

Primary Source Reading 17-1 ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Southeast Asia and the Domino Theory**▣ About the Selection**

In 1954 Vietnamese forces attacked 10,000 French soldiers entrenched at Dien Bien Phu. France asked the United Nations to help its army. During this period, President Eisenhower held a press conference in which he explained the Domino Theory, or the strategic importance of Vietnam and its surrounding countries. This theory became a common justification for those who supported U.S. action in Indochina.

Reader's Dictionary

Indochina: a peninsula in Southeast Asia that includes Burma, Laos, and Vietnam

inimical: in opposition to

GUIDED READING

As you read, determine what Eisenhower believes are the consequences of Communist expansion in Asia. Then answer the questions that follow.

Q. Robert Richards, Copley Press: Mr. President, would you mind commenting on the strategic importance of Indochina to the free world? I think there has been, across the country, some lack of understanding on just what it means to us.

The President: You have, of course, both the specific and the general when you talk about such things.

First of all, you have the specific 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 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 430 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

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that you would suffer through loss 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 moves in to threaten Australia and New Zealand.

It takes away the economic aspects, that region that Japan would have as a trading area or Japan . . . will have only one place 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.

Source: *The Power of Words: Documents in American History, Volume II*. New York: HarperCollins College Publishers, 1996.

READER RESPONSE

Directions: Answer the following questions on the lines below.

1. According to Eisenhower, what would Communist expansion in Asia mean to Japan?

2. What is the Domino Theory?

3. What would be the consequences of the dominoes falling and countries coming under Communist rule in Indochina, according to Eisenhower?

4. **Critical Thinking** Why do you think the United States has been so opposed to communism?
