

Statements and Addresses by President Lyndon B. Johnson leading to:

**“The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution”
Senate and House of Representatives
Joint Resolution 1145,
Washington, D.C.
Aug. 7, 1964**

**Statement by the President Upon Instructing the Navy To Take Retaliatory Action
in the Gulf of Tonkin
August 3, 1964**

[This statement was issued following an August 2, 1964 attack on the US destroyer Maddox by Communist PT boats as it patrolled the Gulf of Tonkin.]

I HAVE instructed the Navy

- (1) to continue the patrols in the Gulf of Tonkin off the coast of North Vietnam,
- (2) to double the force by adding an additional destroyer to the one already on patrol,
- (3) to provide a combat air patrol over the destroyers, and
- (4) to issue orders to the commanders of the combat aircraft and the two destroyers (a) to attack any force which attacks them in international waters, and (b) to attack with the objective not only of driving off the force but of destroying it.

**Presidential Radio and Television Report to the American People Following
Renewed Aggression in the Gulf of Tonkin
August 4, 1964**

My fellow Americans:

As President and Commander in Chief, it is my duty to the American people to report that renewed hostile actions against United States ships on the high seas in the Gulf of Tonkin have today required me to order the military forces of the United States to take action in reply.

The initial attack on the destroyer Maddox, on August 2, was repeated today by a number of hostile vessels attacking two US destroyers with torpedoes. The destroyers and supporting aircraft acted at once on the orders I gave after the initial act of aggression.

We believe at least two of the attacking boats were sunk. There were no US losses.

The performance of commanders and crews in this engagement is in the highest tradition of the United States Navy. But repeated acts of violence against the Armed Forces of the United States must be met not only with alert defense, but also with positive reply.

That reply is being given as I speak to you tonight. Air action is now in execution against gunboats and certain supporting facilities in North Vietnam which have been used in these hostile operations.

In the larger sense this new act of aggression, aimed directly at our own forces, again brings home to all of us in the United States the importance of the struggle for peace and security in Southeast Asia. Aggression by terror against the peaceful villagers of South Vietnam has now been joined by open aggression on the high seas against the United States of America.

The determination of all Americans to carry out our full commitment to the people and to the government of South Vietnam will be redoubled by this outrage. Yet our response, for the present, will be limited and fitting. We Americans know, although others appear to forget, the risks of spreading conflict. We still seek no wider war.

I have instructed the Secretary of State to make this position totally clear to friends and to adversaries and, indeed, to all. I have instructed Ambassador Stevenson to raise this matter immediately and urgently before the Security Council of the United Nations. Finally, I have today met with the leaders of both parties in the Congress of the United States and I have informed them that I shall immediately request the Congress to pass a resolution making it clear that our Government is united in its determination to take all necessary measures in support of freedom and in defense of peace in Southeast Asia.

I have been given encouraging assurance by these leaders of both parties that such a resolution will be promptly introduced, freely and expeditiously debated, and passed with overwhelming support. And just a few minutes ago I was able to reach Senator Goldwater and I am glad to say that he has expressed his support of the statement that I am making to you tonight.

It is a solemn responsibility to have to order even limited military action by forces whose overall strength is as vast and as awesome as those of the United States of America, but it is my considered conviction, shared throughout your Government, that firmness in

the right is indispensable today for peace; that firmness will always be measured. Its mission is peace.

President's Special Message to the Congress on US Policy in Southeast Asia August 5, 1964

Last night I announced to the American people that the North Vietnamese regime had conducted further deliberate attacks against US naval vessels operating in international waters, and I had therefore directed air action against gunboats and supporting facilities used in these hostile operations. This air action has now been carried out with substantial damage to the boats and facilities. Two US aircraft were lost in the action.

After consultation with the leaders of both parties in the Congress, I further announced a decision to ask the Congress for a resolution expressing the unity and determination of the United States in supporting freedom and in protecting peace in Southeast Asia.

These latest actions of the North Vietnamese regime has given a new and grave turn to the already serious situation in Southeast Asia. Our commitments in that area are well known to the Congress. They were first made in 1954 by President Eisenhower. They were further defined in the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty approved by the Senate in February 1955.

This treaty with its accompanying protocol obligates the United States and other members to act in accordance with their constitutional processes to meet Communist aggression against any of the parties or protocol states.

Our policy in Southeast Asia has been consistent and unchanged since 1954. I summarized it on June 2 in four simple propositions:

America keeps her word. Here as elsewhere, we must and shall honor our commitments. The issue is the future of Southeast Asia as a whole. A threat to any nation in that region is a threat to all, and a threat to us.

Our purpose is peace. We have no military, political, or territorial ambitions in the area.

This is not just a jungle war, but a struggle for freedom on every front of human activity. Our military and economic assistance to South Vietnam and Laos in particular has the purpose of helping these countries to repel aggression and strengthen their independence.

The threat to the free nations of Southeast Asia has long been clear. The North Vietnamese regime has constantly sought to take over South Vietnam and Laos. This Communist regime has violated the Geneva accords for Vietnam. It has systematically conducted a campaign of subversion, which includes the direction, training, and supply of personnel and arms for the conduct of guerrilla warfare in South Vietnamese territory.

In Laos, the North Vietnamese regime has maintained military forces, used Laotian territory for infiltration into South Vietnam, and most recently carried out combat operations—all in direct violation of the Geneva Agreements of 1962. In recent months, the actions of the North Vietnamese regime have become steadily more threatening. In May, following new acts of Communist aggression in Laos, the United States undertook reconnaissance flights over Laotian territory, at the request of the Government of Laos. These flights had the essential mission of determining the situation in territory where Communist forces were preventing inspection by the International Control Commission. When the Communists attacked these aircraft, I responded by furnishing escort fighters with instructions to fire when fired upon. Thus, these latest North Vietnamese attacks on our naval vessels are not the first direct attack on armed forces of the United States.

As President of the United States I have concluded that I should now ask the Congress, on its part, to join in affirming the national determination that all such attacks will be met, and that the United States will continue in its basic policy of assisting the free nations of the area to defend their freedom.

As I have repeatedly made clear, the United States intends no rashness, and seeks no wider war. We must make it clear to all that the United States is united in its determination to bring about the end of Communist subversion and aggression in the area. We seek the full and effective restoration of the international agreements signed in Geneva in 1954, with respect to South Vietnam, and again in Geneva in 1962, with respect to Laos.

I recommend a Resolution expressing the support of the Congress for all necessary action to protect our armed forces and to assist nations covered by the SEATO Treaty.

At the same time, I assure the Congress that we shall continue readily to explore any avenues of political solution that will effectively guarantee the removal of Communist subversion and the preservation of the independence of the nations of the area.

The resolution could well be based upon similar resolutions enacted by the Congress in the past—to meet the threat to Formosa in 1955, to meet the threat to the Middle East in 1957, and to meet the threat in Cuba in 1962. It could state in the simplest terms the resolve and support of the Congress for action to deal appropriately with attacks against our armed forces and to defend freedom and preserve peace in Southeast Asia in accordance with the obligations of the United States under the Southeast Asia treaty. I urge the Congress to enact such a resolution promptly and thus to give convincing evidence to the aggressive Communist nations, and to the world as a whole, that our policy in Southeast Asia will be carried forward—and that the peace and security of the area will be preserved.

The events of this week would in any event have made the passage of a Congressional Resolution essential. But there is an additional reason for doing so at a time when we are entering on three months of political campaigning. Hostile nations must understand

that in such a period the United States will continue to protect its national interests, and that in these matters there is no division among us.

**Presidential Remarks at Syracuse University on the Communist Challenge in Southeast Asia
August 5, 1964**

Dr. Newhouse, Chancellor Tolley, Governor and Mrs. Rockefeller, Members of the Congress, distinguished guests, members of the faculty, ladies and gentlemen:

I know that you share with me the great admiration and pride that the generosity of Dr. Newhouse has made possible for this area of our Nation and for this great institution. We all are in his debt, and in the years and generations and centuries to come, we will see the products of this great adventure.

On this occasion, it is fitting, I think, that we are meeting here to dedicate this new center to better understanding among all men. For that is my purpose in speaking to you.

Last night I spoke to the people of the Nation.

This morning, I speak to the people of all nations—so that they may understand without mistake our purpose in the action that we have been required to take.

On August 2 the United States destroyer Maddox was attacked on the high seas in the Gulf of Tonkin by hostile vessels of the Government of North Vietnam.

On August 4 that attack was repeated in those same waters against two United States destroyers.

The attacks were deliberate.

The attacks were unprovoked.

The attacks have been answered.

Throughout last night and within the last 12 hours, air units of the United States Seventh Fleet have sought out the hostile vessels and certain of their supporting facilities. Appropriate armed action has been taken against them. The United States is now asking that this be brought immediately and urgently before the Security Council of the United Nations.

We welcome—and we invite—the scrutiny of all men who seek peace, for peace is the only purpose of the course that America pursues.

The Gulf of Tonkin may be distant, but none can be detached about what has happened there.

Aggression—deliberate, willful, and systematic aggression—has unmasked its face to the entire world. The world remembers—the world must never forget—that aggression unchallenged is aggression unleashed.

We of the United States have not forgotten.

That is why we have answered this aggression with action.

America's course is not precipitate. America's course is not without long provocation.

For 10 years three American Presidents—President Eisenhower, President Kennedy, and your present President—and the American people have been actively concerned with threats to the peace and security of the peoples of Southeast Asia from the Communist government of North Vietnam.

President Eisenhower sought—and President Kennedy sought—the same objectives that I still seek:

That the governments of Southeast Asia honor the international agreements which apply in the area;

That those governments leave each other alone;

That they resolve their differences peacefully;

That they devote their talents to bettering the lives of their peoples by working against poverty and disease and ignorance.

In 1954 we made our position clear toward Vietnam.

In June of that year we stated we “would view any renewal of the aggression in violation of the 1954 agreements with grave concern and as seriously threatening international peace and security.”

In September of that year the United States signed the Manila pact on which our participation in SEATO is based. That pact recognized that aggression by means of armed attack on South Vietnam would endanger the peace and the safety of the nations signing that solemn agreement.

In 1962 we made our position clear toward Laos. We signed the Declaration of Neutrality of Laos. That accord provided for the withdrawal of all foreign forces and respect for the neutrality and independence of that little country.

The agreements of 1954 and 1962 were also signed by the government of North Vietnam.

In 1954, that government pledged that it would respect the territory under the military control of the other party and engage in no hostile act against the other party.

In 1962 that government pledged that it would “not introduce into the Kingdom of Laos foreign troops or military personnel.”

That government also pledged that it would “not use the territory of the Kingdom of Laos for interference in the internal affairs of other countries.”

That government of North Vietnam is now willfully and systematically violating those agreements of both 1954 and 1962.

To the south it is engaged in aggression against the Republic of Vietnam.

To the west it is engaged in aggression against the Kingdom of Laos.

To the east it has now struck out on the high seas in an act of aggression against the United States of America.

There can be, there must be no doubt about the policy and no doubt about the purpose. So there can be no doubt about the responsibilities of men and the responsibilities of nations that are devoted to peace.

Peace cannot be assured merely by assuring the safety of the United States destroyer Maddox or the safety of other vessels of other flags.

Peace requires that the existing agreements in the area be honored.

Peace requires that we and all our friends stand firm against the present aggressions of the government of North Vietnam.

The government of North Vietnam is today flouting the will of the world for peace. The world is challenged to make its will against war known and to make it known clearly and to make it felt and to make it felt decisively.

So, to our friends of the Atlantic Alliance, let me say this, this morning: the challenge that we face in Southeast Asia today is the same challenge that we have faced with courage and that we have met with strength in Greece and Turkey, in Berlin and Korea, in Lebanon and in Cuba. And to any who may be tempted to support or to widen the present aggression I say this: there is no threat to any peaceful power from the United States of America. But there can be no peace by aggression and no immunity from reply. That is what is meant by the actions that we took yesterday.

Finally, my fellow Americans, I would like to say to ally and adversary alike: let no friend needlessly fear—and no foe vainly hope—that this is a nation divided in this election year. Our free elections—our full and free debate—are America’s strength, not America’s weakness.

There are no parties and there is no partisanship when our peace or the peace of the world is imperiled by aggressors in any part of the world.

We are one nation united and indivisible.

And united and indivisible we shall remain.

H.J. RES 1145

Joint Resolution: To promote the maintenance of international peace and security in Southeast Asia.

August 7, 1964

Whereas naval units of the Communist regime in Vietnam, in violation of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and of international law, have deliberately and repeatedly attacked United States naval vessels lawfully present in international waters, and have thereby created a serious threat to international peace; and

Whereas these attacks are part of a deliberate and systematic campaign of aggression that the Communist regime in North Vietnam has been waging against its neighbors and the nations joined with them in the collective defense of their freedom; and

Whereas the United States is assisting the peoples of Southeast Asia to protect their freedom and has not territorial, military or political ambitions in that area, but desires only that these peoples should be left in peace to work out their own destinies in their own way: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

Section 1. That the Congress approves and supports the determination of the President, as Commander in Chief, to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.

Section 2. The United States regards as vital to its national interest and to world peace the maintenance of international peace and security in Southeast Asia. Consonant with the Constitution of the United States and the Charter of the United Nations and in accordance with its obligations under the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty, the

United States is, therefore, prepared, as the President determines, to take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force, to assist any member or protocol state of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty requesting assistance in defense of its freedom.

Section 3. This resolution shall expire when the President shall determine that the peace and security of the area is reasonably assured by international conditions created by action of the United Nations or otherwise, except that it may be terminated earlier by concurrent resolution of the Congress.

Speaker of the House of Representatives

President pro tempore of the Senate

**Statement by the President on the Passage of the Joint Resolution on Southeast Asia
August 7, 1964**

The 414-to-nothing House vote and the 88-to-2 Senate vote on the passage of the Joint Resolution on Southeast Asia is a demonstration to all the world of the unity of all Americans. They prove our determination to defend our own forces, to prevent aggression, and to work firmly and steadily for peace and security in the area.

I am sure the American people join me in expressing the deepest appreciation to the leaders and Members of both parties, in both Houses of Congress, for their patriotic, resolute, and rapid action.