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## **Dwight Eisenhower, President, 1953-1961 Transcript**

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# The American Presidency: Transformation and Change Dwight Eisenhower, President 1953-1961

by

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## ***ROOSEVELT TO BUSH***

### **THE AMERICAN PRESIDENCY:**

### **TRANSFORMATION AND CHANGE**

### **DWIGHT EISENHOWER, PRESIDENT 1953-1961**

#### **Professor Vernon Bogdanor**

The last lecture I gave was on President Truman, who became President in 1945. He did not serve two full terms and so he could have chosen to run again in 1952, but he decided not to, and that was wise because he would almost certainly have been defeated by whoever he ran against.

The Democratic candidate in his place was the Governor of Illinois, Adley Stevenson. Truman was the only Twentieth Century President who had not been to university, and so he wrote to Stevenson to say: 'Adley, if a knucklehead like me can become President and not do too badly, think what a really educated man like you could do in the job.'

At the end of his presidency, Truman returned to his home in Independence, Missouri, travelling on the train, stopping on the way for a haircut. When he was asked what was the first thing he was going to do when he got back to Missouri, he said, 'I'm going to carry the grips up to the attic.'

In great contrast with future American Presidents, he refused to let his name appear on any company letterhead because he said it would demean the presidency. He lived in a modest house in Independence and, although he was the first President to be given a pension, he spent most of his money and time on the Truman Library. He used to lecture on the presidency, not to college students, who he said knew it all already, but to high school students, without a fee, and visitors to the Truman Library could sometimes come across him and he would happily discuss his presidency with them.

As it turned out, his successor was not Adley Stevenson, who was heavily beaten, but a Republican, Dwight Eisenhower. He was the first Republican President to be elected since 1928, before the Depression. Truman disliked him intensely, and that dislike was reciprocated. They were very opposite types of people, as we will see. But Truman was exceptional in not liking him because most people did like Eisenhower, or as he was always called, Ike. It was a family nickname but everybody called him Ike. The slogan that he used for his elections or the buttons people carried were 'I like Ike' - and everyone seemed to like Ike.

Eisenhower was President from 1952 to 1960, when he was succeeded by another Democrat, John F. Kennedy. The Eisenhower era was, to an extent, an interregnum between long periods of Democratic rule in America. In 1952 Ike brought with him a congressional majority for the Republicans, which was the first they had had since 1928 again. But this was lost in 1954, and in 1956, so although Eisenhower was elected for a second term, there was a Democratic majority Congress. Eisenhower was therefore the first President since the Nineteenth Century to suffer this indignity of having a Congress returned against him. So for six of the eight years of his presidency, he had to work with the Democrats.

It is necessary to bear in mind that the Democrats were by no means a party to the left of the Republicans, as you might think from analogy with British experience. Indeed, in terms of either common economic convictions or political aims, they were not a unified party at all at that time. They were split between Northern liberals and Southern segregationists. The South then was solidly Democratic and controlled wholly by the Democratic Party; no Republican could win a seat in the South at that time, because the Republicans were the party of Abraham Lincoln, who had conquered the South in the Civil War. So you had this strange marriage of convenience between the Northern liberals and the Southern segregationists, who I think it is not too strong to call racists really. It was a marriage of convenience, and there was a lot of fighting between them and a lot of talk of divorce. That they did not divorce was because the committee chairmanships depended upon seniority at that time, and so the longer you had been in the Congress, the more chance you had of getting a chairmanship. Therefore, the Southerners, by definition, were there all the time because they had hardly any opposition. So most of the Congressional chairmanships and Senate chairmanships at that time went to the Southern Democrats and that is one reason why it was so difficult for Eisenhower

to get a civil rights policy through, as I will explain later. This was also the reason why it was very difficult for his successor, John F. Kennedy, to get a civil rights policy through; that Congress was controlled by people from the South.

So, Eisenhower was born in 1890 and, like Truman, he was from a poor background. His parents were farmers in Kansas and, oddly enough, in the light of Eisenhower's career, they were pacifists. Perhaps the only respect in which he was at all like Truman was that he came from a poor background. He often used to say, 'I'm just a farm boy from Kansas,' but otherwise, he was very different from Truman.

Truman had tried to join the Army but was not accepted because of his short-sightedness, but Eisenhower was accepted. The main reason Eisenhower joined the Army was because it was the only way that he could get an education as his parents were too poor to send him to college. He did not do particularly well in the Army, but later on, in the 1920s, he was noticed by the command and sent to a general staff school at Fort Leavenworth, where he came top of his class in 1925, and was noticed. So Eisenhower had a federally subsidised education and, oddly for someone who was on the whole against social welfare and the welfare state, he was on the federal payroll for all but two years of his working life; he was subsidised himself by the federal government, even though he was very much against the New Deal and federal aid in general.

By the time that Eisenhower was nominated as the Republican candidate in 1952, he was a war hero with an enormous reputation. I don't think there is anyone in America or Britain who has ever had the reputation that Eisenhower had - certainly not in modern America and certainly not in modern Britain. The nearest analogy is Churchill, but he was a party politician and seen as such in 1945, when he was defeated immediately after the War ended. The British political thought he was a great War leader but that he perhaps would not be so good in times of peace as he was seen as a very strong partisan Conservative. But Eisenhower was universally admired, and indeed, pressed by both the Democrats and the Republicans after the War to stand for the presidency. As someone in the audience perhaps kindly reminded me after the last lecture, I forgot to say that Truman himself had said in 1948, whether sincerely or not, that if Eisenhower wished to run, he, Truman, would stand as his Vice-Presidential candidate on the Democratic ticket. Eisenhower was also asked by the Republicans to run, but he did not.

Those of you who attended my first lecture last year may remember that I spoke of the two roles of the American President and how it combines what in Britain is completely separated: the role of the head of state, the role of the Queen; and the role of the head of the government, the Prime Minister. The American President has the perhaps impossible task to be both a successful politician but also a head of state above the battle. There are very few American politicians who have been able to do that: Roosevelt perhaps was at the beginning, in 1933 when people were very frightened, but after that he became very partisan; perhaps, for a brief time, Ronald Reagan; but certainly not Truman, who was a thoroughly partisan President who was bitterly opposed by the Republicans. This was not true, as I say, of Eisenhower. The nearest analogy perhaps is to the Queen of Britain because it became almost impious to criticise Eisenhower at some points. With other Presidents, they were monarchical for a brief time such as when people rally round in a time of difficulty, such as with Roosevelt in 1933. Another example would be Lyndon Johnson immediately after Kennedy's assassination in 1963. But once the President becomes political, he loses support and he becomes a partisan. That was not true of Eisenhower. He did not lose support. If he had been able to run for a third term in 1960, he would certainly have been elected; he would have defeated Kennedy or anyone else who chose to run against him. Part of his success was that he seemed non-partisan. Until 1952, no one knew which party he supported. Eisenhower thought that it was probably wrong to vote, as a military man. He did not vote in the presidential election until he had left the Army in 1948, so he was 58 before he cast his first vote in a presidential election, and in that election, he voted for Truman's Republican opponent. He then said that he would have voted against Roosevelt in 1932, in 1936, and 1940, but he said he would have voted for Roosevelt in 1944 because he thought it would be a mistake to change military leaders in the middle of a war.

Eisenhower understood this role of the President as a constitutional monarch, if you like. He understood it so well that, for many years, he was thought to have been a bit of a cipher in the presidency, and that people said the real makers of his policy were members of his Cabinet. In this respect people particularly picked out Eisenhower's Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, a somewhat unattractive character whom few people but Eisenhower actually liked very much. Harold Macmillan said of John Foster Dulles that 'His speech was slow, but it easily kept pace with his thought.' People thought that Eisenhower was just a bumbling chairman of the board, that he merely presided over the whole Administration but did not make policy, and witty people who were opposed to Eisenhower said that while he was there, the White House had become the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

Eisenhower encouraged that view. He often said he was no politician. He did not like partisan politics, and he said that he did not like politicians. He said he was just a simple farm boy from Kansas. At press conferences, when he was asked questions

that he did not want to answer, he would say, 'That's far too complicated a question for a dumb bunny like me.'

Nothing could be further from the truth than that picture of Eisenhower, and when historians came to examine the archives of papers of his Administration, they found how false it all was. Eisenhower was indeed a very deceptive person. Richard Nixon said that he was the most devious man he had ever met, which, coming from Nixon, you may think was quite a compliment.

Eisenhower was quite unlike Truman in that regard. Truman was very direct. With Truman, what you saw was what you got, and I think I mentioned last time that, towards the end of his Presidency, a reviewer wrote a critical review of his daughter's piano concert. In response Truman wrote a letter to this reviewer which shocked Eisenhower, and indeed much of America, as he physically went out and posted it himself so that it was certain to get to the reviewer. It read: *'I've just read your lousy review of Margaret's concert. I have come to the conclusion you are an eight ulcer man on four ulcer pay. It seems to me you are a frustrated old man who wishes he could have been successful. Some day, I hope to meet you. When that happens, you will need a new nose, a lot of beefsteak for black eyes, and perhaps a supporter below. Pegler, [that was a journalist] is a gutter snipe, but a gentleman alongside you. I hope you'll accept that statement as a worse insult than a reflection on your ancestry.'*

Eisenhower would never have done that. Eisenhower never criticised anyone in public at all, because he thought it a grave error to do that. He hid his activism and did not want to sully his image. During the War, he had been the first General to appoint a public relations man, called Harry Butcher, to ensure that his image remained unsullied. This is a part of why I think no President was more different from what he seemed.

Most historical figures become clearer the more you study them. That is certainly true of Truman; perhaps not quite so true of Roosevelt; but the more you study Eisenhower, the more opaque he becomes, and I have to confess I am still not quite sure what I think about him or how to evaluate his Administration. But the one thing I am sure of is that it was Eisenhower who made the decisions. It was not Dulles and not anyone else in his Cabinet or in his team; it was him. They may have been good decisions, they may have been bad decisions, but they were his decisions.

To his close friends Eisenhower said in later life: 'People say I'm not a politician,' though he had also said: 'I've been in politics since the day I first entered the Army.'

He had become a speechwriter in the inter-War years for General MacArthur, the Chief of Staff in the Army. He had written speeches for him both in the Philippines and in Washington. People who noticed Eisenhower's bumbling speeches and thought he was not in command of syntax were making a grave error, because he could certainly write good speeches when he wanted to, but quite often he did not want to, for reasons I will explain. We can see from the speeches he prepared for General MacArthur that he was a very lucid prose writer, and he was also a fine speaker when he wished to convey his intentions, but it was simply the case that he often he did not.

When the bombing of Pearl Harbor took place, the new Chief of Staff, General Marshall, telephoned Eisenhower from the Philippines and said, 'I want you to write me a paper on what America should do in this dreadful situation.' Eisenhower said, 'Can you give me a few hours to do it?' and Marshall said, 'Of course.' He wrote the report and it enormously impressed Marshall, so he recommended Eisenhower to Roosevelt, and both Marshall and Roosevelt thought Eisenhower was a man of very great ability. He was appointed by Roosevelt as leader of the American forces in Europe, and then leader of all the Allied forces in Europe. These people would not have appointed someone to those key positions who was a mere bumbler.

Eisenhower was a leader of the military coalition against Hitler, and he planned the D-Day Landings. The D-Day Landings now seem as if success was insured. Eisenhower did not think so, and he kept a letter in his pocket explaining, after failure, that it was his responsibility alone. This shows to what extent the landing was a great gamble. Only three people have ever achieved a successful cross-Channel landing: Julius Caesar, William the Conqueror, and Eisenhower.

His position involved securing agreement between men such as Winston Churchill, Franklin Roosevelt, De Gaulle, General Montgomery, General Patton, and others. They were all very different people but there was one thing they all have in common: none of them were easy people to deal with. Eisenhower's role was to hold the Alliance together, and the British naturally were suspicious of him, particularly when he came to Britain as Supreme Commander. He countered this suspicion by reacted very strongly against anyone with the slightest criticism of the British. One American officer, having had perhaps a drink too many in Claridges, told his British counterpart: 'We are here to tell the British how to fight,' - he was sent back by the next boat. Another American was also sent back for criticising a British officer, and the British officer pleaded for him to Eisenhower, saying, 'All he did was call me a son of a bitch - nothing wrong with that.' Eisenhower said, 'Yes, but he called you a British son of a bitch, and that's unforgivable!'

We know that there were many quarrels in the War, but none of them were on national lines. They were all on the issues at hand. In every controversy in the War, Eisenhower had British supporters and American opponents and British opponents and American supporters, so what he did was to weld this massive coalition together.

The Russians liked him too, but he was rather shocked by the Russians. For instance, when he met General Zhukov, he held his opinion that, 'The way to clear minds is to march your soldiers through them.' That deeply shocked Eisenhower, who was very concerned about the lives of his men. Eisenhower said he was very worried about American prisoners in German hands and Zhukov said, 'Why worry? They're no longer able to fight. What does it matter what happens to them?' It greatly shocked Eisenhower, and very much influenced his attitude towards the Russians when he was in power.

Eisenhower met Stalin in 1945, and Stalin, oddly enough, liked and approved of him, on the grounds that, unlike most generals, he was not uncultivated. That was actually a mistake made by Stalin, as he was not very well read or educated. One particular occurrence between Eisenhower and Stalin was where Eisenhower made a witticism which did not go down very well, when he said, 'If Zhukov ever needs a job, I'm sure he could find one in Hollywood,' because he was a bit of a star. Stalin simply replied, 'Zhukov will never need a job.' But regardless, everyone knew, liked and respected Eisenhower.

It was not only the leaders who liked Eisenhower; it was also the men. He was charismatic and the soldiers liked him, partly because they knew that he was going to save their lives. General Montgomery, who did not like him much, said, 'He has the power of drawing the hearts of men towards him as a magnet attracts bits of metal.' People said Eisenhower's smile was worth twenty divisions, because however exhausted and pessimistic he was, he never let it show in public. He was very concerned with public relations, and most of the photographs you see of him as President or as Supreme Allied Commander will show him smiling, whatever the situation. He spread optimism, but all the same, he did generally like most people and expected them to like him. He could reach out to people and bring them together - not just the leaders, but people in the mess. He was quite unlike the conventional stereotype of a general. He was not a fire-eater and he hated the use of force. He was a man of peace, who always, in his Presidency, sought to avoid the use of force if possible. He was very cautious and force was the last resort.

He was accused after the War of not doing what he could have done to capture Berlin. The criticism was that he let Stalin and the Soviets get to Berlin before the West. His answer was to ask how he could have explained to the wives, mothers and girlfriends of the people whose lives had been sacrificed when it had only been for a symbol, because the zones had been already settled. Therefore, once the West had reached Berlin, they would have had to retreat from everywhere except West Berlin, so a lot of people's lives would have been sacrificed unnecessarily. He did not see that this could be legitimately explained, and he certainly did not wish to be the one to attempt it.

He was interviewed on the twentieth anniversary of D-Day in Normandy, and he was asked what his thoughts were, to which he said that his thoughts were concerned with the casualties: 'It was not the triumph; it was the graves of the men who were there, who had not come back, the young people.' He said it hurt him very deeply.

So he was far from being a bubbling amateur when he became President of America, and he was determined to avoid, in very difficult circumstances, another war.

He had more experience of international affairs than any other man who has been elected President of America, either before or since. He knew all the leaders from the War: Churchill, who was having a second innings in Britain; de Gaulle in France; Anthony Eden; Harold Macmillan - he knew all of them. For this reason, he had enormous self-confidence. He was quite unlike Truman in 1945, who thought he could not do it. Eisenhower thought not only could he do the job, but he could do it better than anyone else. In his first day in the office, he wrote in his diary: 'This seems like what I have been doing for the last decade.' He could do it; he knew he could keep the peace.

How did he hold the Alliance together in the War? It was mainly because he inspired trust and that came because he secured consensus between very difficult people. He was adept at securing agreement and getting people to work together. I think Eisenhower's Presidency is only comprehensible in terms of his experience as Supreme Commander in the War and the lessons he drew from that experience. It was this lesson of consensus that he introduced in his government. This, on occasion, led him into what many people regard as wrong courses.

For example, when he became President, America was faced with the problem of Senator McCarthy, who was using the genuine fears about spies to spread hysteria and attack people who were often very mildly leftist, or sometimes not even leftist at all, as communist agents. Eisenhower refused to attack him, frontally. He said, 'I'm a Republican, and a Republican must not

attack a fellow Republican.' He even withdrew a passage praising General Marshal in a speech in Wisconsin so as not to annoy McCarthy, and people thought that was very cowardly. But this did not mean he supported McCarthy; he opposed him, and indeed, he helped to bring him down, but by covert methods - he did not attack him frontally.

On civil rights, he thought it would be wrong to upset people in the South, even though they were segregationists, and that meant giving the intolerant and the segregationists a veto over policy. Critics said his leadership consisted in not actually leading, but he did not think that was the right way to do things, as I will explain later.

He never attacked anyone personally. He rarely spoke his mind. It was often unclear what he meant, and people said his ambiguous speeches were a sign of laziness or mental debility. Nothing could be further from the truth. He saw great value in keeping his thoughts to himself, and I will give you one example of that.

In 1953, America was bogged down in negotiations over the end of the Korean War, with her allies. There were considerable disagreements between America and Britain over the right terms to secure from the Chinese who were fighting in Korea. The Republican Leader in the Senate, Senator Taft, made a public speech in 1953, and he said that if the negotiating team in Korea could not agree, then the Americans 'should let England and our allies know that we are withdrawing from all further peace negotiation in Korea, because we might as well reserve to ourselves a completely free hand.' Eisenhower was asked about that at a press conference, and it put him in a dilemma, because if he said he agreed with Taft, this would mean a breach with the British, which was the last thing he wanted; on the other hand, if he said he disagreed with Taft, he would be disagreeing with a leader of his own party in the Senate. He dealt with it very astutely, because when he was asked the question 'did he or did he not agree with the Senator?', he said that he never engaged in personalities and he said, 'I'm not going to put words in Senator Taft's mouth because I did not read the speech in detail.' Although of course he had, 'but I do believe this: when he says 'go it alone', he must mean that we insist on following our own beliefs and convictions in this situation. He certainly does not mean we should just throw everybody out.'

Then the journalist said, 'If I read his speech correctly, in fact that is what he said exactly.'

Eisenhower said, 'Perhaps Senator Taft was referring to the possibility that lack of cooperation by the Chinese could force the Americans to withdraw from negotiations.'

Well, the journalist said he took Taft's position to be that disagreement between America and Britain might also be a cause for withdrawing.

Eisenhower said, 'There is something confusing here. I do not believe I'd best answer it. I do not understand what could be meant by such a thing. Look, suppose all of us here are friends and we are trying to get somebody out on the street to agree to something, and he disagrees. Does that mean we all suddenly here become enemies and break up? I do not understand that.'

The journalist then read directly from Taft's speech, which contained the blanket assertion, 'I think we should do our best now to negotiate this truce, and if we fail, then let England and our other allies know that we are withdrawing from all further peace negotiations in Korea.'

Eisenhower then said it might be that America and its allies would at some point agree that the negotiations had become fruitless and withdraw before then. 'As I say,' Eisenhower said, 'there is some idea here I'm not grasping, and I do not think it is fair to ask me to try to comment on it when I do not.'

Another journalist asked if he would read Taft's speech in detail and comment.

Eisenhower concluded: 'If I had to read all the speeches that are in the papers in detail, I would be pretty badly off!'

So people dismissed him as bumbling and not understanding in this instance, as in others, but actually, he had avoided taking up a position which was bound to offend people whom he did not want to offend.

He did not adopt the usual methods of a President of putting pressure on Congressional leaders. Instead he got others to do it. He told his Treasury Secretary to tell a friendly Texas billionaire to put pressure on Lyndon Johnson, who was the Democratic Senate Leader, to be more cooperative. So he did not sully his own image, but he worked to secure it behind the scenes, which is why people have called his Presidency a 'hidden hand Presidency'.

He once told his Press Secretary to confuse people on a certain issue, and his Press Secretary said, 'But Mr President, if I say that, they'll give me hell,' and Eisenhower replied, 'Better you, my boy, than me!'

But that of course meant something rather unattractive: that he stood by while his colleagues, who had loyally carried out his policies, were attacked. So you will see that he was not quite as nice as he seemed, and in fact, he also had a pretty bad temper. He was not loyal to people who worked for him because he would oblige them to take the blame, while his reputation remained unsullied.

Eisenhower claimed that he stood for election to the Presidency in the first place for foreign policy reasons in order to ensure that the Republican Party remained committed to collective security and did not become isolationist. I do not in fact believe that. I think he would have stood for the Presidency anyway; I think he had been thinking about it for a long time, but he always wanted to make it appear that he was pressed into it by others. He said, 'It's much better to be sought than to appear to seek it,' and those Republicans who were against the isolationists came to ask him to be a candidate.

He had thought little about domestic policy. He had been out of America for much of the time of the New Deal and the Truman social policy, and he was, on the whole, out of sympathy with it insofar as he had had thoughts at all, and some of his early speeches were fairly unsophisticated. He made one early speech, which fortunately was not noticed too much, in which he said if people wanted social security, he said they had be better off in prison and that was not really what America was about. But he was in fact deeply conservative in his views about government intervention, but his domestic policy, when it came, was much more moderate than these beliefs would imply. When one of his brothers asked why Eisenhower did not simply roll back the New Deal, he replied that, 'If a party in America promised to abolish social security, old age pensions and the policies of the New Deal, you would not hear of it again.' So he was not actually providing any alternative to previous policies of the Democrats domestically.

In foreign policy the Republican Party promised, and he joined in with them, that there was going to be a new policy in place of the Truman policy of containment, which some of the Republicans said was cowardly. Eisenhower promised a crusade. It was not quite clear what this crusade was to be, and it was odd that he was proposing an alternative policy because he had been one of those who had put in place the Truman policy of containment as the first head of NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, set up in 1949. The Republican right wing said the alternative was to try and roll back communism and liberate the satellite states of Eastern Europe. Eisenhower went along with that in the Republican programme, but he insisted on putting the word 'peacefully' in there, since he was not going to use force to do it. It is fair to say the Republicans, who had been in opposition for twenty years, had become pretty desperate, and were prepared to do anything really to get back into office. Eisenhower went along with some very nasty sentiments which he did not himself believe in.

Shortly after Eisenhower became President, in January 1953, Stalin died. He died in March 1953 and shortly after that, there was the first of the revolts of the satellites in East Germany. These riots in 1953 were forcibly put down by the Russians, and it happened again in Hungary in 1956. This showed the futility of the rhetoric of roll back and the Republicans could do very little other than Truman had done, and Republican policy there, in practice also, was very little different from Truman's policy. Truman had in fact set the framework for post-War policy, and Eisenhower continued with it.

However, one thing that he did was to cut military expenditure drastically. You may think perhaps surprisingly for a general, but I do not think it was when we look at the whole picture. Defence spending had tripled under Truman, and Eisenhower said it was too high and it would cripple America if it continued. As I said earlier, deep down he was a man of peace.

Shortly after the death of Stalin, he made a speech which was meant to appeal to the new Soviet leaders, in which he said that 'Every gun made, every warship launched, every rocket fired, signifies in the final sense a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed.' He has been criticised, and I think fairly, for not following up these sentiments, and there was perhaps a possibility of a greater thaw in East-West relations after Stalin's death than actually occurred, perhaps the sort of thaw that was to occur in the 1980s when Gorbachev achieved power. Churchill, by then Prime Minister of Britain again, thought that was possible and so wanted a summit conference. Eisenhower said that the Soviets have not changed fundamentally and he wanted to see deeds and not merely new words from the Russians. The British Cabinet agreed with Eisenhower and not with Churchill. They thought Churchill was a senile man who was past it and really did not grasp what was happening at all, though I think it is fair to say that many in the British Cabinet could not help remembering that they had all been against Churchill once before, when he had been right and they'd all been wrong. However, nothing could have been lost, so it seems to me, by trying to achieve a better relationship with the Soviets, and Eisenhower did not do it.

Now, when I said that Eisenhower cut defence expenditure and wanted peace, he was in no sense an appeaser, as you would perhaps expect. He knew that peace was not achieved just by cutting expenditure and hoping for the best. He avoided war through strong policies and through using threats, because America was much stronger than the Soviets and China in nuclear weapons. Indeed, China did not have nuclear weapons at that time. It seems that he threatened the Chinese that if they did not end the Korean War quickly, America would consider using nuclear weapons against them, and he also threatened the Chinese that if they continued to attach offshore islands which belonged to Taiwan, he might also consider nuclear weapons. I do not think for one moment he would actually have done so, but his threats were credible and they worked. This was because he knew the communist countries were frightened of America and did not want war. Eisenhower's threats were credible also because of his own prestige and strength. This is in contrast to later threats by John F Kennedy which were perhaps not so credible.

So, if nuclear war was unimaginable and a conventional war unwinnable, what was left for America? Was she stalemated? Eisenhower said no; we can use covert action to remove governments we do not like. He did that in Guatemala and also in Iran, where CIA forces removed leftist dictators and replaced them with dictators who were more sympathetic to the Americans. He was planning to do the same with Castro's Cuba in 1960, and those plans were inherited by Kennedy in the disastrous Bay of Pigs exercise in the spring of that year. This was clearly a breach of the self-determination principle which America claimed to stand for. Thus it was Eisenhower who began the process of covert American action to undermine regimes which he thought were unsympathetic to the United States.

Most important of all, he inaugurated the American commitment in Vietnam, which in the end was to cost America 58,000 lives. Vietnam is most closely associated with Kennedy and Johnson, but arguably, the fundamental commitment was made by Eisenhower. Vietnam, which was then called Indo-China, was a French colony when Eisenhower came to office, and the French were fighting communist guerrillas in that colony. Truman committed America to supporting the French, and that commitment was inherited by Eisenhower. When the French were in trouble in 1954, they asked America to send ground troops to Indo-China and Eisenhower refused, though characteristically he veiled his refusal in ambiguity. He said he would send troops if America's allies would agree, knowing that the British Government would never agree because Anthony Eden and the Foreign Secretary bitterly opposed sending troops into South-East Asia. So, when the British said they would not agree, Eisenhower said there you are, I cannot act, I'm very sorry, but he never intended to send troops anyway. He would not get involved in that. So the French were defeated and they had to leave Indo-China.

There was a conference at Geneva in 1954 which settled the structure of what became Vietnam, for twenty years. Vietnam was divided along the 17<sup>th</sup> Parallel, and north of that parallel was a communist regime - the leader of the guerrillas against the French was Ho Chi Minh, the communist leader - and south of that regime was non-communist. The agreement was that free elections would be held in the whole of Vietnam in 1956. But, although America was at the conference, she did not sign the agreement because she did not want to recognise communist gains. However, Eisenhower said that America would not disrupt the agreement by force, although it had not signed it.

Then, in 1956, no elections were actually held and the South refused to take part in elections, and Eisenhower was blamed for this. Indeed, he said that had there been elections, 80% of the whole of Vietnam would have voted for Ho Chi Minh. Eisenhower has been much criticised for this, but again I think partly unfairly, because Ho Chi Minh in the North would not have allowed an election in any sense in which the Americans or we would have recognised an election; there would be only one party allowed to campaign and there would not be the free conditions in which you could have an election. I think that even if there was the election, once Ho Chi Minh had won it, that would be the last election he would have held and there would not be any future elections. So I think that there is some defence of Eisenhower over this issue.

Moreover, after the Geneva agreements were signed in 1954, one million refugees left the North to the South. They were, admittedly, encouraged by the Americans to go, but I think many of them would have left anyway. A large number of Catholics left, and I think they would probably have left with or without the encouragement of Americas. To my knowledge, there were no refugees the other way, from the South to the North.

Two questions arise about Eisenhower's policy in Vietnam. The first is whether what he did was wise in 1954-6? The critics of Eisenhower have said that Ho Chi Minh, although a communist, was a nationalist type of communist and would have been, like Tito in Yugoslavia, independent of the Chinese and Russia. Therefore he was not part of an international communist conspiracy and America could have got on decent terms with him as it did with Tito. They said that the new leader in the South, President Diem, whom the Americans supported, had little indigenous support and was authoritarian and corrupt. I do not believe that. In fact, I think it is fairly clear that Ho Chi Minh was a dedicated international communist. He was strongly opposed to Tito, who he



said had split the world communist movement, and he was very much in sympathy with the Chinese and the Soviet communists, and when the breach came, he was very much on China's side. I see no sign of the point sometimes made that he would have been in any way independent, an independent operator.

Moreover, in the context of the time, there was no chance of America withdrawing its commitment from Vietnam. The Americans were being criticised for having allowed China to become communist in 1949. It was said that was due to bad advice, and they had been sold the story that Mao Tse-tung too was an agrarian radical and not a real communist, but they found that was not the case. They had been involved in fighting in Korea, where there had been a communist attack from the north to the south. They could simply not withdraw, and indeed, only two Senators opposed Eisenhower's commitment. The Democratic Party, in some ways, was even more strongly behind a commitment to South Vietnam remaining non-communist, and in the context of the time I do not think it was not possible for Eisenhower to do anything else.

The second key question is whether Eisenhower would have maintained the commitment to the extent that Kennedy and Johnson did. This is particularly the case with Johnson, who sent American ground troops to fight in Vietnam in 1965, therefore escalating the war. By that time, after Eisenhower had retired from the presidency, he was very much of a hawk, and he told Kennedy and Johnson they had to put everything into the battle to defeat communism in Vietnam. However, although this is much argued, my view is that this is not conclusive. Eisenhower was a very cautious man, and I think he would have said that the South Vietnamese had to win that battle for themselves; the Americans would help them, but they would not do more than that. He might have threatened the Chinese, and he might have threatened the North Vietnamese, and his threats would have been very credible, but I think he would not have had a large American commitment to South Vietnam. But I am aware that this is a very arguable and controversial statement and it may be wrong.

The main challenge that Eisenhower faced domestically was the challenge of civil rights. At the time he became President, America had ten million black citizens. Around six million of them lived in the South, where there were very deep and bitter feelings from the time of the Civil War. There were five states in the South where there was a black majority after the Civil War: Alabama, Louisiana, Florida, Mississippi, and South Carolina, and they were the most troubled areas during Eisenhower's presidency. The Democratic leaders in those states believed in the philosophy of states' rights, which meant the federal government should leave them alone and they could continue a policy of segregation and discrimination. This was a great moral challenge which some critics say that Eisenhower flunked, like some say of the challenge of Senator McCarthy.

It is fair to say that he was ill at ease with minorities, with Jewish and black people. He had no close friends, I think it is fair to say, amongst minorities. His close friends tended to be white, Anglo-Saxon, very wealthy businessmen, with whom he seemed at home. Some people said there was corruption in that, but there was not. In a sense, the businessmen got more from him than he did from them. He liked self-confident people who had been successful and who did not have any problems or difficulties that he would have to deal with; people as confident as himself. Eisenhower was in no way personally prejudiced and would never have dreamt personally of discriminating against anyone, but he did not understand what was outside his own experience. Unlike Truman, he did not read much in his spare time. Truman read a lot of history; Eisenhower read mainly westerns! Having been out of America during much of the Depression, he had not realised the rise of black consciousness that had occurred during that time. When he came to power he thought America was pretty marvellous, and that agitators causing trouble would make it worse. He was deeply conservative, with a small 'c'.

Moreover, he did not believe, and this was a sincere belief, that laws could do much to change the situation in the South. He thought that only education and persuasion could do that. Shortly after Eisenhower became President in 1954, the Supreme Court issued a landmark decision, perhaps the most famous case in its history, *Brown versus the Board of Education*, in which it was declared that segregation in education was inherently unconstitutional. This was obviously going to play a large part in black emancipation. Eisenhower was bitterly opposed to that decision. He thought it was a mistake for the Court to get involved in matters that were concerns of the states and that it would not do any good.

He then did something which I find truly shocking. I think it was the worst thing he did in his presidency. While the case was being considered by the Court, he invited the Chief Justice, Earl Warren, to dinner at the White House. I do not think Warren should have gone, but he did and when he got to the White House, he found that the Attorney General was present, and various other lawyers working for the Administration, and also the advocate for the Board of Education, that is the segregationists, a man called John Davis, but not the advocate for the black side of it, for *Brown*. Eisenhower, during the dinner, said to Earl Warren that John Davis was a very fine advocate, and as the dinner was ending, Eisenhower put his arm round Warren and said something which I think is truly shocking: 'You know these people in South, they're not really bad people. They just do not want their sweet little girls to sit next to Negroes in class.' He told the black delegation, 'You people just have to be

patient,' - to wait. That, again, you may say was not very helpful.

However, as so often with Eisenhower, there is more than one side to the story, that with no one noticing, he himself desegregated large sectors of American life. He desegregated everything in the District of Columbia, which was then under federal authority. He desegregated the whole of the Army, including in the South, and also for schools for children of military personnel. He integrated hospitals, he integrated the blood supply, he integrated the federal departments, the inter-state railways. He sent federal troops into Arkansas to ensure that the Supreme Court's decision was accepted, though he did not agree with it. He made over 200 appointments of black people to public positions, and he encouraged state universities in the South and the border states to desegregate, and most of them had done so by the end of his presidency. All this was done with little publicity because he thought it was a mistake to stir things up, so he did things quietly.

In 1957 his Administration passed the first civil rights act since the late Nineteenth Century. However, I think it was the one feature of Eisenhower's Administration that he himself was not happy with. His Attorney General wanted it but he did not. It was a very moderate measure, and it did little more than ensuring that rights the American Constitution had given black people could be exercised, primarily the right to vote. But even this moderate bill was emasculated in Congress by the Democratic leadership, by his opponents. Eisenhower did not help push it on because he did not believe in it, but even so, I do not think it would have made any difference, and the bill was strangled. Even the extension of the right to vote proved ineffective. The Department of Justice brought just ten cases dealing with the right to vote by the end of Eisenhower's presidency, and only a quarter of the black population eligible to vote had been registered by then. Eisenhower gave no lead, and you may argue that the troubles and the riots in the '60s were largely due to those failures.

To put Eisenhower's own point of view, in 1957 he wrote to a friend, 'Laws are rarely effective unless they represent the will of the majority,' and he instanced the situation of prohibition, when they had tried to ban alcohol by law and it had not worked. He said to another friend, 'As you know, the reason that I so earnestly support moderation in the race question is because I believe two things: the first is that until America has achieved reality in the concept of individual dignity and equality before the law, we will not have become completely worthy of our limitless opportunities; the second thing is that I believe coercive law is by itself powerless to bring about complete compliance with its own terms, when in any extensive region, the great mass of public opinion is in bitter opposition.' He then said, 'But this second fact does not excuse us from using every kind of legitimate influence to bring about enlightenment through education, persuasion, leadership, and indeed example.' He hoped for '...a wider acceptance of the philosophy of progress through moderation. This might inspire extremists on both sides to gravitate a bit more towards the centre line, which is the only path along which progress in great human affairs can be achieved.' What he was saying was that when there was militancy and violence, both sides were to blame, so he was treating civil rights activists and segregationists as somehow equals, which seems, you may say, a bit inadequate, though it is fair to say the Democrats in the Senate and Congress were even more feeble than he was. But still, Eisenhower had enormous prestige, you may say, which he could have used to make great advances in the area of civil rights. People criticised him for hoarding his prestige, but he did not - he already had a reputation, he did not need to make his mark, but his philosophy seemed to be the way to remain a leader is not to lead.

Let me sum up the significance of his presidency: You may say, in the last resort, that Eisenhower shows something about the weakness of the American theory of the president, that you cannot be both a constitutional monarch and a political partisan for any length of time. You must use your political power, and that means making enemies. That is what happened with Roosevelt and Truman. If you stay above the battle, you will not make many enemies, but you will not actually use the power that has been granted to you for the purposes of effective change, and that would be the criticism of Eisenhower as domestic President. In foreign policy, you may argue he missed the chance of a thaw and an earlier improvement of relations with the Soviet Union, though that is controversial, and many people would say there was not such a chance, but I think nothing would have been lost by trying.

But as I say, he was able to reduce military expenditure very considerably, and this was possible only because he knew the Pentagon and defence industry so well. In his farewell address, in 1961, he warned against the dangers of the military industrial complex, a warning which his successors might have taken to heart. He said, 'In the counsels of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought by the military industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.' In 1960, when he left the presidency, he was attacked by his Democratic opponent Kennedy and also by his Vice-President, who was the Republican candidate, Richard Nixon. He was attacked by both of them for neglecting American defences, and Kennedy said there was a missile gap, which Eisenhower knew did not exist, and that the Russians were ahead of America, and so America had to spend a lot more on defence. Both his

Democratic opponent and the Republican who wanted to succeed him said that America had fallen behind in the defence race. Eisenhower thought that was not true and that any attempts to spend huge amounts of money on defence would be both wasteful and unnecessary. But Eisenhower could reduce military expenditure because he was a strong leader whom his opponents in the communist world respected.

Incidentally, the standard of living of black people improved very considerably during Eisenhower's presidency. A new black middle class was being created, which you may argue did as much for civil rights as government legislation, or certainly Eisenhower would have thought so, and there was more economic progress in the 1950s than in the civil rights era of the '60s. America was a happier place at the end of Eisenhower's presidency than at the beginning. As I said earlier, Truman would have been repudiated if he had stood again; Eisenhower would certainly have secured election.

Eisenhower was a conservative, and you may say you cannot judge a conservative by the same criteria as someone like Roosevelt or Truman who believed in activist government. Ike did not believe in activism. His presidency must be judged not by what happened but by what did not happen and then what did happen in the 1960s: no armed conflict abroad under Eisenhower, and no upheavals, riots or urban troubles at home. Those things did happen in the '60s under more activist Presidents. Eisenhower made government look easy. His Democratic opponents, led by Kennedy, said that he was too unambitious. In the 1960 election campaign Kennedy said 'We've got to get this country moving again,' and Nixon agreed. But perhaps what happened in the 1960s shows that government was not quite as simple as it had seemed under Eisenhower. America faced a nuclear crisis in Cuba which nearly led to a war. America got caught in the quagmire of Vietnam. At home, there were urban riots, social upheaval, and student protest.

Perhaps government was not quite as easy as Eisenhower made it seem, just as perhaps the D-Day Landings were not as easy to achieve as Eisenhower had made it seem. His aims were simple, both at home and abroad: he wanted people to like each other more, and on the whole, he succeeded. In 1956, when he stood for the presidency for the second time, posters said not only 'We like Ike,' but 'Ike likes us'!

After the social upheavals of the Roosevelt and Truman years, America needed a respite. Ike provided it. He improved the political atmosphere and he kept the peace during a highly dangerous period of the Cold War. After leaving the presidency, he said, 'The United States never lost a soldier or a foot of ground in my Administration. We kept the peace. People ask how it happened. By God, it did not just happen, I'll tell you that!' That perhaps should be his epitaph, and I think he stands rather more highly in the list of American Presidents, despite his failures, than is generally believed.