

Eisenhower on the Strategic Link between French Forces in Europe and Vietnam

Serious problems were plaguing our nation in Korea and Vietnam. In the former, indecisive and costly fighting still dragged on. In Vietnam the French had not yet convinced the world that the struggle was between those who stood for freedom on one side and Communist rebels, supported by the power of Red China, on the other. Consequently a considerable portion of world opinion viewed the war there as merely a French effort to continue their prewar domination in the region. Until this point was clarified, it was difficult for any Western nation, including our own, to offer or provide any help to the French and loyal Vietnamese.

This was a matter that had troubled me greatly when I was serving as military commander of NATO in 1951-52. In that period the French government had found it necessary to deplete their NATO military contingent by a number of battalions so as to reinforce promptly French troops in Vietnam. In expressing my disappointment in that development I had strongly urged the government to interpret, publicly, their Far Eastern war effort in terms of freedom versus Communism. This could be done only through a French public commitment assuring to the Vietnamese, unequivocally, the right of determining their own political future. Such a pronouncement, I argued, would earn the approval of the Free World as well as its moral and greater material support.

During my service in NATO a considerable number of responsible officials in France had assured me of their complete agreement with this view. General de Lattre de Tassigny, who was then the commander of French forces in Vietnam, had come to the United States, at my urging, just a few months before his death and in a nationally televised speech in this country made just such a statement. But because his government did not follow with a public political pronouncement, the matter was still subject to misinterpretation and an American support for the French in that region could not achieve unanimous domestic approval. Nonetheless, recognizing the necessity of stopping Communist advances in that country, we started immediately after my inauguration to devise plans for strengthening the defenders politically and militarily within the proper limits.

Source: Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change: 1953-1956* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1963), p. 109)

[Return to Vinnie's Home Page](#)

[Return to Vietnam Page](#)