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The Communist Threat in the Taiwan Area

1. Statement by Secretary Dulles,

I have reviewed in detail with the President the serious situation which has resulted from aggressive Chinese Communist military actions in the Taiwan (Formosa) Straits area. The President has authorized me to make the following statement.

1. Neither Taiwan (Formosa) nor the islands of Quemoy and Matsu have ever been under the authority of the Chinese Communists. Since the end of the Second World War, a period of over 13 years, they have continuously been under the authority of Free China, that is, the Republic of China.

2. The United States is bound by treaty to help to defend Taiwan (Formosa) from armed attack and the President is authorized by joint resolution of the Congress to employ the Armed Forces of the United States for the securing and protecting of related positions such as Quemoy and Matsu.

3. Any attempt on the part of the Chinese Communists now to seize these positions or any of them would be a crude violation of the principles upon which world order is based, namely, that no country should use armed force to seize new territory. [pg 2]

4. The Chinese Communists have, for about 2 weeks, been subjecting Quemoy to heavy artillery bombardment and, by artillery fire and use of small naval craft, they have been harassing the regular supply of the civilian and military population of the Quemoy, which totals some 125,000 persons. The official Peiping radio repeatedly announces the purpose of these military operations to be to take by armed force Taiwan (Formosa), as well as Quemoy and Matsu. In virtually every Peiping broadcast Taiwan (Formosa) and the offshore islands are linked as the objective of what is called the "Chinese Peoples Liberation Army."

5. Despite, however, what the Chinese Communists say, and so far have done, it is not yet certain that their purpose is in fact to make an allout effort to conquer by force Taiwan (Formosa) and the offshore islands. Neither is it apparent that such efforts as are being made, or may be made, cannot be contained by the courageous, and purely defensive, efforts of the forces of the Republic of China, with such substantial logistical support as the United States is providing.

6. The joint resolution of Congress, above referred to, includes a finding to the effect that "the secure possession by friendly governments of the western Pacific island chain, of which Formosa is a part, is essential to the vital interests of the United States and all friendly nations in and bordering upon the Pacific Ocean." It further authorizes the President to employ the Armed Forces of the United States for the protection not only of Formosa but for "the securing and protection of such related positions and territories of that area now in friendly hands and the taking of such other measures as he judges to be required or appropriate in assuring the defense of Formosa." In view of the situation outlined in the preceding paragraph, the President has not yet made any finding under that resolution that the employment of the Armed Forces of the United States is required or appropriate in insuring the defense of Formosa. The President would not, however, hesitate to make such a finding if he judged that the circumstances made this necessary to accomplish the purposes of the joint resolution. In this connection, we have recognized that the securing and protecting of Quemoy and Matsu have increasingly become related to the defense of Taiwan (Formosa). This is indeed also recognized by the Chinese Communists. Military dispositions have been made by the United States so that a Presidential determination, if made, would be followed by action both timely and effective. [pg 3]

7. The President and I earnestly hope that the Chinese Communist regime will not again, as in the case of Korea, defy the basic principle upon which world order depends, namely, that armed force should not be used to achieve territorial ambitions. Any such naked use of force would pose an issue far transcending the offshore islands and even the security of Taiwan (Formosa). It would forecast a widespread use of force in the Far East which would endanger vital free-world positions, and the security of the United States. Acquiescence therein would threaten peace everywhere. We believe that the civilized world community will never condone overt military conquest as a legitimate instrument of policy. [pg 4]

8. The United States has not, however, abandoned hope that Peiping will stop short of defying the will of mankind for peace. This would not require it to abandon its claims, however ill-founded we may deem them to be. I recall that in the extended negotiations which the representatives of the United States and Chinese Communist regime conducted at Geneva between 1955 and 1958, a sustained effort was made by the United States to secure, with particular reference to the Taiwan area, a declaration of mutual and reciprocal renunciation of force, except in self-defense, which, however, would be without prejudice to the pursuit of policies by peaceful means. The Chinese Communists rejected any such declaration. We believe, however, that such a course of conduct constitutes the only civilized and acceptable procedure. The United States intends to follow that course, so far as it is concerned, unless and until the Chinese Communists, by their acts, leave us no choice but to react in defense of the principles to which all peace-loving governments are dedicated. [pg 5]

**2. White House Statement,
September 6, 1958**

The President discussed the Taiwan Straits situation with the Secretary of State, the Secretary of the Treasury, the Secretary of Defense, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff—members of the National Security Council. Also present were the Director of the United States Information Agency, the Director of the Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization, and the Acting Director of the Central Intelligence Agency. The Vice President, because of a long-standing out of town engagement, was unable to be present.

Consideration was given to measures which would conform to the policy enunciated on September 4 by the Secretary of State on the authority of the President. But particular note was taken of the reported radio statement of Mr. Chou En-lai indicating that the Chinese Communists were prepared to resume ambassadorial talks with the United States "in order to contribute further to the safeguarding of peace." These talks, which had been conducted in Europe for several years, were recently interrupted by the Chinese Communists.

So far the United States has not received any official word on this subject. We hope, however, that the reported statement of Mr. Chou En-lai is responsive to the urging, contained in our September 4 policy statement, that "armed force should not be used to achieve territorial ambitions," although such renunciation of force need not involve renouncing claims or the pursuit of policies by peaceful means. This is the course that the United States will resolutely pursue, in conforming with our vital interests, our treaty obligations, and the principles on which world order is based.

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The United States has sought to implement that policy in its past talks at the ambassadorial level with the Chinese Communists. On July 28, 1958, and subsequently, we have sought a resumption of these talks.

If the Chinese Communists are now prepared to respond, the United States welcomes that decision. The United States Ambassador at Warsaw stands ready promptly to meet with the Chinese Communist Ambassador there, who has previously acted in this matter.

Naturally, in these resumed talks the United States will adhere to the negotiating position which it originally took in 1955, namely, that we will not in these talks be a party to any arrangement which would prejudice the rights of our ally, the Republic of China.

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3. President Eisenhower's Report to the American People, September 11, 1958

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MY FRIENDS: Tonight I want to talk to you about the situation, dangerous to peace, which has developed in the Formosa Straits in the Far East. My purpose is to give you its basic facts and then my conclusions as to our Nation's proper course of action.

To begin, let us remember that traditionally this country and its Government have always been passionately devoted to peace with honor, as they are now. We shall never resort to force in settlement of differences except when compelled to do so to defend against aggression and to protect our vital interests.

This means that, in our view, negotiations and conciliation should never be abandoned in favor of force and strife. While we shall never timidly retreat before the threat of armed aggression, we would welcome in the present circumstances negotiations that could have a fruitful result in preserving the peace of the Formosa area and reaching a solution that could be acceptable to all parties concerned including, of course, our ally, the Republic of China.

On the morning of August 23d the Chinese Communists opened a severe bombardment of Quemoy, an island in the Formosa Straits off the China Coast. Another island in the same area, Matsu, was also attacked. These two islands have always been a part of Free China—never under Communist control.

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This bombardment of Quemoy has been going on almost continuously ever since. Also, Chinese Communists have been using their naval craft to try to break up the supplying of Quemoy with its 125,000 people. Their normal source of supply is by sea from Formosa, where the Government of Free China is now located.

Chinese Communists say that they will capture Quemoy. So far they have not actually attempted a landing, but their bombardment has caused great damage. Over 1,000 people have been killed or wounded. In large part these are civilians.

This is a tragic affair. It is shocking that in this day and age naked force should be used for such aggressive purposes.

But this is not the first time that the Chinese Communists have acted in this way.

In 1950 they attacked and tried to conquer the Republic of Korea. At that time President Truman announced the intention of protecting Formosa, the principal area still held by Free China, because of the belief that Formosa's safety was vital to the security of the United States and the free world. Our Government has adhered firmly ever since 1950 to that policy.

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In 1953 and 1954 the Chinese Communists took an active part in the war in Indochina against Viet-Nam.

In the fall of 1954 they attacked Quemoy and Matsu, the same two islands they are attacking now. They broke off that attack when, in January 1955, the Congress and I agreed that we should firmly support Free China.

Since then, for about 4 years, Chinese Communists have not used force for aggressive purposes. We have achieved an armistice in Korea which stopped the fighting there in 1953. There is a 1954 armistice in Viet-Nam; and since 1955 there has been quiet in the Formosa Straits area. We had hoped that the Chinese Communists were becoming peaceful—but it seems not.

So the world is again faced with the problem of armed aggression. Powerful dictatorships are attacking an exposed, but free, area.

What should we do?

Shall we take the position that, submitting to threat, it is better to surrender pieces of free territory in the hope that this will satisfy the appetite of the aggressor and we shall have peace?

Do we not still remember that the name of "Munich" symbolizes a vain hope of appeasing dictators?

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At that time the policy of appeasement was tried, and it failed. Prior to the Second World War Mussolini seized Ethiopia. In the Far East Japanese warlords were grabbing Manchuria by force. Hitler sent his armed forces into the Rhineland in violation of the Versailles Treaty. Then he annexed little Austria. When he got away with that, he next turned to Czechoslovakia and began taking it bit by bit.

In the face of all these attacks on freedom by the dictators, the powerful democracies stood aside. It seemed that Ethiopia and Manchuria were too far away and too unimportant to fight about. In Europe appeasement was looked upon as the way to peace. The democracies felt that if they tried to stop what was going on that would mean war. But, because of these repeated retreats, war came just the same.

If the democracies had stood firm at the beginning, almost surely there would have been no World War. Instead they gave such an appearance of weakness and timidity that aggressive rulers were encouraged to overrun one country after another. In the end the democracies saw that their very survival was at stake. They had no alternative but to turn and fight in what proved to be the most terrible war that the world has ever known.

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I know something about that war, and I never want to see that history repeated. But, my fellow Americans, it certainly can be repeated if the peace-loving democratic nations again fearfully practice a policy of standing idly by while big aggressors use armed force to conquer the small and weak.

Let us suppose that the Chinese Communists conquer Quemoy. Would that be the end of the story? We know that it would not be the end of the story. History teaches that, when powerful despots can gain something through aggression, they try, by the same methods, to gain more and more and more.

Also, we have more to guide us than the teachings of history. We have the statements, the boastings, of the Chinese Communists themselves. They frankly say that their present military effort is part of a program to conquer Formosa.

It is as certain as can be that the shooting which the Chinese Communists started on August 23d had as its purpose not just the taking of the island of Quemoy. It is part of what is indeed an ambitious plan of armed conquest.

This plan would liquidate all of the free-world positions in the western Pacific area and bring them under captive governments which would be hostile to the United States and the free world. Thus the Chinese and Russian Communists would come to dominate at least the western half of the now friendly Pacific Ocean.

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So aggression by ruthless despots again imposes a clear danger to the United States and to the free world.

In this effort the Chinese Communists and the Soviet Union appear to be working hand in hand. Last Monday I received a long letter on this subject from Prime Minister Khrushchev. He warned the United States against helping its allies in the western Pacific. He said that we should not support the Republic of China and the Republic of Korea. He contended that we should desert them, return all of our naval forces to our home bases, and leave our friends in the Far East to face, alone, the combined military power of the Soviet Union and Communist China.

Does Mr. Khrushchev think that we have so soon forgotten Korea?

I must say to you very frankly and soberly, my friends, the United States cannot accept the result that the Communists seek. Neither can we show, now, a weakness of purpose—a timidity—which would surely lead them to move more aggressively against us and our friends in the western Pacific area.

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If the Chinese Communists have decided to risk a war, it is not because Quemoy itself is so valuable to them. They have been getting along without Quemoy ever since they seized the China mainland 9 years ago.

If they have now decided to risk a war, it can only be because they, and their Soviet allies, have decided to find out whether threatening war is a policy from which they can make big gains.

If that is their decision, then a western Pacific Munich would not buy us peace or security. It would encourage the aggressors. It would dismay our friends and allies there. If history teaches anything, appeasement would make it more likely that we would have to fight a major war.

Congress has made clear its recognition that the security of the western Pacific is vital to the security of the United States and that we should be firm. The Senate has ratified, by overwhelming vote, security treaties with the Republic of China covering Formosa and the Pescadores, and also the Republic of Korea. We have a mutual security treaty with the Republic of the Philippines, which could be next in line for conquest if Formosa fell into hostile hands. These treaties commit the United States to the defense of the treaty areas. In addition, there is a joint resolution which the Congress passed in January 1955 dealing specifically with Formosa and the offshore islands of Free China in the Formosa Straits.

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At that time the situation was similar to what it is today.

Congress then voted the President authority to employ the Armed Forces of the United States for the defense not only of Formosa but of related positions, such as Quemoy and Matsu, if I believed their defense to be appropriate in assuring the defense of Formosa.

I might add that the mandate from the Congress was given by an almost unanimous bipartisan vote.

Today, the Chinese Communists announce, repeatedly and officially, that their military operations against Quemoy are preliminary to attack on Formosa. So it is clear that the Formosa Straits resolution of 1955 applies to the present situation.

If the present bombardment and harassment of Quemoy should be converted into a major assault, with which the local defenders could not cope, then we would be compelled to face precisely the situation that Congress visualized in 1955.

I have repeatedly sought to make clear our position in this matter so that there would not be danger of Communist miscalculation. The Secretary of State on September 4th made a statement to the same end. This statement could not, of course, cover every contingency. Indeed, I interpret the joint resolution as requiring me not to make absolute advance commitments but to use my judgment according to the circumstances of the time. But the statement did carry a clear meaning to the Chinese Communists and to the Soviet Union. There will be no retreat in the face of armed aggression, which is part and parcel of a continuing program of using armed force to conquer new regions.

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I do not believe that the United States can be either lured or frightened into appeasement. I believe that, in taking the position of opposing aggression by force, I am taking the only position which is consistent with the vital interests of the United States and, indeed, with the peace of the world.

Some misguided persons have said that Quemoy is nothing to become excited about. They said the same about south Korea—about Viet-Nam, about Lebanon.

Now I assure you that no American boy will be asked by me to fight *just* for Quemoy. But those who make up our Armed Forces—and, I believe the American people as a whole—do stand ready to defend the principle that armed force shall not be used for aggressive purposes.

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Upon observance of that principle depends a lasting and just peace. It is that same principle that protects the western Pacific free-world positions as well as the security of our homeland. If we are not ready to defend this principle, then indeed tragedy after tragedy would befall us.

But there is a far better way than resort to force to settle these differences, and there is some hope that such a better way may be followed.

That is the way of negotiation.

That way is open and prepared because in 1955 arrangements were made between the United States and the Chinese Communists that an Ambassador on each side would be authorized to discuss at Geneva certain problems of common concern. These included the matter of release of American civilians imprisoned in Communist China, and such questions as the renunciation of force in the Formosa area. There have been 73 meetings since August 1955.

When our Ambassador, who was conducting these negotiations, was recently transferred to another post, we named as successor Mr. [Jacob D.] Beam, our Ambassador to Poland. The Chinese Communists were notified accordingly the latter part of July, but there was no response.

The Secretary of State, in his September 4th statement, referred to these Geneva negotiations. Two days later, Mr. Chou En-lai, the Premier of the People's Republic of China, proposed that these talks should be resumed "in the interests of peace." This was followed up on September 8th by Mr. Mao Tse-tung, the Chairman of the People's Republic of China. We promptly welcomed this prospect and instructed our Ambassador at Warsaw to be ready immediately to resume these talks. We expect that the talks will begin upon the return to Warsaw of the Chinese Communist Ambassador, who has been in Peiping.

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Perhaps our suggestion may be bearing fruit. We devoutly hope so.

Naturally, the United States will adhere to the position it first took in 1955, that we will not in these talks be a party to any arrangements which would prejudice rights of our ally, the Republic of China.

We know by hard experiences that the Chinese Communist leaders are indeed militant and aggressive. But we cannot believe that they would now persist in a course of military aggression which would threaten world peace, with all that would be involved. We believe that diplomacy can and should find a way out. There are measures that can be taken to assure that these offshore islands will not be a thorn in the side of peace. We believe that arrangements are urgently required to stop gunfire and to pave the way to a peaceful solution.

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If the bilateral talks between Ambassadors do not fully succeed, there is still the hope that the United Nations could exert a peaceful influence on the situation.

In 1955 the hostilities of the Chinese Communists in the Formosa area were brought before the United Nations Security Council. But the Chinese Communists rejected its jurisdiction. They said that they were entitled to Formosa and the offshore islands and that, if they used armed force to get them, that was purely a "civil war" and that the United Nations had no right to concern itself.

They claimed also that the attack by the Communist north Koreans on south Korea was "civil war," and that the United Nations and the United States were "aggressors" because they helped south Korea. They said the same about their attack on Viet-Nam.

I feel sure that these pretexts will never deceive or control world opinion. The fact is that Communist Chinese hostilities in the Formosa Straits area do endanger world peace. I do not believe that any rulers, however aggressive they may be, will flout efforts to find a peaceful and honorable solution, whether it be by direct negotiations or through the United Nations.

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My friends, we are confronted with a serious situation. But it is typical of the security problems of the world today. Powerful and aggressive forces are constantly probing, now here, now there, to see whether the free world is weakening. In the face of this there are no easy choices available. It is misleading for anyone to imply that there are.

However, the present situation, though serious, is by no means desperate or hopeless.

There is not going to be any appeasement.

I believe that there is not going to be any war.

But there must be sober realization by the American people that our legitimate purposes are again being tested by those who threaten peace and freedom everywhere.

This has not been the first test for us and for the free world. Probably it will not be the last. But as we meet each test with courage and unity, we contribute to the safety and the honor of our beloved land—and to the cause of a just and lasting peace.

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4. President Eisenhower's Letter to Premier Khrushchev, September 13, 1958

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DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: I have your letter of September 7. I agree with you that a dangerous situation exists in the Taiwan area. I do not agree with you as to the source of danger in this situation.

The present state of tension in the Taiwan area was created directly by Chinese Communist action, not by that of the Republic of China or by the United States. The fact is that following a long period of relative calm in that area, the Chinese Communists, without provocation, suddenly initiated a heavy artillery bombardment of Quemoy and began harassing the regular supply of the civilian and military population of the Quemoy. This intense military activity was begun on August 23rd—some three weeks after your visit to Peiping. The official Peiping Radio has repeatedly been announcing that the purpose of these military operations is to take Taiwan (Formosa) as well as Quemoy and Matsu, by armed force. In virtually every Peiping broadcast, Taiwan (Formosa) and the offshore islands are linked as the objective of what is called the "Chinese Peoples Liberation Army".

The issue, then, is whether the Chinese Communists will seek to achieve their ambitions through the application of force, as they did in Korea, or whether they will accept the vital requisite of world peace and order in a nuclear age and renounce the use of force as the means for satisfying their territorial claims. The territory concerned has never been under the control of Communist China. On the contrary, the Republic of China—despite the characterizations you apply to it for ideological reasons—is recognized by the majority of the sovereign nations of the world and its Government has been and is exercising jurisdiction over the territory concerned. United States military forces operate in the Taiwan area in fulfillment of treaty commitments to the Republic of China to assist it in the defense of Taiwan (Formosa) and the Penghu (Pescadores) Islands. They are there to help resist aggression—not to commit aggression. No upside down presentation such as contained in your letter can change this fact.

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The United States Government has welcomed the willingness of the Chinese Communists to

resume the ambassadorial talks, which were begun three years ago in Geneva, for the purpose of finding a means of easing tensions in the Taiwan area. In the past, the United States representative at these talks has tried by every reasonable means to persuade the Chinese Communist representative to reach agreement on mutual renunciation of force in the Taiwan area but the latter insistently refused to reach such agreement. The United States hopes that an understanding can be achieved through the renewed talks which will assure that there will be no resort to the use of force in the endeavor to bring about a solution of the issues there.

I regret to say I do not see in your letter any effort to find that common language which could indeed facilitate the removal of the danger existing in the current situation in the Taiwan area. On the contrary, the description of this situation contained in your letter seems designed to serve the ambitions of international communism rather than to present the facts. I also note that you have addressed no letter to the Chinese Communist leaders urging moderation upon them. If your letter to me is not merely a vehicle for one-sided denunciation of United States actions but is indeed intended to reflect a desire to find a common language for peace, I suggest you urge these leaders to discontinue their military operations and to turn to a policy of peaceful settlement of the Taiwan dispute.

If indeed, for the sake of settling the issues that tend to disturb the peace in the Formosa area, the Chinese Communist leaders can be persuaded to place their trust in negotiation and a readiness to practice conciliation, then I assure you the United States will, on its part, strive in that spirit earnestly to the same end.

Sincerely,

DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER

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