thereby achieve a decisive victory and the unification of Korea. This alternative was supported by the "Asia-Firsters" in congress, Admiral Radford, and South Korea's septuagenarian president, Syngman Rhee, even though it would probably require the use of tactical nuclear weapons, and involve the possibility of the war's expansion into a global conflict.

The remaining alternative is the one that was eventually chosen. The United States could use the threat of nuclear weapons to force the communists to accept the armistice

without the forceful repatriation of prisoners of war. To make the communists aware of the possibility of the American use of the nuclear option, Dulles travelled to India to meet with prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru, where he let it be known that unless progress was made in the armistice talks, which had been suspended the previous summer, the United States was prepared to "move decisively without inhibition in our use of weapons, and would no longer be responsible for confining hostilities to the Korean Peninsula."[32] Since India was a neutral, and Nehru met often with both sides, Eisenhower and Dulles were confident that the information would reach the ears of the proper Chinese, North Korean, and Soviet officials.

Apparently, this assumption was correct, for the communists suddenly agreed to reopen negotiations in late March, specifically on the prisoners of war issue. The point was driven home by the movement of atomic weapons to Okinawa. An armistice was signed on June 27, 1953, complete with the American plan for voluntary repatriation of prisoners. The armistice line was drawn roughly at the 38th parallel, dividing the peninsula as it was before the war.

Most revisionists agree that Eisenhower was the prime mover in the ending of the Korean war. Dulles, fearing that

[32]Dwight David Eisenhower, *The White House Years: Mandate for Change, 1953-1956* (New York, 1963), 181.

unless a decisive victory was won in Korea the Chinese would not be prevented from further advances, allegedly favored the continuation of the conflict until Korean unification was achieved, even if this included blockading the Chinese coast and airstrikes against Manchuria.[33] Revisionists also assert that Eisenhower, fearing that such action would likely result in World War III, favored an immediate peace.

In the above assessments, Dulles is characterized as the staunch anti-communist, whose fanatical attitude often had to be tempered by Eisenhower's calm sensibility. Where Dulles advocated strong-handed tactics, Eisenhower was more conciliatory. We have seen, however, that Eisenhower's attitude in some cases resembled the hard line of Dulles; is it not also possible that Dulles may have been as conciliatory as Eisenhower is often attributed to be?

There is evidence that Dulles favored the ending of the Korean war as much as Eisenhower did. Two memoranda written by Dulles to Eisenhower give this impression. They were both written on November 26, 1952, *before* Eisenhower left for Korea on November 29.[34] The first memorandum contends that the war's continuation benefits the Soviet Union:

---

[33]Divine, *Cold War*, 28; and Ambrose, *Eisenhower*, 99.

[34]Dulles Memoranda to Eisenhower, November 26, 1952, Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954* (hereafter, *FRUS*), (Washington D.C., 1984), 15:692-694.

From the Soviet standpoint the Korean War:

(a) holds a large part of the U.S. land forces on an Asian peninsula where in the case of general war they might be lost,..

(b) absorbs large amounts of military equipment which slows down the rearming of Western Europe, of Chinese nationalists on Formosa and of native and French forces in Vietnam.

(c) provides an excuse for Soviet Russia to hold onto Port Arthur and to control Manchuria.

(d) provides a propaganda gold mine which is being exploited to the immense advantage of the Communist position throughout all of Asia.

(e) provides a source of serious friction between the U.S. and the other N.A.T.O. powers.

(f) maintains a constant military threat to Japan, which builds up anxiety and neutralism there.[35]

In the second memorandum, Dulles advises the president-elect on what to discuss when he meets with Syngman Rhee in his upcoming trip to Korea:

Indicate that the unity of Korea continues to be the goal of the United States in accordance with its pre-war pledges, just as the unity of Germany and unity of Austria continue to be our goals. But that does not mean that the United States is committed to precipitate a third World War in an effort to achieve these goals.[36]

---

[35]Dulles to Eisenhower, November 26, 1952, *FRUS*: 1952-1954, 15:692-693.

[36]Dulles to Eisenhower, November 26, 1952, *FRUS*: 1952-1954, 15:694.

In addition Dulles adds his view as to what the United States goals should be:

> ...I may note my belief, held ever since I was in Korea in June 1950, that our objective should be to extend the effective control of the Republic of Korea up to the so-called "waist line".[sic] *We could never expect a friendly Republic of Korea to hold unchallenged possession of the entire northern area* since this would bring Western powers close to Port Arthur and Vladivostok and in control of an area which provides much of the power needed by the industrial complex of Manchuria.[37] [emphasis added]

These memoranda clearly indicate that Dulles's views on Korea were not nearly as militant as revisionists have indicated. In fact, except for the reference to extending control to the "waist line," it is apparent that Dulles was in full accord with the actions that eventually were taken, namely the rapid conclusion of the armistice, *without* an attempt to unify all of Korea.

The conclusion that in his decision to end the Korean war, Eisenhower exerted his dominance over his secretary of state is therefore incorrect. Dulles also knew the value of a rapid settlement, and in the early stages advised Eisenhower of his opinions. The secretary was not the hothead who would risk annihilation in his vendetta against

---

[37]Dulles to Eisenhower, November 26, 1952, *FRUS*: 1952-1954, 15:694.

communism. Instead, he displayed a pragmatic and realistic outlook, comparable to that of Eisenhower.

"Resigned to Do Nothing"

In the spring of 1954, the Eisenhower administration was faced with an important decision in its foreign policy: whether or not the United States should commit forces to aid France in Southeast Asia, specifically to rescue the French garrison at Dien Bien Phu in Vietnam. After several weeks of debate among Eisenhower and his advisors, the administration decided to allow the French to be defeated at Dien Bien Phu rather than involve American forces in the war. The decision not to intervene seems remarkable, given the magnitude of the United States' later involvement in the region, and is often cited as an example of Eisenhower's wisdom.

According to one revisionist, Eisenhower not only succeeded in staying out of the war in Indochina but also managed to avoid the appearance of being "soft on communism." Dulles's fervent attempts to facilitate an American intervention were blocked by congressional and international barriers, thus allowing Eisenhower to avoid sending American soldiers into another war in Asia while placing the blame for inaction on congress and unwilling allies. Eisenhower is characterized as a brilliant schemer, who, playing the forces of his advisors, congress, and United States allies against

each other, was able to achieve his peaceful goals without noticeable political repercussions.[38]

This interpretation, while intriguing, is highly speculative. There is no evidence to support the assertion that Eisenhower was at odds with his secretary of state, in fact, as we have seen, the two statesmen were often in agreement. Similarly, the argument that Eisenhower simply played the role of the would-be-interventionist, when in reality seeking pacific goals, is highly problematic. The assumption that non-intervention was preferable to Eisenhower is based on the subsequent unpleasant American experience in Vietnam. As we will see, Eisenhower often expressed his willingness to act.

By the time Eisenhower took office in 1953, the United States had developed a keen interest in the French-Indochina war. French victory in the eight-year-old conflict had become seen by the Truman administration as crucial to the survival of the entire "free world." In what would later be called the "domino principle," Truman and his advisors expressed the concept that the fall of any one nation to communism would subsequently cause the collapse of surrounding countries to communist rule, the phenomenon expanding until the entire world was under the domination of

---

[38]Melanie Billings-Yun, *Decision Against War: Eisenhower and Dien Bien Phu, 1954* (New York, 1988).

Moscow. The major non-communist powers must therefore stop the spread of communism wherever it raised its head.

This conception of the state of world affairs was one of the factors which led the Truman administration to abandon the neutral stance that it had taken. By 1953, the United States was bearing forty percent of the financial and material burden of the French effort.[39] Thus, along with Korea, the situation in Indochina was at the forefront of the Eisenhower administration's concerns in Asian policy.

The French-Indochina War had its origins in the Second World War. The Japanese invasion and expulsion of the long-standing French colonial government demonstrated to the Indochinese that Asians could predominate over European rule. This spark of nationalist sentiment broke into full flame during the lapse of colonial imposition following the Japanese withdrawal and before the French return.

When the French did return, just one month after the Japanese withdrawal, they found that Vietnam, the largest territory in French Indochina, had declared its independence under the Revolutionary League for the Independence of Vietnam (Vietminh) led by the Soviet-trained communist leader, Ho Chih Minh. Ho based himself in the northern

---

[39]Billings-Yun, *Decision*, 1.

capital, Hanoi, and on September 2, 1945, formally established the independent Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

When fighting broke out between the French and the Vietminh on December 19, the United States chose a policy of neutrality, balancing the desire to bolster the French government with the ideology of national self-determination. As the fighting continued on for several years, however, certain events caused the Truman administration to change its view. Most significant of these events were the "fall" of China to communism on October 1, 1949, and the outbreak of war in Korea. The French-Indochinese conflict came to be seen as a key struggle against international communism.

Although the United States was pouring millions of dollars into the French effort in Indochina each year, France insisted that the direction of the war remain in its hands alone. American military advisors were kept far from areas of fighting, and American political and military advice was often ignored. The French government feared that if American involvement went beyond material aid, France would lose its position in Southeast Asia to the United States. The maintenance of its Asian colonies was considered essential to the international prestige of France.

The strain on Franco-American relations was aggravated by the issue of colonialism. The United States did not want to be seen as an advocate of colonialism, and pressured France to make more sincere moves toward the independence of its colonies. Furthermore, most American observers doubted

that the communists could be driven out without the support of the Vietnamese people, which could only be obtained by giving them something to fight for, namely independence.

By 1954, the French had grown weary after eight years of fighting, and inspired by the successful partition of Korea, placed the conflict in Indochina on the agenda of the upcoming conference in Geneva, which had been called to wrap up loose ends in the settlement of the Korean conflict. With this conference in mind, the French and Vietminh both hoped to improve their military standing. The French commander, General Henri Navarre, decided to pool his best divisions in the heart-shaped valley at Dien Bien Phu. Believing the fortress to be impregnable, Navarre hoped to entice the Vietminh to attack. The general envisioned wave after wave of Vietminh attackers being repelled by the French defense, resulting in great numbers of Vietminh casualties and an improved bargaining position for the French at Geneva.

The French, however, underestimated the size of the force the Vietminh commander, General Vo Nguyen Giap, could muster, as well as the fighting skill of his soldiers. They also overestimated the defensibility of the fortress. These mistakes became clear soon after the initial attacks upon the French at Dien Bien Phu. Barely one week into the fighting,

the Central Intelligence Agency gave the French a fifty percent chance of holding out.[40]

At this point, the Eisenhower administration began to consider the possibilities of an American intervention in Indochina. Eisenhower and Dulles agreed that the United States could not act unilaterally, but might as part of an international coalition that would necessarily include Asian members as well as England and France. On March 29 in a speech to the Overseas Press Club of America that had been thoroughly reviewed and approved by Eisenhower, Dulles expressed the administration's view that the communist threat in Indochina could be met only by "united action."[41]

United action was necessary for political as well as strategic purposes. It would not be wise for the president whose campaign promises included "No More Koreas" to plunge the nation into another war in Asia with the United States providing most of the effort. Congress had expressed its opposition to such an operation. Furthermore, a cooperative effort among Eastern and Western powers in Indochina would serve as a strong warning to communist China that direct military intervention on behalf of the Vietminh would be met in force. It was also intended to give a psychological boost

---

[40]Memorandum of Discussion, 189th NSC Meeting, March 18, 1954, *FRUS: 1952-1954*, 13:1132-1133.

[41] Divine, *Cold War*, 45.

to the French, who were growing weary of the war, and give them a better position at Geneva.

The French were resigned to end the war at Geneva with a negotiated peace and a partition of Indochina. This prospect frightened Dulles, who, at a press conference in the last week of March, told reporters that the he would not sanction a rescue mission to save Dien Bien Phu. The United States should not commit its forces to help the French in their effort to strike a deal with the communists, which would result in the loss of the North to the communists. Material and financial aid would continue to be given, but military involvement for the purpose of increasing the France's bargaining weight at Geneva was out of the question. The emotionalism surrounding the battle should be downplayed, and its relative military insignificance should be seen in the scope of the entire conflict. After all, the current battle only engaged four percent of the French forces in Indochina.

The administration instead supported a continuation of the Navarre Plan, which would produce "decisive military results" if not victory within two years.[42] The Navarre Plan, developed by the French commander in May 1953, called for 100,000 more Vietnamese troops, 50,000 more French soldiers and $400 million in American aid. The administration especially liked the aspect of the plan which

---

[42]Billings-Yun, *Decision*, 38.

called for the employment of more Vietnamese, and hoped that this involvement would bolster indigenous support for the French, a key element if they were to achieve victory.

If the United States were to intervene in Indochina, it would do so as part of a collective effort for the purpose of ridding the region of communism. Although Eisenhower's views on the subject were not often made public, it is apparent that he was in accord with his secretary of state. In a March 25 meeting of the National Security Council, the president began exploring options concerning united action. He asked his advisors which nations might be persuaded to intervene in Indochina along with the United States, contemplating the possibility of United Nations action or an expansion of the ANZUS (Australia, New Zealand, and United States) treaty powers to include other nations in Southeast Asia.[43]

On April 3, Dulles and Admiral Radford met with key legislative leaders, including Senate Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson. The president instructed his subordinates to inquire of the legislators as to their views on the situation in Indochina. They were not to solicit assurances of congressional support for an intervention but rather to ascertain the position of the legislature. This would give

---

[43]Memorandum of Discussion, 190th NSC Meeting, March 24, 1954, *FRUS*: 1952-1954, 13:1164-1165.

the administration the ability to approach other nations with an appearance of national unity.

After Radford briefed the legislators of the military situation in Indochina, the secretary of state explained the significance of Indochina as the key to Southeast Asia. Should Indochina fall to communism, the rest of Southeast Asia would follow, endangering the Pacific defense of the United States. Dulles then told the legislators that he hoped that the president could be given congressional backing to take action with air and sea power if the executive felt that it was in the interest of national security.

Only one of the legislators expressed a willingness to grant the request unconditionally, but he capitulated to his fellow lawmakers. The unanimous sentiment was, "we want no more Koreas with the United States furnishing 90% of the manpower." However, the legislative leaders felt that if the administration could obtain definite commitments from England and other nations, "that a Congressional resolution could be passed, giving the President power to commit armed forces in the area."[44]

The congressional requirement for international participation before United States forces could be committed had already been expressed by the administration in Dulles'

[44]Dulles Memorandum, April 5, 1954, *FRUS* 1952-1954, 13:1225.

"united action" speech. The day after the meeting, Eisenhower enumerated three criteria for American military intervention in Indochina: 1) intervention by the United States had to be part of a coalition including other nations of Southeast Asia and England; 2) France had to make substantial commitments to the independence of Indochina, Laos and Cambodia; 3) France had to agree to stay in the war should United States forces intervene. These in fact were the conditions the administration had developed before the meeting with the congressional representatives.[45]

The conference with members of Congress was necessary to Eisenhower's concept of presidential power. In reference to the situation, Eisenhower stated in his memoirs:

> Part of my fundamental concept of the Presidency is that we have a constitutional government and only when there is a sudden, unforseen emergency should the President put us into war without congressional action.[46]

Since the United States had been supplying the French effort for some years, Eisenhower concluded that there could be no "unforseen emergency" in Indochina.

---

[45]David L. Anderson, "Eisenhower, Dienbienphu, and the Origins of United States Military Intervention in Vietnam," *Mid-America*, Vol. 71 (April- July 1989), 109-110.

[46]Eisenhower, *Mandate*, 345.

On April 5, Dulles received a cable from ambassador Douglas C. Dillon. The French asked for immediate air strikes on Vietminh positions at Dien Bien Phu from American aircraft carriers. Unless this action was taken, the fortress would be lost. Apparently, Radford had given the French the impression that the request would be met favorably in Washington.[47] Dulles discussed the situation with Eisenhower, and cabled back that American intervention was impossible "without full political understanding with France and other countries. In addition, Congressional action would be required."[48]

On April 29, three days before the Geneva conference opened, Dulles received another urgent plea for American intervention from French Foreign Minister Georges Bidault. Dulles was in Paris at the time. Bidault had shown Dulles a message from General Navarre to Prime Minister Joseph Laniel, which described the desperate situation at Dien Bien Phu. As Navarre saw it, the only alternatives were:

> (1) Operation Vautour [Vulture] which would be massive B-29 bombing (which I understand would be a US operation from US bases outside Indochina) or (2) request for a cease-fire [Dulles found out a few

---

[47]Dillon to State Department, April 5, 1954, *FRUS*: 1952-1954, 18:1236-1238.

[48]Dulles to Dillon, April 5, 1954, *FRUS*: 1952-1954, 18:1242.

hours later that Navarre meant a general cease-fire, not just one at Dien Bien Phu].[49]

Dulles told Bidault that American intervention was highly unlikely, but that he would talk to the president and Radford about it. The French had obviously overcome their earlier aversion to American involvement, but it was too late. The administration had already come to the conclusion that the circumstances were not appropriate for American intervention.

On May 7, 1954, the French position at Dien Bien Phu was captured by Vietminh troops. The next day, the Indochina phase of the Geneva conference began. Navarre's plan to gain a political advantage for French negotiators failed miserably. His underestimation of the quality and quantity of the Vietminh troops served the purposes of the communists instead. On July 21, the French-Indochina war was ended, and Vietnam was divided at the seventeenth parallel.

The Eisenhower administration made an attempt at united action, but was faced with unenthusiastic allies, and a French government that was not willing to meet the conditions that the United States set down for intervention until it was too late. When they finally asked for an American bombing raid, the Eisenhower administration had already decided not

---

[49]Telegram, Dulles to State Department, April 23, 1954, *FRUS*: 1952-1954, 18:1374.

to intervene to save the fortress at Dien Bien Phu. To do so would have required a unilateral operation; such an operation would have been politically dangerous. In the estimation of Eisenhower and Dulles, the risks of action outweighed the benefits.

The administration's quest for united action did not end with the Geneva agreements. To prevent further communist encroachment, Eisenhower and Dulles sought to create a regional defense pact in Southeast Asia. The fruit of their efforts was the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), which allied the United States, the Philippines, Thailand, Australia, New Zealand, and Pakistan.

Throughout the crisis, Eisenhower and Dulles worked together to meet the goals of the administration. While some scholars have asserted that Dulles' hawkish tendencies would have led the nation into war in 1954, had it not been for the moderating force of the British, congress, and Eisenhower, the differences between the president and his chief advisor were minor, and conflicts were infrequent.[50] Both supported the use of alliances to contain communism, and were not willing to commit United States troops to what was essentially a colonial undertaking. They thus sponsored the

---

[50]George C. Herring, "'A Good Stout Effort': John Foster Dulles and the Indochina Crisis, 1954-1955," in Richard Immerman, ed., *John Foster Dulles and the Diplomacy of the Cold War* (Princeton, 1990), 216.

concept of united action, and real independence for the Associated States as the only bases for intervention.

Back on "The Brink"

Six weeks after the French-Indochinese war had officially ended, the Eisenhower administration once again found itself involved in conflict in Asia. For eight months in 1954-1955, the world watched with concern the events in the Taiwan straits, wondering if war would break out between the United States and the People's Republic of China over the Quemoy and Matsu islands. As with the earlier Asian policy situations, revisionists have pointed to the Quemoy and Matsu crisis as an example of Eisenhower's control and dominance of foreign policy.[51] However, there is considerable evidence that the policy the United States followed during the crisis was developed at least in part by Dulles.

The conflict involved the antagonists of the Chinese civil war: the communist People's Republic of China, who occupied the mainland; and Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek's nationalist Republic of China, who had fled to of Taiwan. The Nationalists also held several coastal island groups, including Quemoy, Matsu and the Tachens, as well as the

---

[51]See Ambrose, *Eisenhower*; Divine, *Cold War*; Bennett C. Rushkoff, "Eisenhower, Dulles and the Quemoy-Matsu Crisis, 1954-1955," *Political Science Quarterly* 96 (Fall 1981), 465-480; Thomas E. Stolper, *China, Taiwan, and the Offshore Islands* (New York, 1985).

Pescadores, a group of islands close to Taiwan in the Taiwan strait.

The Quemoy group consists of two islands covering sixty square miles, and blocks the port of Amoy, only two miles east. To the north, the nineteen islands of the Matsu group cover twelve square miles and blocks the port of Foochow, just ten miles away. The Tachens were about 200 miles north of Taiwan. Nationalist fortifications on these islands included 75,000 troops, 50,000 of which were on Quemoy.

The mere presence of one quarter of the entire nationalist army so close to its shores was enough to make the communists nervous, but the situation was exacerbated by nationalist attacks from the islands on shipping and the mainland coast. Thus strengthened in their resolve to capture the offshore islands, communist forces on September 3, 1954 began bombarding Quemoy with artillery fire. Two American soldiers were killed in the shelling. In the nine months that followed, the Eisenhower administration faced its most serious crisis to date.[52]

When he was informed of the shelling of Quemoy, Eisenhower was in the summer White House in Denver, Colorado, and Dulles was in Manila overseeing the formation of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). Eisenhower

---

[52]Eisenhower, *Mandate*, 459.

received word from Washington that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had voted three-to-one to recommend that the president give Chiang Kai-shek the go ahead to bomb the mainland. If this action provoked an assault on Quemoy, the Joint Chiefs recommended that American forces be used in the island's defense.[53]

The majority reasoned that the islands, while of little military value to the protection of Taiwan itself, had important political and psychological value to the nationalist forces. They served as "stepping stones" for the promised nationalist return to the mainland, and their loss would have disastrous effects on the morale of the nationalist army. Failure to come to the aid of the nationalists in this instance could also discourage them and other nations from seeking American protection in the future.[54]

The one dissenting vote came from General Matthew Ridgeway, the Army Chief of Staff. He felt that the loss of the islands would have little effect on the safety of Taiwan. He also did not feel United States military leaders could make authoritative statements of the islands' alleged

---

[53]The Acting Secretary of Defense (Anderson) to the President, September 3, 1954, *FRUS*: 1952-1954, 15:556.

[54]Anderson to the President, September 3, 1954, *FRUS*: 1952-1954, 15:556-557.

psychological or political value. The Joint Chiefs did agree on two points: (1) the islands were not crucial to the United States' ability to defend Taiwan; and (2) the nationalists could not hold the islands without American help.[55]

On September 12, the National Security Council met in Denver to discuss the situation. It was the first time the NSC had met outside of Washington. Radford reiterated his belief that the United States should do everything it could to defend Quemoy, adding that there were military benefits to holding the island. The nationalist presence there interfered with communist communications to the port of Amoy, and more importantly, since the best place to stage an attack on Taiwan was at Amoy, nationalist occupation of the island was of considerable value in preventing such an attack.[56]

The president said that the communists would try to bog down American forces wherever they could, and that if there was to be general war, he would rather have it with Russia than with China. Otherwise, the Russians could simply supply the Chinese, without getting involved directly. If he was going to commit American prestige, he would "want to go to the head of the snake." Eisenhower agreed with Radford that

---

[55]Eisenhower, *Mandate*, 463.

[56]Memorandum of Discussion, 214th Meeting of the National Security Council, September 12, 1954, *FRUS*: 1952-1954, 15:617.

if action were to be taken to defend the islands, there could not be arbitrary limitations on the forces to be used, this would not be a limited effort as in Korea, but he also indicated that American action was bound to have negative effects on its relations with its allies.[57]

Secretary Dulles said the situation put the administration in a "horrible dilemma." A convincing case could be made for either side. One could say that the communists were pushing to see how far the United States would go to stop them, and that any sign of weakness would be like an invitation to the communists to push farther. In the end, the United States would have to fight,

> ...possibly under less advantageous conditions....They have shown an aggressive policy against Formosa [Taiwan], both by their propaganda statements and their actions, such as at Quemoy. A powerful case can be made that unless we stop them, a Chinese Nationalist retreat from the islands would have disastrous consequences in Korea, Japan, Formosa, and the Philippines.[58]

One could also say that to go to the aid of the nationalists would bring the United States into war with the Peoples Republic of China. Since the administration believed

---

[57]214th NSC Meeting Discussion, September 12, 1954, *FRUS*: 1952-1954, 15:617-619.

[58]214th NSC Meeting Discussion, September 12, 1954, *FRUS*: 1952-1954, 15:619.

that such a war would necessarily involve the use of nuclear weapons, this would bring upon the United States the condemnation of most of the world, as well as a majority of the American people. While the loss of the offshore islands would not be welcomed, general war with China was even less desireable.

Dulles then suggested an alternative. The offshore island situation could be brought to the United Nations Security Council to obtain an injunction for a cease-fire and maintenance of the *status quo*. Even if the Soviet Union vetoed such a proposal, they would appear to the world to be rejecting peace. Either way, the United States would gain.[59]

Eisenhower approved Dulles's suggestion. Dulles was sent to London where he met with British Foreign Minister Anthony Eden, and the New Zealand High Commissioner. They agreed that New Zealand would submit the problem to the UN Security Council. It is readily apparent that the Eisenhower administration followed Dulles's line in this instance.

Chiang, however, objected to the plan. Acceptance of the status quo was inconsistent with his goal of recapturing the mainland. Assistant secretary of state Walter Robertson was sent to Taipei to talk with the generalissimo, and offer a mutual-defense treaty in exchange for a favorable nationalist response to the ceasefire proposal. Chiang said

---

[59]214th NSC Discussion, September 12, 1954, *FRUS*: 1952-1954 15:619.

that he would only agree if the treaty was signed before the ceasefire proposal was presented to the UN.

The treaty committed the two countries to "maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack and Communist subversive activities." The treaty was specifically limited to Taiwan and the Pescadores but could be extended to other areas by mutual agreement. In a secret understanding, the nationalists agreed not to attack the mainland unilaterally.[60] With the treaty, the decision of whether to go to war over the offshore islands clearly lay in Washington.

However, just as the treaty was being signed, the government in Peking announced that eleven American airmen who had been shot down over China during the Korean war and two civilians had been convicted of espionage, and were given sentences which varied from four years to life imprisonment. The reaction in the United States was predictably negative. Senator William Knowland of California, the so-called "Senator from Formosa," called out for an immediate blockade of the entire China coast. Eisenhower flatly rejected Knowland's suggestion, but because of the public outrage over

---

[60]Eisenhower, *Mandate*, 466-467.

the imprisonments, the administration chose to delay New Zealand's submission of the ceasefire proposal to the UN.[61]

Further events prevented the ceasefire proposal from ever being submitted. In January 1955, communist forces captured the island of Ichiang, just north of the Tachens. Dulles expressed to Eisenhower his concern that the ambiguous stance that the United States had taken up to this point was making the situation worse. With the capture of Ichiang, and the issue of the convicted airmen, the communists were trying to see how far the United States would let them push.

Although he wished to maintain as much freedom of action as possible, the secretary also believed that the United States needed to clarify its position publicly. Also, since the loss of Ichiang had damaged American credibility in the area, it would be wise to downplay the importance of the that island and the Tachens, which were 200 miles north of Taiwan, and were of limited value, even to Chiang. Therefore, Dulles proposed that the administration pressure Chiang to evacuate the Tachens, while simultaneously clarifying the United States' stance by asking Congress for the explicit authority to intervene militarily to defend Taiwan and the Pescadores

---

[61]Memorandum of Conversation by Bond, November 30, 1954, *FRUS*: 1952-1954, 15:961-967.

and any related positions the president felt were important.[62]

Once again, Eisenhower approved Dulles's proposal. A congressional resolution explicitly granting the president the authority to act as he saw fit to defend the nationalist position would have three positive effects: (1) it would clarify American intentions to the communists; (2) it would confirm that the administration was acting on constitutional grounds; and (3) it would bolster the moral of Chiang and his troops. Eisenhower told congress that the president already possessed the authority to act, but a resolution by Congress:

> would make clear the unified and serious intentions of the American Congress, the American government, and the American people and thus reduce the chance of war through Communist miscalculation.[63]

Congress quickly and by overwhelming margins passed the Formosa Resolution, which stated that the President was:

> ...authorized to employ the armed forces of the United States as he deems necessary for the specific purpose of securing and protecting Formosa and the Pescadores against armed attack, this authority to include the securing and protecting of such related positions and territories of that area now in friendly hands and the taking of

---

[62]Memorandum of Conversation by Dulles, January 19, 1955, *FRUS*: 1955-1957, 2:41.

[63]Eisenhower, *Mandate*, 467.

such other measures as he judges to be required or appropriate in assuring the defense of Formosa and the Pescadores.[64]

In essence, the resolution gave Eisenhower a "blank check."

The People's Republic reacted angrily. Foreign Minister Chou En-lai called it a "war message," and reiterated his government's resolve to capture not only the offshore islands, but Taiwan and the Pescadores as well.[65]

Chiang agreed to evacuate the Tachens with the support of the Seventh Fleet. As mainland forces occupied the evacuated areas, however, Peking continued to show an increasingly belligerent attitude. The military buildup opposite Taiwan was stepped up, and proposals for peace talks were rejected.

Dulles, after returning from Taipei, where he was delivering the senate-approved mutual defense treaty, told the National Security Council that the situation was much worse than he had realized. He said there was at least a fifty percent chance that the United States would have to fight. The focus of the world's attention was on the offshore islands; to let them fall to communism would be

---

[64]Formosa Resolution, quoted in Eisenhower, *Mandate*, 469.

[65]Eisenhower, *Mandate*, 468.

interpreted as a show of the United States' lack of determination to curb communist expansion.[66]

The secretary agreed with the military leaders that a war with the communists would require the use of United States nuclear capability. A land war in China, given the vast area and resources available to the communists would be a long and protracted venture, and would probably be unsuccessful as well. Time was needed then to prepare public opinion for the use of atomic weapons.[67]

Eisenhower agreed, and the administration began publicly to discuss the possibility of using atomic weapons if war should break out in the Taiwan Straits. In a speech on March 12, Dulles announced that the United States had "new and powerful weapons of precision which can utterly destroy military targets without endangering unrelated civilian centers." Later, he stated that the United States was prepared to use tactical nuclear weapons if war broke out over the offshore islands.[68]

---

[66]Memorandum of Discussion, 240th NSC Meeting, March 10, 1955, *FRUS*: 1955-1957, 2:345.

[67]Memorandum of Discussion, 240th NSC Meeting, March 10, 1955, *FRUS*: 1955-1957, 2:345.

[68]Divine, *Cold War*, 62.

Responding to a reporter's question on March 16, Eisenhower said that in the event of general war in Asia, the United States would use atomic weapons against a strictly military target. The president hoped that his answer would convince the communists of the United States' determination.[69]

Admiral Radford suggested that the administration go beyond just talk and place nuclear armed rockets and a division of American troops on Taiwan. He also suggested shifting another Strategic Air Command bomber wing to the Pacific.[70]

While he agreed that the situation was perilous, Eisenhower was not prepared to make such belligerent moves. He reiterated the concerns of his secretary of state that the United States was faced with two choices which were unacceptable. If the nation found itself at war, it would almost certainly have to use nuclear weapons, a move that would alienate the United States from most of its allies. On the other hand, if the Quemoy and Matsu were lost to the mainland, the United States would lose the confidence of the world as a champion against communism. This may result in

---

[69]Eisenhower, *Mandate*, 477.

[70]H.W. Brands, Jr., "Testing Massive Retaliation: Credibility and Crisis Management in the Taiwan Strait," *International Security*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (Spring 1988), 143.

the acquiescence to communism of Taiwan, the Philippines, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, and thus present a serious security risk to the United States.[71]

Eisenhower now made his own suggestion. He proposed that they try to convince Chiang to treat the islands as "outposts" rather than full-fledged bases. By lessening the importance of the islands, the United States and Taiwan could limit the damage to American prestige should the islands be lost. Eisenhower sent Admiral Radford and assistant secretary of state Robertson to Taipei to offer the generalissimo a promise to deploy and maintain American forces on Taiwan, including Marines and an entire air wing. In exchange, Chiang would have to agree to pull out all unnecessary forces and the civil population from Quemoy and Matsu, "and change those islands from precarious symbols of Chinese Nationalist prestige into strongly defended, workable outposts."[72]

Chiang was infuriated with the proposal. He felt that to follow Eisenhower's proposal would be to give up the islands, and accused the United States on going back on the promise it made when he agreed to evacuate the Tachens. Robertson retorted that the United States had agreed to defend only the island of Taiwan itself and the Pescadores,

---

[71]Eisenhower to Dulles, April 5, 1955, *FRUS*: 1955-1957, 2:445.

[72]Eisenhower, *Mandate*, 481.

not Quemoy and Matsu. He told Chiang that president Eisenhower had ruled out intervention with American forces; to do so would result in the loss of domestic and international support. Chiang could not count on American support in the defense of Quemoy and Matsu.[73]

Luckily, the communists were no more willing to go to war than Eisenhower was. Foreign Minister Chou En-lai announced at the Asian-African conference at Bandung that the People's Republic of China did not want war with the United States, and proposed negotiations to settle the issue. By May 22, there was an informal cease-fire, and on August 1 the eleven American airmen were released.

Eisenhower and Dulles congratulated themselves for their handling of the crisis. Eisenhower said that the administration had rejected the many roads to war, and chose one for peace.[74] Dulles said the administration had gone to "the brink of war" to achieve peace, just as it had in Korea, using the threat of "massive retaliation" to bring the communists to the bargaining table.[75]

---

[73]Robertson to Dulles, April 25, 1955, *FRUS*: 1955-57, 2:509.

[74]Eisenhower, *Mandate*, 483.

[75]James Shepley, "How Dulles Averted War," *Life*, January 16, 1956, 70.

Whether or not peace had come about because of or in spite of the actions of the Eisenhower administration, it is clear that the course of action taken by the United States during the crisis was not formulated by either Dulles or Eisenhower alone. The administration's first action, the attempt to bring the problem to the United Nations, was suggested by the secretary of state. Eisenhower, agreed that Dulles's proposal was a good idea, so he gave him the go ahead. It was Dulles's idea to evacuate the Tachens and ask Congress for the Formosa Resolution. It was also Dulles who proposed that the administration prepare public opinion for the possible use of nuclear weapons. Not until it seemed that the secretary's plans were not working did Eisenhower propose one of his own: to ask Chiang to change the status of the islands.

Thus, the assertion by revisionists of Eisenhower's complete dominance of American policy during the Quemoy-Matsu crisis is flawed. While it is apparent that Eisenhower was an active participant in the discussion of American policy during the offshore islands crisis, and it was Eisenhower who made the final decision in all cases, it is also clear that Eisenhower relied heavily on his secretary of state for the formulation of policy.

Conclusion

By the time Eisenhower entered the White House, he had developed a certain philosophy about leadership and the presidency. This philosophy governed his relationship with and his selection of his subordinates. He believed that in order for a modern president to be an effective leader, he must have and make good use of a system of advisors. In foreign policy, John Foster Dulles was the president's primary advisor, and for five-and-a-half years, Eisenhower used the secretary's full potential.

Eisenhower believed that no matter how great the man, as an individual, he had limitations. These limitations needed to be overcome if the man was to be a great leader. The best way to deal with the inherent weaknesses of the individual is for the leader to make his decisions with the benefit of the wisdom of others. This reliance on others cannot, however, be blind. Advisors have the same limitations of any individual, and their advice must be analyzed by the leader, who must decide whether to follow an advisor's suggestions or develop a course of action of his own.

Since Eisenhower felt he had to have reliable and useful subordinates, he chose them carefully. Friendship did not count for much; none of his old friends became members of his Cabinet or White House staff. Eisenhower also would not select anyone who actively sought an office, or who could

easily afford to take the office. "I feel that anyone who can, without great personal sacrifice, come to Washington to accept an important governmental post is not fit to hold that post." If you accepted those who sought out an office and could easily take it, all you would get would be "business failures, political hacks, and New Deal lawyers."[76]

Once chosen, Eisenhower relied on the subordinates' experience and insight to complement his own. He expected them to make certain decisions on their own. He did not believe that it was necessary, efficient or possible for every decision to be made by the president personally. Most minor decisions would had to be made at a lower level by individuals who were well aware of the president's underlying beliefs and objectives, and could make decisions based on that knowledge. Eisenhower told John F. Kennedy, "There are no easy matters that will come to you as president. If they are easy, they will be settled at a lower level."[77]

When the decisions were difficult, he expected his advisors to discuss the problem with him and the other advisors. This way, he could be sure that he looked at all aspects of the problem before deciding what policy to pursue. Yet he always reserved the authority to make the final decision himself. In this context, he recalled:

---

[76]Ambrose, *Eisenhower*, 20.

[77]Quoted in DeConde, "Reluctant Use of Power," 88.

> On a crucial question during the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln is said to have called for a vote around the Cabinet table. Every member voted no. "The ayes have it," Lincoln announced.[78]

Eisenhower avoided such a dramatic scene by never asking his advisors for a vote. He did however, demand that they give him their suggestions and opinions.

In foreign policy, the burden of advising Eisenhower fell largely on the shoulders of Dulles. While the president had other foreign policy advisors, none was as experienced and respected as the secretary of state. Furthermore, as we have seen, Dulles's perception of the international situation in the 1950s was largely shared by Eisenhower. Since the president often agreed with Dulles, he was more likely to accept the secretary's recommendations than those of his other advisors.

Eisenhower did not, however, delegate the final decision-making authority to Dulles, as most contemporaries and early analysts believed. Nor did he formulate his foreign policy on his own, using Dulles and others as unwitting participants in some intricate plan to achieve his objectives, as the revisionists have maintained. Both of these assessments paint an all too simplistic picture of the

---

[78]Eisenhower, *Mandate*, 115.

Eisenhower-Dulles relationship. One says that Dulles was the dominating force; the other says that Eisenhower was.

But a relationship between two people is seldom such a case of black and white; Eisenhower and Dulles were no exception. As the above examinations of the administration's Asian policy demonstrate, foreign policy decisions were rarely made by either the president or the secretary of state alone. While it was understood the president always had the last word, and that Eisenhower could act purely on his own (and he sometimes did), he often relied on Dulles for the formulation of policy and ideas.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Accinelli, Robert, "Eisenhower, Congress and the 1954-55 Offshore Island Crisis," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (1990), 329-348.

Adams, Sherman, *First Hand Report: The Inside Story of the Eisenhower Administration*, New York, 1962.

Ambrose, Stephen E., *Eisenhower, Vol. II: The President*, New York, 1984.

Anderson, David L., "Eisenhower, Dienbienphu, and the Origins of United States Military Intervention in Vietnam," *Mid-America*, Vol. 21, No. 2, (April-July 1989), 101-117.

Berding, Andrew, *Dulles on Diplomacy*, Princeton, 1965.

Bernstein, Barton J., "Foreign Policy in the Eisenhower Administration," *Foreign Service Journal*, Vol. 50. No. 5 (1973), 17-30.

Billings-Yun, Melanie, *Decision Against War: Eisenhower and Dien Bien Phu, 1954*, New York, 1988.

Shepley, James, "How Dulles Averted War," *Life* (January 16, 1956), 70.

Billings-Yun, Melanie, "Ike and Vietnam," *History Today*, Vol. 38 (1988), 13-19.

Brands, Henry William, "Johnson and Eisenhower: The President, the Former President, and the War in Vietnam," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (1985), 586-601.

Capitanchik, David B., *The Eisenhower Presidency and American Foreign Policy*, London, 1969.

Chang, Gordon H., "To the Nuclear Brink: Eisenhower, Dulles and the Quemoy-Matsu Crisis," *International Security*, Vol. 12, No. 4, 96-122.

Childs, Marquis, *Eisenhower: Captive Hero: A Critical Study of the General and President*, New York, 1958.

Clubb, O. Edmund, "Formosa and the Offshore Islands in American Policy, 1959-1955," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 96, No. 3 (1988-89), 92-112.

Cohen, Warren I., *America's Response to China: A History of Sino-American Relations*, New York, 1990.

Cotton, James, and Neary, Ian, eds., *The Korean War in History*, Manchester, 1989.

DeConde, Alexander, *The American Secretary of State: An Interpretation*, New York, 1962.

DeConde, Alexander, "Reluctant Use of Power," in Robinson, Edgar E., ed., *Powers of the President in Foreign Affairs, 1945-1965*, San Francisco, 1966, 77-132.

Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1952-1954*, Volumes 13 and 15, Washington D.C., 1984.

Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1954-1955*, Volume 2, Washington D.C., 1985.

DeSantis, Vincent P., "Eisenhower Revisionism," *Review of Politics*, Vol 38, No. 2 (1976), 190-207.

Dingman, Roger, "Atomic Diplomacy During the Korean War," *International Security*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (1988-89), 50-91.

Divine, Robert A., *Eisenhower and the Cold War*, New York, 1981.

Dulles, Foster Rhea, *American Policy Toward China, 1949-1969*, New York, 1972.

Eisenhower, Dwight David, *The White House Years: Mandate For Change, 1953-1956*, New York, 1963.

Fairbank, John K., *The United States and China, Third Edition*, Cambridge, Mass., 1971.

Fairbank, John K., *Communist China and Taiwan in United States Foreign Policy*, New Haven, 1960.

Foot, Rosemary J., "Nuclear Coercion and the Ending of the Korean Conflict," *International Security*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (1988-89), 92-112.

George, Alexander L., and Smoke, Richard, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice*, New York, 1974.

Gerson, Louis, *John Foster Dulles*, New York, 1967.

Goold-Adams, Richard, *John Foster Dulles: A Reappraisal*, New York, 1962.

Gordon, Leonard H.D., "United States Opposition to Use of Force in the Taiwan Strait, 1954-1962," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 72, No. 3 (Dec. 1985), 637-660.

Graebner, Norman A., *Cold War Diplomacy: American Foreign Policy, 1945-1960*, Princeton, 1962.

Greenstein, Fred I., *The Hidden-Hand Presidency: Eisenhower as Leader*, New York, 1982.

Greenstein, Fred I., and Burke, John P., "The Dynamics Of Presidential Reality Testing: Evidence from Two Vietnam Decisions," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 104, No. 4 (1989-90), 557-580.

Guhin, Micheal A., *John Foster Dulles: A Statesman and His Times*, New York, 1972.

Halperin, Morton H., and Tsou, Tang, "United States Policy Toward the Offshore Islands," *Public Policy*, Vol. 15 (1966), 119-38.

Hill, N.L., *Mr. Secretary of State*, New York, 1963.

Holsti, Ole R., "Will the Real Dulles Please Stand Up," *International Journal*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (1974-75), 34-44.

Holsti, Ole R., "The 'Operational Code' Approach to the Study of Political Leaders: John Foster Dulles' Philosophical and Instrumental Beliefs,"*Canadian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (1970), 123-157.

Hoopes, Townsend, *The Devil and John Foster Dulles*, Boston, 1973.

Hunt, Micheal H., *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy*, New Haven, 1987.

Immerman, Richard, "Eisenhower and Dulles: Who Made the Decisions?"*Political Psychology* (Autumn 1979), 21-28.

Immerman, Richard, *John Foster Dulles and the Diplomacy of the Cold War*, Princeton, 1990.

Kalicki, J.H., *The Pattern Of Sino-American Crises: Political-Military Interactions in the 1950s*, New York, 1985.

Keefer, Edward C., "President Dwight D. Eisenhower and the End of the Korean War," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (1986), 267-289.

Kempton, Murray, "The Underestimation of Dwight D. Eisenhower," *Esquire* (September, 1967), 108.

Klemstine, James Aurandt, "Two Decisions Not To Intervene: The Role of Containment in Indochina," Dissertation, Duke University, 1989.

Kolko, Gabriel, *Anatomy of a War: Vietnam, the United States, and the Modern Historical Experience*, New York, 1985.

Kozlowski, Francis Xavier, "Defiant Issue: Cold War Influence of United States Taiwan Policy, 1945 to 1952," Binghampton, New York, 1990.

Krock, Arthur, "Impressions of the President and the Man," *New York Times Magazine* (June 23, 1957),5.

Lyon, Peter, *Eisenhower: Portrait of A Hero*, Boston, 1974.

MacDonald, Callum, "Containment and Cold War: Conflict in Korea, 1950-53," *Modern History Review*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (1990), 5-9.

Melanson, Richard A., and Mayers, David, eds., *Reevaluating Eisenhower: American Foreign Policy in the 1950s*, Urbana, Illinois, 1987.

Morganthau, Hans J., "John Foster Dulles," in Graebner, Norman, ed., *An Uncertain Tradition: American Secretaries of State in the Twentieth Century*, New York, 1961, 289-308.

Neustadt, Richard E., *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan*, New York, 1990.

Qiang, Zhai, "Recent China Writings on 1945-1955 Sino-US Relations," *Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations Newsletter*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (1989), 75-84.

Rieselbach, Leroy N., *The Roots of Isolationism: Congressional Voting and Presidential Leadership in Foreign Policy*, Indianapolis, 1966.

Rostow, Walt, *The United States in the World Arena: An Essay in Recent History*, New York, 1960.

Rushkoff, Bennett C., "Eisenhower, Dulles and the Quemoy-Matsu Crisis, 1954-55," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 96, No. 3 (Fall 1981), 465-480.

Schlesinger, Arthur M., Jr., *The Imperial Presidency*, New York, 1974.

Scribner, Charles R., "The Eisenhower and Johnson Administrations' Decisionmaking on Vietnamese

Intervention: A Study of Contrasts," Dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara, 1980.

Sofacer, Abraham D., *War, Foreign Affairs and ConstitutionalPower: The Origins*, Cambridge, Mass., 1976.

Stolper, Thomas E., *China, Taiwan, and the Offshore Islands*, New York, 1985.

Wilcox, Francis O., *Congress, the Executive and Foreign Policy*, New York, 1971.

Willis, Gary, *Nixon Agonistes*, Boston, 1970.