To the Congress of the United States:

In my forthcoming State of the Union Message, I shall review the international situation generally. There are worldwide hopes which we can reasonably entertain, and there are worldwide responsibilities which we must carry to make certain that freedom—including our own—may be secure. There is, however, a special situation in the Middle East which I feel I should, even now, lay before you.

Before doing so it is well to remind ourselves that our basic national objective in international affairs remains peace—a world peace based on justice. Such a peace must include all areas, all peoples of the world if it is to be enduring. There is no nation, great or small, with which we would refuse to negotiate, in mutual good faith, with patience and in the determination to secure a better understanding between

The Middle East has abruptly reached a new and critical stage in its long and important history. In past decades many of the countries in that area were not fully self-governing. Other nations exercised considerable authority in the area and the security of the region was largely built around their power. But since the First World War there has been a steady evolution toward self-government and independence. This development the United States has welcomed and has encouraged. Our country supports without reservation the full sovereignty and independence of each and every nation of the Middle East.

Russia's rulers have long sought to dominate the Middle East. That was true of the Czars and it is true of the Bolsheviks. The reasons are not hard to find. They do not affect Russia's security, for no one plans to use the Middle East as a base for aggression against Russia. Never for a moment has the United States entertained such a thought.

The Soviet Union has nothing whatsoever to fear from the United States in the Middle East, or anywhere else in the world, so long as its rulers do not themselves first resort to aggression.

That statement I make solemnly and emphatically. ...
The reason for Russia's interest in the Middle East is solely that of power politics. Considering her announced purpose of Communizing the world, it is easy to understand her hope of dominating the Middle East.

This region has always been the crossroads of the continents of the Eastern Hemisphere. The Suez Canal enables the nations of Asia and Europe to carry on the commerce that is essential if these countries are to maintain well-rounded and prosperous economies. The Middle East provides a gateway between Eurasia and Africa.

It contains about two thirds of the presently known oil deposits of the world and it normally supplies the petroleum needs of many nations of Europe, Asia and Africa. The nations of Europe are peculiarly dependent upon this supply, and this dependency relates to transportation as well as to production! This has been vividly demonstrated since the closing of the Suez Canal and some of the pipelines. Alternate ways of transportation and, indeed, alternate sources of power can, if necessary, be developed. But these cannot be considered as early prospects.

These things stress the immense importance of the Middle East. If the nations of that area should lose their independence, if they were dominated by alien forces hostile to freedom, that would be both a tragedy for the area and for many other free nations whose economic life would be subject to near strangulation. Western Europe would be endangered just as though there had been no Marshall Plan, no North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The free nations of Asia and Africa, too, would be placed in serious jeopardy. And the countries of the Middle East would lose the markets upon which their economies depend. All this would have the most adverse, if not disastrous, effect upon our own nation's economic life and political prospects....

International Communism, of course, seeks to mask its purposes of domination by expressions of good will and by superficially attractive offers of political, economic and military aid. But any free nation, which is the subject of Soviet enticement, ought, in elementary wisdom, to look behind the mask.

Soviet control of the satellite nations of Eastern Europe has been forcibly maintained in spite of solemn promises of a contrary intent, made during World War II.

Stalin's death brought hope that this pattern would change. And we read the pledge of the Warsaw Treaty of 1955 that the Soviet Union would follow in satellite countries “the principles of mutual respect for their independence and sovereignty and non-interference in domestic affairs.” But we have just seen the subjugation of Hungary by naked armed force. In the aftermath of this Hungarian tragedy, world respect for and belief in Soviet promises have sunk to a new low. International Communism needs and seeks a recognizable success.

Thus, we have these simple and indisputable facts:

- The Middle East, which has always been coveted by Russia, would today be prized more than ever by International Communism.
• The Soviet rulers continue to show that they do not scruple to use any means to gain their ends.

• The free nations of the Mid East need, and for the most part want, added strength to assure their continued independence. ...

There is general recognition in the Middle East, as elsewhere, that the United States does not seek either political or economic domination over any other people. Our desire is a world environment of freedom, not servitude. On the other hand many, if not all, of the nations of the Middle East are aware of the danger that stems from International Communism and welcome closer cooperation with the United States to realize for themselves the United Nations goals of independence, economic well-being and spiritual growth.

If the Middle East is to continue its geographic role of uniting rather than separating East and West; if its vast economic resources are to serve the well-being of the peoples there, as well as that of others; and if its cultures and religions and their shrines are to be preserved for the uplifting of the spirits of the peoples, then the United States must make more evident its willingness to support the independence of the freedom-loving nations of the area.

Under these circumstances I deem it necessary to seek the cooperation of the Congress. Only with that cooperation can we give the reassurance needed to deter aggression, to give courage and confidence to those who are dedicated to freedom and thus prevent a chain of events which would gravely endanger all of the free world.

... It is nothing new for the President and the Congress to join to recognize that the national integrity of other free nations is directly related to our own security.

We have joined to create and support the security system of the United Nations. We have reinforced the collective security system of the United Nations by a series of collective defense arrangements. Today we have security treaties with 42 other nations which recognize that our peace and security are intertwined. We have joined to take decisive action in relation to Greece and Turkey and in relation to Taiwan.

Thus, the United States through the joint action of the President and the Congress, or, in the case of treaties, the Senate, has manifested in many endangered areas its purpose to support free and independent governments and peace against external menace, notably the menace of International Communism. Thereby we have helped to maintain peace and security during a period of great danger. It is now essential that the United States should manifest through joint action of the President and the Congress our determination to assist those nations of the Mid East area, which desire that assistance.

The action which I propose would have the following features.

• It would, first of all, authorize the United States to cooperate with and assist any nation or group of nations in the general area of the Middle East in the development of economic strength dedicated to the maintenance of national independence.
• It would, in the second place, authorize the Executive to undertake in the same region programs of military assistance and cooperation with any nation or group of nations which desires such aid.

• It would, in the third place, authorize such assistance and cooperation to include the employment of the armed forces of the United States to secure and protect the territorial integrity and political independence of such nations, requesting such aid, against overt armed aggression from any nation controlled by International Communism. These measures would have to be consonant with the treaty obligations of the United States, including the Charter of the United Nations and with any action or recommendations of the United Nations. They would also, if armed attack occurs, be subject to the overriding authority of the United Nations Security Council in accordance with the Charter.

• The present proposal would, in the fourth place, authorize the President to employ, for economic and defensive military purposes, sums available under the Mutual Security Act of 1954, as amended, without regard to existing limitations.

The legislation now requested should not include the authorization or appropriation of funds because I believe that, under the conditions I suggest, presently appropriated funds will be adequate for the balance of the present fiscal year ending June 30. I shall, however, seek in subsequent legislation the authorization of $200,000,000 to be available during each of the fiscal years 1958 and 1959 for discretionary use in the area, in addition to the other mutual security programs for the area hereafter provided for by the Congress.

This program will not solve all the problems of the Middle East.

Neither does it represent the totality of our policies for the area. There are the problems of Palestine and relations between Israel and the Arab States, and the future of the Arab refugees. There is the problem of the future status of the Suez Canal. These difficulties are aggravated by International Communism, but they would exist quite apart from that threat.

The proposed legislation is primarily designed to deal with the possibility of Communist aggression, direct and indirect. There is imperative need that any lack of power in the area should be made good, not by external or alien force, but by the increased vigor and security of the independent nations of the area.

It is my hope and belief that if our purpose be proclaimed, as proposed by the requested legislation, that very fact will serve to halt any contemplated aggression. We shall have heartened the patriots who are dedicated to the independence of their nations. They will not feel that they stand alone, under the menace of great power. And I should add that patriotism is, throughout this area, a powerful sentiment. It is true that fear sometimes perverts true patriotism into fanaticism and to the acceptance of dangerous enticements from without. But if that fear can be allayed, then the climate will be more favorable to the attainment of worthy national ambitions.
And as I have indicated, it will also be necessary for us to contribute economically to strengthen those countries, or groups of countries, which have governments manifestly dedicated to the preservation of independence and resistance to subversion. Such measures will provide the greatest insurance against Communist inroads. Words alone are not enough.

Let me refer again to the requested authority to employ the armed forces of the United States to assist to defend the territorial integrity and the political independence of any nation in the area against Communist armed aggression. Such authority would not be exercised except at the desire of the nation attacked. Beyond this it is my profound hope that this authority would never have to be exercised at all.

Nothing is more necessary to assure this than that our policy with respect to the defense of the area be promptly and clearly determined and declared. Thus the United Nations and all friendly governments, and indeed governments which are not friendly, will know where we stand.

In the situation now existing, the greatest risk, as is often the case, is that ambitious despots may miscalculate. If power-hungry Communists should either falsely or correctly estimate that the Middle East is inadequately defended, they might be tempted to use open measures of armed attack. If so, that would start a chain of circumstances which would almost surely involve the United States in military action. I am convinced that the best insurance against this dangerous contingency is to make clear now our readiness to cooperate fully and freely with our friends of the Middle East in ways consonant with the purposes and principles of the United Nations. I intend promptly to send a special mission to the Middle East to explain the cooperation we are prepared to give.

The policy which I outline involves certain burdens and indeed risks for the United States. Those who covet the area will not like what is proposed. Already, they are grossly distorting our purpose. However, before this Americans have seen our nation's vital interests and human freedom in jeopardy, and their fortitude and resolution have been equal to the crisis, regardless of hostile distortion of our words, motives and actions.

Indeed, the sacrifices of the American people in the cause of freedom have, even since the close of World War II, been measured in many billions of dollars and in thousands of the precious lives of our youth. These sacrifices, by which great areas of the world have been preserved to freedom, must not be thrown away.

In those momentous periods of the past, the President and the Congress have united, without partisanship, to serve the vital interests of the United States and of the free world.
President Eisenhower on “The Domino Theory”

From a Presidential News Conference of April 7, 1954

In this press conference President Eisenhower answered various questions about foreign policy. It is worthwhile recalling that 1954 was the year of the fall of the French garrison at Dien Bien Phu in North Vietnam, and that Senator Joseph McCarthy (the "certain senator" referred to in a question) was still conducted his anti-Communist witch hunts. The names of the questioners and most questions on domestic issues have been omitted.

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

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

No, we have no intention of going into a program of seeing how big these can be made. I don't know whether the scientists would place any limit; and, therefore, you hear these remarks about "blow-out," which, I think, is even blowing a hole through the entire atmosphere. We know of no military requirement that could lead us into the production of a bigger bomb than has already been produced.

Now, with respect to the potentiality of this development for peace-time use, our people study, I think in almost every aspect of human affairs, how this whole atomic science, this nuclear science, can be applied to peacetime uses. It would be rash to say that the hydrogen bomb doesn't add to the possibilities; yet, at the moment, I know of no direct connection or direct application of the hydrogen bomb principle to peacetime power. I asked that very question of the scientists, and they gave an answer as nearly as I have just stated it as I can recall.

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

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

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

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

... 

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

So far as I know, there are no positive reactions as yet, because the time element would almost forbid. The suggestions we have, have been communicated; and we will have communications on them in due course, I should say.

Q. 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?

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

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

Here we have a situation for which I have stood for a long time, Hawaiian statehood. I thought there
were certain considerations of national security, and so on, that made the other case a separate one. If
these bills are put together, I will have to take a look at them at the time and study and decide what I
believe to be right at that moment. I just can't predict.

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

No, Mr. Clark, I couldn't answer that one for the simple reason that we have got this whole troublous
question now under study by a group of people. The only thing I can say is that here is a problem that is
of the utmost moment to all of us, not only the United States, to the free world. It is the kind of thing to
which there is more attention given, I guess, at the given moment of real acute occurrence than almost
any other thing. It is getting study day by day, and I can't tell you what would be the exact reaction.

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

So far as I know, Secretary Dulles has never made an important pronouncement without not only
confering and clearing with me, but sitting down and studying practically word by word what he is to
say. Now, I am not aware of any antagonism between the statements he has made and I have made. I
have plead with America to look facts in the face; I have plead with them not to minimize what the
possibilities of the situation are, but to realize that we are 160 million of the most productive and the
most intelligent people on earth; therefore, why are we going around being too scared? Now, on the
other hand, we would be completely foolish not to see what these facts are and what their potentialities
are. I see those two statements a completely compatible, not as incompatible.

Q. Mr. President, you have touched on this, but I wonder if you could tell us whether there is any truth to
these reports in the last couple of days that the United States is asking some of the other free nations to
join in a joint declaration warning Communist China against any aggression in Southeast Asia?
No; in approach, Mr. Arrowsmith, you call attention to the problem and say that this looks like a place where the interests of all of us are involved, and now let us talk this over. You don't propose the answer before you study it, put it that way.

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

Your question is really, do I think there is a good chance of reaching a negotiated solution? [“That is right.”] Well, I wouldn't class the chances as good, no, not one that the free world would consider adequate to the situation. I must say, let me make clear again, I am certain the United States, as a whole, its Congress and the executive portions of its Government, are ready to move just as far as prudence will allow in seeking any kind of conciliation or negotiated agreement that will ease any of the problems of this troubled world. But one thing: we are not going to overstep the line of prudence in keeping ourselves secure, knowing that the agreements we made have some means of being enforced. We are not simply going to take words. There must be some way of making these things fact and deed.

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

Not at this moment. I should point out, with all the sincerity I have, there is nothing partisan about this problem. There is nothing, so far as I know, in which the executive branch and the Congress are apart. We not only must confer upon the broadest scale with the leaders of Congress as we proceed toward a decision, we go just as far as they would think it would be necessary in such a conference. If some specific authority or anything else were necessary, it would be asked for after the leaders had already agreed on a bipartisan basis this is what we should do. I know of nobody that is trying to escape his responsibility in this whole business, because we realize that it is America and the free world we are talking about, and nothing else.

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

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

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

Again you are bringing up questions that I have explained in a very definite sense several times this morning. I am not saying what we are prepared to do because there is a Congress, and there are a
number of our friends all over this world that are vitally engaged. I know what my own convictions on this matter are; but until the thing has been settled and properly worked out with the people who also bear responsibilities, I cannot afford to be airing them everywhere, because it sort of stultifies negotiation which is often necessary.