

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

*Vietnam*

*Walt Rostow Letter*

RECEIVED July 25, 1967

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BOB DOLE

Dear Congressman Dole:

I am very sorry to be so late in responding to your letter of May 18 in which you passed along questions from an editor in your District. You know, I am sure, that these weeks have been extremely hectic for us all, and I have had to put off some correspondence in order to deal with other pressing business.

Let me first enter a disclaimer. I am not, as your editor suggests, the "master mind of the theories behind our Viet-Nam expedition." Nonetheless, I shall do my best to respond to the questions asked.

I would say the following:

1. There is no question that Communist China would like to see the war in Viet-Nam continue indefinitely. More than that, they would like to see this "war of national liberation" succeed. For, as you know, the expansion of communism by force is a fixed point of Peking's indoctrination.

2. I have no "domino theory." I do believe, however, that there can be little question that if the aggression in Viet-Nam is defeated, the Communists will be less likely to adopt the same techniques in neighboring areas. On the other hand, I have no doubt that a communist success in Viet-Nam would encourage them in pressing forward with "wars of national liberation" wherever tempting targets existed or developed.

We are in Viet-Nam in pursuit of our broadest national interest and in accordance with our pledged word in treaty commitments. Any similar situation would have to be judged on the basis of these interests and commitments.

3. Short of our losing the war, I cannot imagine anything that would be more heartening to the Communists than a flat statement by us that we have no intention of ever going to the assistance of any other friends or allies in that part of the world. This surely would stimulate the Communists to greater aggression.

4. The destruction in Viet-Nam resulting from military action as well as from the campaign of indiscriminate terrorists by the Viet Cong is a matter of deepest regret. The destruction of any war is regrettable. But we have seen throughout history that nations are tremendously resilient. Europe was thriving and prosperous ten years after the most destructive war in history. Korea, today, is not recognizable when compared with the Korea of ten short years ago. Similarly, in Viet-Nam I am sure that we will all be astonished at the recovery of those able and skillful people if only they can be left in peace. Indeed, even now in the midst of war, they are moving quickly to establish a viable and independent government.

5. Viet-Nam is not now an "armed camp under our military rule." Nor do I see any likelihood that it will ever be so. In fact, our presence in Viet-Nam has helped, not hindered, the people of that country in developing their own political institutions in their own way.

6. The documents mentioned are in the public domain and need no repetition here.

7. We have lived up to basic conditions of those commitments.

8. In other parts of the world, I would say that our position as a world power was relatively unchanged. In Asia, where the meaning of the war in Viet-Nam is more real and better understood, there is no question that our position in the eyes of Governments and of people has improved. For they know now, as never before, that we feel deeply the importance of their independence and security and are prepared to help them in achieving their goals, even ~~the~~ considerable sacrifice in blood and treasure.

9. Any final judgment will have to await the outcome of this struggle. But I would say that our ability to carry forward this most difficult task against the vocal and energetic opposition of a small but significant portion of our population -- some of whom would have us do more, some of whom would have us do less -- is a sign of important national strength.

10. We are prepared to move toward a peaceful settlement at anytime, either through negotiations or through mutual acts of restraint and de-escalation. All we ask is that the effort to conquer South Viet-Nam by force come to an end.

Sincerely yours,

*W W Rostow*

W. W. Rostow

The Honorable  
Bob Dole  
United States House of  
Representatives  
Washington, D. C.

*P. S. I still hold the view set out in  
this June 1961 talk - which was cleared  
by President Kennedy*

*Walt*